

America

2019 CPA MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

DECEMBER 23, 2019

APOSTROPHES TO MARY

THE 2019 HUNT PRIZE ESSAY

By Mary Szybist

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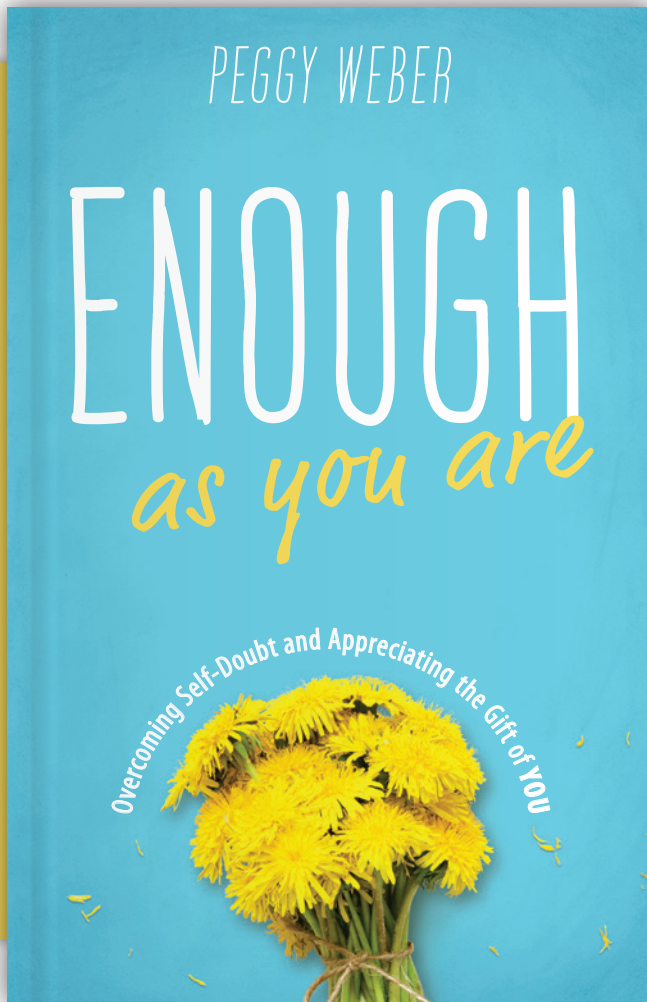
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The Impossible Dream

Sigmund Freud supposedly said that the Irish are impervious to psychoanalysis, though there is little evidence that he ever actually made such a claim. After all, if Freud had said that, then why were the previous editors in chief of **America**, many of whom were of Irish descent, so fascinated by Freudian thought, as Adam A. J. Deville recounts in this issue? I suspect one reason for the stereotype is that we Irish do have a habit of deflecting uncomfortable realities with humor, which can be occasionally maddening.

It might interest you to know that I underwent intense psychological testing as part of my application process for the Society of Jesus. It might even surprise you to know that I passed. And after I had passed my tests and was admitted to the Jesuits, my superiors sent me back to review a detailed summary of the findings with the psychiatrist.

“Basically, you are a psychologically healthy person,” he said. “But when you experience something uncomfortable, you often make a joke rather than confront your pain directly.”

“Really?” I said, laughing. “How much have the Jesuits paid you to tell me that? Any guy I’ve ever sat next to in a pub could’ve told them that for free.”

“See,” he replied, “you’re doing it now.”

Fair enough. But while I was glad to learn that I am basically sane, the testing experience caused me to wonder, as the character of Cervantes does in the musical “Man of La Mancha,” just where, precisely, madness lies, at least in the philosophical sense. “When life itself seems lunatic,” Cervantes says, “perhaps to

be too practical is madness. To seek treasure where there is only trash. Too much sanity may be madness!”

Which brings me to the reason for the season. The things I hold most dear, the beliefs that keep me sane in a world gone mad, have everything to do with Christmas. Yet, strangely enough, in another time and place, one unconditioned by centuries of Christian cultural tradition, those same beliefs would constitute prima facie evidence of my clinical derangement. Suppose I had been one of those shepherds keeping watch by night. And then suppose that I spent the next few years going around first-century Palestine telling people that I had seen the newborn Messiah in something like a stable in Bethlehem. And that his mother was a frightened but fearless teenage girl and that his father was an aging carpenter who talked to God in dreams. His earthly father, that is. For his real father, I’d tell them, was God—you know, the one who created the world and holds it in being even now? That God.

All that would have sounded so bizarre that people might have been justified in thinking I was not in my right mind. They might even have banished me to the other side, along with the Gerasene demoniac. Or worse. And yet the credibility of the Christian faith rests on such bizarre claims. The Gospel is filled with them: rich is poor, death is life, the last is first. Such things seem to defy logic—but only according to a human standard. For what we are ultimately talking about here is the logic of the creator, not the creature, which is why the power of these beliefs lies in their seemingly in-credible character.

That is what Christmas is actually about—the world gone mad, in a good

way, in the best possible way, a way none of us could have ever imagined. To borrow a phrase from a friend, the incarnation is that moment when God enacts the comedy of our redemption amid the tragedy of the world. In that sense, it is a joke—not something that helps us avoid our pain but an event that allows us to enter into it anew, without fear. The incarnation helps us make sense of it all, and, more important, it gives us the hope we need to survive. God’s descent into human life charges our pain with meaning and gives it a transformative power that would otherwise certainly elude us. In the incarnation, the impossible became possible, became real, our reality.

“Christmas and the star and the three kings and the ox and the ass,” Charles says to Sebastian in the novel *Brideshead Revisited*. “You can’t believe things because they’re a lovely idea.”

“But I do,” Sebastian tells him. “That’s how I believe.”

Sebastian gets the joke. He intuits that the sheer craziness of it all is actually what makes it worth believing, even what makes faith credible. And that faith gives him—us—eyes with which to see the world as it is and to reimagine its possibilities.

Thus Christmas reminds us, as Cervantes says at the close of his monologue, that “maddest of all is to see life only as it is and not as it should be.”

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



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Felix K's site/picture-alliance/dpa/AP Images

Members of the St. Nicholas Guild enter the Catholic Church of St. Mary in Friedrichshafen-Jettenhausen, Baden-Wuerttemberg, Germany, Dec. 1.

Cover: Blue Virgin Window, Chartres Cathedral
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**We are called to treat one another like
family, with dignity and respect**

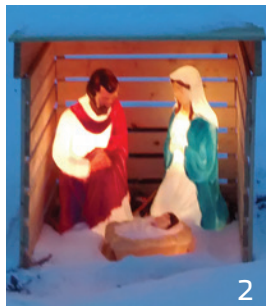
The magi can represent the openness
and universality of the Gospel
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Hope is the long road to Bethlehem

Every Nativity set has its story

At the beginning of Advent, Pope Francis encouraged Christians everywhere to continue “the beautiful family tradition of preparing the nativity scene in the days before Christmas” by setting up Nativity sets not only in their homes but also “in the workplace, in schools, hospitals, prisons and town squares.” In that spirit, **America** asked its readers to send us a photo and description of their Nativity set and tell us what makes it special.



1

I bought this Nativity 16 years ago in a border town in Mexico, where I taught in an Episcopal school. My students made small *ojos de Dios*, and I added other tin ornaments. It reminds me of the many students who made ornaments and enjoyed the lights that made the tin Nativity shine!

Veronica Zamarron
Harlingen, Tex.

2

I like a simple display with a unique image. We live on a well-traveled county road. I think this communicates peace without being too distracting.

Keston Smith
Fort Wayne, Ind.

3

We began putting our simple Nativity in a cage about two years ago. At that time, we began standing out on a busy street corner for an hour every Saturday with a group of like-minded Catholics holding banners saying, “Immigrants and refugees welcome.” The banner includes a picture of the Holy Family on the road to Egypt. The group is now interfaith, and we have partner groups standing on other corners every weekday. And the Nativity is up year round to keep us in solidarity with our sisters and brothers in detention.

Helen Deines
Louisville, Ky.

4

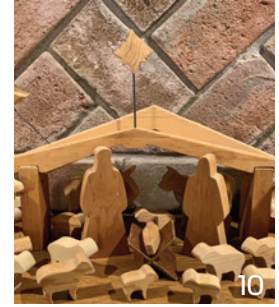
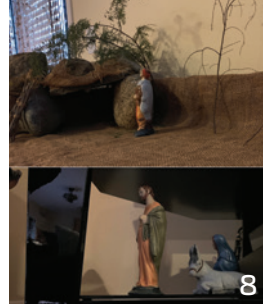
A few years ago, our daughter and her boys were setting out their Fisher-Price Little People Nativity set. They could not find St. Joseph. After some searching, one of the boys found a Little People Batman and they used him as a “substitute” for St. Joseph. It has been a few years now. The real St. Joseph was found, but all decided his substitute was just fine. It is now a family tradition.

Brian McKernan
Ridgefield, Wash.

5

My parents, Vaile and Mary Scott, bought ours during the 1960s. I always felt that this one allowed me to step into the scene in a different way than a traditional Nativity. It is made of some kind of soapstone. After my dad became ill and passed, the Nativity set got buried in a box for several years. I never forgot it and after some searching retrieved it. It is displayed at Christmas time on a countertop in my R.V., as my husband and I are retired and travel full time.

Francie Scott
Fort Pierce, Fla.



6

This was carved by my mother, Therese J. Mueller, in about 1929. She carved the heads, hands and feet and wired, padded and dressed them. The idea was to allow each figure to bend: to kneel, carry, hold, wave, etc. This way the infancy narratives could be told from the Annunciation through the trip to Bethlehem, the birth of Christ, the kings following the star, the flight into Egypt...all the way to the celebration of the presentation in the temple on Feb. 2. Therese Mueller was a classic writer for the liturgical movement in the '40s and '50s. We children grew up with these stories.
Gertrud Mueller Nelson
Encintas, Calif.

8

Being the start of Advent, all we have to offer is this lonely shepherd looking for shelter in some dark and dank cave. Meanwhile, Joseph and Mary are making their way across from the other side of the living room. I could send an update at Christmas if you would like!
My dad, back in the sixties, always tried to make our Nativity set as realistic as possible, like St. Francis intended. We have tried to carry on the tradition, even now with the kids all grown up. They were always fascinated, as kids, as to how Joseph and Mary moved overnight each Advent Sunday, getting ever closer to the cave with each week. Meanwhile shepherds wandered in and out of the cave scene until that big night arrived.
Peter and Gillian Queenan
Coquitlam, British Columbia

9

We were a missionary family in Liberia. I was a Lutheran pastor in Suakoko from 1984 to 1986. During a personally turbulent time, a season of desolation, we found consolation among two communities of lepers. The Ganta community had a wood carver who created this Nativity for us. His gift remains for us gracious consolation nearly 35 years later.
Dominic Scibilia
Mount Pleasant, S.C.

7

My mother bought this early Renaissance crèche because it was handmade in Sri Lanka. She used it for years. It now sits on a handmade wooden table my father refinished for my mom. It's wood and different from any other I have seen.
Gigi Eakins
Renton, Wash.

10

My family inherited our Nativity set from my grandfather after he passed away two years ago. Although he struggled to make ends meet when my mother was growing up, Grandpa Morton used his artistic touch to create unique, beautiful presents for his wife and children. In the early 1970s, he hand-carved a Nativity set out of scrap wood for my grandmother. The original set contained the Nativity essentials: Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus and the stable animals. The set grew every year as Grandpa Morton added more pieces and characters. Eventually, he developed a tradition of adding one lamb to the Nativity set each Christmas, which was meant to symbolize more believers discovering Christ's love for us and joining his flock. Grandpa Morton continued adding lambs until my grandmother's death in 2016; today our Nativity set has 103 sheep.
Isabelle Senechal (Joseph A. O'Hare, S.J., fellow)
New York, N.Y.

It Is Time to Clarify Executive Privilege

At the opening of the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment hearings on Dec. 4, Jonathan Turley, a legal scholar called by the Republicans, warned members of the committee that they could be setting a dangerous precedent. If they proceed without subpoenaing key witnesses, he argued, they would be answering the president's extreme and unsupportable theory of executive supremacy with an equally unsupportable version of legislative supremacy—especially if they charged President Trump with obstruction because he presented legal challenges to the subpoenas they did issue.

Instead, Mr. Turley argued, the question of Mr. Trump's extraordinarily broad claims of executive privilege should be tested in the courts, as they were during the Nixon impeachment inquiry. Without reaching any judgment as to how the House should proceed on impeachment, Mr. Turley's observations highlight the need for a clear process for the prompt resolution of contested claims of executive privilege.

On the same day as this hearing, America Media hosted an event focused on understanding the court case that helped lead to President Nixon's resignation, a conversation between our editor in chief, Matt Malone, S.J., and Philip Lacovara, who, as counsel to the Watergate special prosecutor, argued *United States v. Nixon* before the Supreme Court in 1974. (Mr. Lacovara currently serves on America Media's board. Video of that event and a written interview with Mr. Lacovara are available at americamagazine.org/usvnixon.) The Supreme Court handed down its unanimous decision requiring Mr. Nixon to produce secret recordings of Oval Office conversations less than

three weeks after oral argument, and Mr. Nixon resigned 16 days later.

While the Supreme Court moved with impressive speed in *United States v. Nixon*—only three months elapsed between the initial subpoena and the case's final resolution—such efficiency is the exception rather than the rule in legal proceedings. In the contemporary impeachment inquiry, the fear that Mr. Trump's claims of privilege would be tied up in court for months has led the House Democrats to declare that they will consider Mr. Trump's refusal to cooperate with the inquiry as itself constituting obstruction of Congress. (In early October, Mr. Trump made the bizarre claim that the impeachment inquiry was "constitutionally invalid and a violation of due process" and directed the entire executive branch to refuse to cooperate.)

Every U.S. citizen should be concerned about the Trump administration's peculiar intrigues in Ukraine: withholding military aid in order to pressure another country into the simulacrum of a corruption investigation meant to damage a political rival, former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. They should also be able to recognize that the facts already in evidence require investigation and response. But reasonable people can reach different judgments about how the House should proceed and on what schedule. There are enough differences from the Nixon case—including Mr. Trump's even broader pre-emptive refusal to cooperate with Congress and the nearness of the 2020 presidential election—that this precedent cannot cleanly determine the proper course of action.

All of this points to the need to clarify the scope of executive privilege and to establish a streamlined legal

process to resolve such claims quickly. Otherwise, future presidents may continue to be incentivized to claim privilege in order to delay congressional investigations while simultaneously establishing a pretext for rejecting their findings as insufficient. Even though such legislation has no chance of proceeding now, given current partisan divisions, it is necessary to begin the slow work of closing this loophole in our system of checks and balances.

Nuclear Weapons a Continuing Threat

"Russia wants to make a deal very much on arms control and nuclear, and that's smart, and so do we," President Trump told reporters at the 70th-anniversary celebration of NATO in London on Dec. 3. Those were welcome words—words that now need to be backed up with action.

In August, Mr. Trump removed the United States from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, claiming that Russia had developed weapons in violation of the agreement (a charge denied by Russia but echoed by other member nations of NATO). Now, one of the few remaining arms control agreements that limit the arsenals of the two Cold War powers—New START, signed into law by President Obama in 2010—is in jeopardy.

The treaty expires in February 2021 and would take years of negotiations to revise. The deal that Russia very much wants is to extend the treaty for five years, which requires only the mutual agreement of both presidents. Mr. Trump's negotiating team has not responded to Russia's offer, as the president appears to want a more

ambitious trilateral deal that involves China—a deal that does not interest China. However worthy that goal may be, Mr. Trump should not risk allowing New START to expire as the world teeters on the brink of a new nuclear arms race.

This slow-walking by the Trump administration is emblematic of a wider lack of urgency in the United States about the threat posed by nuclear weapons. Following Mr. Trump’s withdrawal from the I.N.F. treaty, George Shultz, who served as President Reagan’s secretary of state, said, “When something like the I.N.F. goes down the drain almost like nothing, it shows you the degree to which people have forgotten the power of these weapons.” It is, in a way, understandable. Amid global threats like climate change and more immediate dangers like mass shootings, Americans have plenty of other concerns to keep them up at night.

But as Pope Francis forcefully reminded the world during his trip to Japan, not only the use but the very possession of nuclear weapons remains an existential threat to humanity and a moral stain on the countries that deploy and stockpile them. (The United States has over 4,000 nuclear warheads in its arsenal.) “Peace and international stability are incompatible with attempts to build upon the fear of mutual destruction or the threat of total annihilation,” the pope said.

Citizens of the only nation that has used nuclear weapons during wartime do not have the luxury of remaining complacent about the continued existence of these devices. Pope Francis’ words should prick America’s conscience and move it to let go of the false security provided by its arsenal. Upholding New START with Russia is a small but necessary step toward the pope’s vision of a world free of nuclear weapons.

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Three U.S. bishops: Stop federal executions for good

We have embarked on the season of Advent, waiting in eager anticipation for the birth of the Lord into our sinful world. With a heavy heart in a season of holy preparation, we are reminded of the U.S. government's ongoing efforts to resume federal executions for the first time in 16 years. The first of these federal executions was scheduled for Dec. 9 but was placed on hold by a federal judge. The government is appealing the decision and intends to carry out the executions if it prevails.

As bishops of the Catholic Church, we have a moral obligation to teach the faith and uphold the dignity of human life. Through prayer, education and advocacy, we call on our government, as both Christians and as Americans, to turn back from the path of death and forgo all executions.

Human dignity can be difficult to understand when we are confronted with the depths of our sins. But we believe, from Scripture and tradition, that each person is created by God in his image and likeness, and the dignity that flows from God's creative act cannot be removed by the actions of any person, no matter how bad, no matter how hurtful.

We reverence God's gift of life in those at the beginning of life and those at its end, in the weak and in the strong, in the poor and in the rich, in the happy and in the sad, in the honored and in the forgotten. And we reverence God's gift of life in the guilty and in the innocent.

The Catholic bishops of the United States have consistently called for an end to the death penalty for decades. When Pope John Paul II visited St. Louis in 1999, he urged an end of the death penalty, which he called

"both cruel and unnecessary." Pope Benedict XVI called for "the attention of society's leaders to the need to make every effort to eliminate the death penalty," and he praised lay Catholics working to end the death penalty around the world.

Pope Francis has strongly emphasized that the death penalty is unacceptable and is an affront to the Gospel and to the respect for life and human dignity. When he addressed the joint meeting of the U.S. Congress during his historic apostolic visit to the United States in 2015, the pope called for the abolition of the death penalty because "every life is sacred, every human person is endowed with an inalienable dignity, and society can only benefit from the rehabilitation of those convicted of crimes."

To oppose the death penalty is not to be "soft on crime." Rather, it is to be strong on the dignity of life. The evidence is overwhelmingly clear that the death penalty in the United States is racially and economically biased, and it varies arbitrarily in its application based on the location of the crime. Most troubling of all, we know beyond any doubt that innocent people have been sent to death row, 166 of whom have been exonerated since 1973.

As Pope Francis has written, "[t]he death penalty loses all legitimacy due to the defective selectivity of the criminal justice system and in the face of the possibility of judicial error. Human justice is imperfect, and the failure to recognize its fallibility can transform it into a source of injustice."

We stand for helping victims and for bringing about justice when great harm is done. And God brings justice, but he also offers mercy and grace in abundance. During Advent, we antic-

ipate the coming of the Lord not with power and violence, but humbly and gently as a baby, a lamb, an offering. God loves us enough to die for us, to restore us to friendship, to teach us the ways of love and forgiveness, to lead us to eternal life.

We ask our fellow Catholics and all people of good will to reject the death penalty, and to proclaim the Incarnate Lord's unmeasurable gift of life. This Advent, we walk again in the darkness that seems too visible in the fear and pain of our sin, but we will catch sight of the light once more, and we will know that the darkness has not overcome it—and never will.

Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory of Washington, D.C., and Bishop Frank J. Dewane of Venice, Fla., have all led dioceses where executions have been carried out and where they have previously spoken out against capital punishment.

EDITOR'S NOTE: On Oct. 10, Archbishop Coakley, Archbishop Gregory and Bishop Dewane elaborated on the themes of this essay in a roundtable discussion on the death penalty, moderated by Carol Zimmermann of Catholic News Service, at the headquarters of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C. Highlights of that discussion can be viewed at www.youtu.be/RN2MVO_kQGk.



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SOME EXPLANATIONS ARE IN ORDER

The most-viewed stories of 2019 By Robert David Sullivan

Are we in a post-truth era? Can Google or Wikipedia explain things for us, or do we first need someone to explain how Google and Wikipedia work? Can we trust Siri? Will we have to wait for the all-knowing Janet, from TV's "The Good Place," to be created and tell us what's what?

Our epistemic crisis, in which people cannot seem to arrive at a shared version of reality, may have had a hand in determining the most popular America Media content of 2019. "Explainers," guides, even videos with Jesuits answering questions posed by the auto-complete function of Google—content that *clarified* matters—seemed to connect most with readers during the past 12 months. Of the 100 most-viewed articles on our website from Dec. 1, 2018, to Nov. 30, 2019, eight were Explainers (a label we have only recently started using regularly), and many others fell into the broader category of clearing up confusion, debunking myths or simply quantifying, say, how many members of the U.S. Congress are Catholic. One of our most popular long-form stories, excerpted from a book by **America's** Vatican correspondent, Gerard O'Connell, detailed exactly how Jorge Bergoglio became pope in 2013.

The most popular Explainers dealt with: changes in abortion laws; why Pope Francis sometimes does not want people to kiss his ring; the process of laicization, or the "defrocking" of priests; the conditions under which someone may be denied Communion; the responsibilities of a bishop over his diocese's finances; the difficulties in polling Catholics about their beliefs; questions about ordaining married men arising from the Synod of Bishops

on the Amazon; and the differences between the terms *Latino* and *Hispanic*.

Eleven of our 100 most-viewed articles posed the question "Why?" in the headline, from "Why Do Some Catholics Oppose Pope Francis?" to "Why Are So Many People Fleeing Honduras?" The latter was one of many Dispatches that provided some global context to the often-insular U.S. media. Among other topics, our foreign correspondents reported on the fire at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and the contentious questions over rebuilding the church, as well as the prominence of the hymn "Sing Hallelujah to the Lord" in protests in Hong Kong.

Underscoring **America's** growth as a multimedia platform, some of our most widely read stories were supplemented by video and audio content. The most popular new video of 2019 was "Where Was God When Notre Dame Was in Flames?" in which James Martin, S.J., our editor at large, put the Paris tragedy in perspective, followed by Father Martin's extended interview with "Late Show" host Stephen Colbert. But the most-viewed **America** video in 2019 was "The Catholic Church in China," produced in 2017 but still highly relevant given the challenges of the church in a country that continues to restrict religious freedom.

In the podcasting arena, the most popular episode of "Jesuitical" featured the author Malcolm Gladwell (who had explored Jesuit reasoning on his own podcast, "Revisionist History").

The limited-series podcast "Deliver Us," about sexual abuse by members of the clergy, got its biggest audience



A major fire at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris left people asking, "Where was God?"

AP Photo/Rafael Yaghobzadeh

MOST VIEWED VATICAN DISPATCHES

1. Cardinal Pell, top advisor to Pope Francis, found guilty of "historical sexual offenses," **Gerard O'Connell**, Dec. 12, 2018
2. Pope Francis to journalist: "I am honored that the Americans attack me," **Gerard O'Connell**, Sept. 4
3. Pope Francis meets with Father James Martin in private audience, **Gerard O'Connell**, Sept. 30
4. Pope Francis canonizes five new saints, including John Henry Newman, **Gerard O'Connell**, Oct. 13
5. Director and deputy director of Vatican press office resign on last day of 2018, **Gerard O'Connell**, Dec. 31, 2018

MOST VIEWED DISPATCHES

1. Archdiocese pulls "Catholic" label from Jesuit school for refusing to fire teacher in same-sex marriage, **Michael J. O'Loughlin**, June 20
2. Do we need a wall? Here's what people on the border think, **J.D. Long-García**, Dec. 26, 2018
3. How many members of the new Congress are Catholic? **Michael J. O'Loughlin**, Jan. 3
4. Bishop Stowe: Why the MAGA hats at the March for Life? **Michael J. O'Loughlin**, Jan. 24
5. The St. Louis Jesuits stage a final performance that brings up the house, **Kerry Weber**, Sept. 30

MOST POPULAR NEW VIDEOS

1. Where was God when Notre Dame was in flames? (Faith in Focus), April 16
2. Stephen Colbert extended interview (Faith in Focus), Dec. 13, 2018
3. 300 years of sister history (in 5 minutes) (Beyond the Habit), Sept. 23
4. Pope Francis kisses the feet of South Sudan leaders to beg for peace, April 11
5. Women deacons: Past, present, future (Conversations With America), Jan. 15

MOST POPULAR NEW PODCAST EPISODES

1. Why Malcolm Gladwell wants to think like a Jesuit (Jesuitical), Sept. 6
2. How can I remain Catholic? (Deliver Us), Feb. 13
3. First Sunday of Lent (The Examen), March 11



Paddy Gilger, S.J., and Eric Sundrup, S.J., host "Jesuit Autocomplete," answering some of the internet's most common questions about faith.



300 YEARS OF SISTER HISTORY (IN 5 MINUTES)

The first episode in the new "Beyond the Habit" series about women religious in the United States was the third most popular video of 2019.

with the episode asking “How Can I Remain Catholic?” And while it premiered too late to make this list (with a debut on Dec. 1), “Plague,” which examines how Catholics responded to the early days of the AIDS crisis, quickly won a large audience and demonstrated the appeal of audio reporting.

Below we have listed the top story for each of the past 12 months from each of our three major departments: Arts & Culture, Faith, and News/Politics & Society. To arrive at this list, we multiplied the number of unique readers for each story by the average time spent reading that story. The most-viewed story overall was a report on last December’s conviction of Cardinal George Pell of Australia for “histor-

ical child sexual offenses.” Next was a Faith in Focus story on a high school that holds funerals for homeless veterans.

Content from previous years also attracted large numbers of readers, led by “Were Jesus, Mary and Joseph Refugees?” and “What Is the Official Church Teaching on Homosexuality?” The difficult questions, it seems, are never answered for good.

For more lists of popular content produced by America Media in 2019, visit americamagazine.org.

Robert David Sullivan, associate editor.
Twitter: @RobertDSullivan.

MOST POPULAR ARTS, FAITH AND NEWS STORIES BY MONTH

DECEMBER 2018

“Silent Night” turns 200 this year. Is it the greatest Christmas song ever? **Edward W. Schmidt, S.J.**, Dec. 24 issue

Cardinal Pell, top advisor to Pope Francis, found guilty of “historical sexual offenses,” **Gerard O’Connell**, Dec. 12

The America Profile: Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards, the pro-life Catholic Democrat, **Matt Malone, S.J.**, Dec. 24 issue

JANUARY

Mary Oliver, our devotional poet, **Lisa Ampleman**, Jan. 22

Vatican commission members: Women served as deacons for a millennium, **Brandon Sanchez**, Jan. 15

Bishop Stowe: Why the MAGA hats at the March for Life? (follow-up to story about Covington Catholic High School students), **Michael J. O’Loughlin**, Jan. 24 (published in Feb. 18 issue)

FEBRUARY

Brandi Carlile’s Biblical imagination in “By the Way, I Forgive You,” **Justin Klassen**, Feb. 8 (published in March 18 issue)

Explainer: Former Cardinal McCarrick faces laicization. What does that mean? **Michael J. O’Loughlin**, Feb. 12

What Black Lives Matter can teach Catholics about racial justice, **Olga Segura**, Feb. 18 issue

MARCH

A Jesuit confesses his love for March Madness and NCAA basketball, **Vincent Strand, S.J.**, March 15

Exclusive: Inside the election of Pope Francis, **Gerard O’Connell**, March 22 (published in April 1 issue)

Explainer: What New York’s new abortion law does and doesn’t do, **Sam Sawyer, S.J.**, Jan. 30

APRIL

The day Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day and Bruce Springsteen met at America magazine, **Chad Mitchum**, April 1 (yes, April 1)

Where was God when Notre Dame was in flames? **James Martin, S.J.**, April 16

Can you find God in a black hole? **Guy Consolmagno, S.J.** (director of the Vatican Observatory), April 10

MAY

Marie Kondo’s road to a tidy (and examined) life, **Elizabeth Grace Matthew**, May 27 issue

The Catholic high school that holds funerals for homeless veterans, **Michael Kotsopoulos**, May 26

Paul Ryan has been hired to teach at Notre Dame. He should think about studying there instead. **Paul D. McNelis, S.J.**, May 2

JUNE

Eight Catholic horror films you should watch, **Eve Tushnet**, June 26 (published in July 8 issue)

The Pentecost Testimony of a Mad, Fed-Up Catholic, **Elizabeth Scalia**, June 8

Sister Carol Keehan is leaving the Catholic Health Association. Here’s what she thinks about U.S. health care. **Michael J. O’Loughlin**, June 6

JULY

The God-Haunted Characters of James Lee Burke, **Edward W. Schmidt, S.J.**, July 5 (published in Aug. 19 issue)

I’m a Catholic woman who was allowed to preach at Mass—until it was banned, **Jean Molesky-Poz**, July 22

Dante, Trump and the moral cowardice of the G.O.P., **Charles Sykes**, July 21 (published in Aug. 19 issue)

AUGUST

David Brooks on his life-changing pilgrimage with St. Augustine and Dorothy Day, **Bill McGarvey**, Aug. 15 (published in Sept. 16 issue)

Explainer: Why the Eucharist is confusing for many Catholics (and survey researchers), **James T. Keane and Sam Sawyer, S.J.**, Aug. 9

The hospital program for parents facing tragic prenatal diagnoses, **Kerry Weber**, Aug. 19 issue

SEPTEMBER

The 10 Greatest Catholic School Movies of All Time, **Ciaran Freeman**, Aug. 30

Pope Francis to journalist: “I am honored that the Americans attack me,” **Gerard O’Connell**, Sept. 4.

Whose nation? Which communities? The fault lines of the new Christian nationalism, **David Albertson and Jason Blakely**, Sept. 19

OCTOBER

The Making of “The Exorcist,” **Jim McDermott, S.J.**, Oct. 25

Pope Francis canonizes five new saints, including John Henry Newman, **Gerard O’Connell**, Oct. 13

Supreme Court decision on L.G.B.T. discrimination sets up religious liberty clash, **Michael J. O’Loughlin**, Oct 11

NOVEMBER

Review: “A Beautiful Day In The Neighborhood” is (surprisingly) not about Mr. Rogers, **John Anderson**, Nov. 22

U.S. bishops: “The threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority,” **Michael J. O’Loughlin**, Nov. 12

Should abortion be the most important issue for Catholic voters? Here’s a better question. **Sam Sawyer, S.J.**, Nov. 13

Sources: Data cover the period from Dec. 1, 2018, to Nov. 30, 2019. Only stories original to America Media are counted; each story is counted for the month of its highest readership only. Monthly data is based on estimates of total time spent viewing each story by online readers. Some content is posted on the America Media website before it appears in print.

Is there a shortage of sacramental care for the elderly in the U.S.?

Sister Jean Dwyan with a resident at the St. Louis Residence of the Little Sisters of the Poor in January 2014.

In October, the lack of priests in the nine-nation Amazon basin was a primary focus of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon region. That may seem a far-off problem, but it mirrors emerging realities in the North American church, including a scarcity of sacramental care for the elderly.

“So many priests are very generous,” said Alan Bowman, vice president of mission integration at Trinity Health, a national Catholic health care provider. “But it’s very, very difficult at times finding priests for sacramental ministry in senior living communities.”

Retirement communities often benefit from the growing ranks of retired clergy in residence, and centers affiliated with religious orders typically have the resources they need. But in unaffiliated retirement homes, finding a priest can be a challenge. At one retirement center in Los Angeles, the local parish provided Mass once a month but recently announced it would no longer do so. “There wasn’t much explanation,” the facility’s activity director, who asked to remain anonymous, said.

And after that support was lost, it was unclear to the director whom to turn to not only for Mass but also for the sacraments of anointing and reconciliation. “We used to call that parish, but I’m not sure that’s still available.”

Karen Summers, chief mission integration officer for Providence St. Joseph Health, notes that in a Seattle facility “up until the last five or 10 years, Mass was offered every day. Then it was hard to get priests [every day]; then it was hard to get priests on the weekend. There were [fewer priests] in the parishes and they were being stretched thin.

“In some of our long-term care facilities, they have Mass once a month,” said Ms. Summers.

Both administrators are quick to point out that while the limited access to clergy is a real problem, their facilities are blessed with lay chaplains certified by the National Association of Catholic Chaplains. “Our chaplains are just

amazing ministers,” Ms. Summers said. “We’ve worked really hard over the years to cultivate the level of professionalization in our ministers.”

Mr. Bowman notes that decades ago, there were conversations among church leaders about the possibility of authorizing some chaplains to provide sacramental ministry under dire circumstances. He wonders if it is worth revisiting that question: “Maybe deacons and board-certified Catholic chaplains could be authorized by the bishops to provide more ministry in these nursing homes.”

At the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Marc J. DelMonico serves as the director of certification for ecclesial ministry. He acknowledged the weakness of a system that sometimes means ministers providing ongoing care have to stop in moments of urgent need in search of priests. In such situations, “lay chaplains experience real anxiety, and how do we do deal with that reality?” he said.

“These are really great people doing this really great work,” said Mr. DelMonico, “and at times they want to be able to accompany those they’ve connected with because they have a deep love and care for them.”

He, too, hopes that a resolution to the problem can be discussed. “People who have lived the life of faith need, in their sickness or elder years, the presence of a person who is going to journey with them through the dark places and help them toward hopefully renewed health or the life to come,” Mr. DelMonico said.

“The lay minister cannot offer sacramental absolution, but there’s nothing that says they can’t offer the good news of the kingdom of God that says Jesus forgives those who repent in their hearts.”

Jim McDermott, S.J.
Twitter: @PopCulturPriest.

A photograph showing a person holding a large white banner with the text "NO QUEREMOS PAZ QUEREMOS JUSTICIA" written in black, hand-painted letters. The banner is held up in a city street, with a brick building and a clear blue sky visible in the background. The person holding the banner is partially visible at the bottom of the frame.

NO
QUEREMOS
PAZ
QUEREMOS
JUSTICIA

After Evo's flight to Mexico, what's next for Bolivia?

In the streets of the capital, La Paz, and nearby El Alto, indigenous protesters soon squared off against security forces after the sudden flight of President Evo Morales from Bolivia to Mexico on Nov. 12. On the internet, digital partisans likewise engaged at social media barricades, fighting over how to best characterize the departure. Was it a coup, a *golpe de estado*, or the result of a more or less defensible process set in motion by the former president's own unconstitutional acts?

A credible case could have been made for either interpretation in the days just after he fled, said Marcos Scauso, an assistant professor of political science at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut. Stepping into the political vacuum, the former opposition senator Jeanine Áñez emerged from obscurity to create a new government on Nov. 13.

Ms. Áñez did not show much concern about when to schedule new elections until the uproar in Bolivia's streets forced her hand, Mr. Scauso pointed out, and the interim president's various decrees since she assumed power suggested to many a possible restoration of Bolivia's old order and the reversal of the dramatic changes achieved by the Movement to Socialism (known by its abbreviation in Spanish, MAS), the indigenous party that has been Mr.

Morales's political base.

Now the drama unfolding in Bolivia has come to appear more clearly as a coup, according to Mr. Scauso. "But that doesn't mean that Evo Morales was the perfect leader," he cautioned.

An audit of the election, which had been held on Oct. 20, conducted by the Organization of American States identified significant irregularities, setting off the crisis. The ousted president had been barred from running for a fourth term by a constitution he personally helped put together in 2009. Ignoring the results of a referendum that upheld those term limits, he ran again under thin cover provided by a Bolivian Supreme Court ruling, a decision that was not accepted by many in Bolivia.

"He's been losing a lot of support in Bolivia from some indigenous movements and from some sectors of the country," Mr. Scauso said. "However, he's also done more for indigenous people than any other government in the history of Bolivia, so he still has a huge base of support."

At the end of November the argument over how Mr. Morales was removed had been surpassed by events in La Paz. On Nov. 23 Bolivian legislators, including MAS representatives, agreed on the terms for a new presidential election.



AP Photo/Natasha Pisarenko

In El Alto, Bolivia, an Evo Morales stronghold on the outskirts of La Paz, this protester says: "We don't want peace. We want justice."

Since then, barricades have come down and calm appears to have been restored. But dangerous tensions remain. A date for the new elections has not been set, but Mr. Morales will not be allowed to return to Bolivia to run again when the new elections are scheduled.

MAS may now be at a disadvantage as it scrambles to locate a candidate who can stand in for Mr. Morales, and gains made by the nation's indigenous people could be at risk. Processes of transformation in Latin America, Mr. Scauso pointed out, have been turned back before by new leadership, as recent reversals of social and economic policy in Brazil and Argentina demonstrate.

But the political path ahead is no less hazardous for the resurgent conservatives fronted by Ms. Áñez, Mr. Scauso said. "What she represents is a couple of hundred years of history that has either explicitly, legally, or not so explicitly and legally, excluded a huge chunk of the population," he said.

Since 2005 that "chunk of the population" has learned to come out and vote.

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



AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino

GOODNEWS: Pope Francis welcomes refugees to a new life in Italy

At Fiumicino Airport near Rome a group of refugees sponsored for admission into Italy by the Vatican were accompanied by Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, on Dec. 4. He urged European bishops to "wake up" and take a stand on welcoming displaced persons fleeing persecution.

Noting the pope's great compassion for refugees and migrants, the cardinal told reporters their ongoing mistreatment was "a shame for Europe." The 33 refugees—including 14 minors—arrived from Lesbos, Greece. Most were fleeing war-torn Afghanistan.

Assisting in their journey has been the Catholic Sant'Egidio community, which since February 2016 has been able to bring 3,026 refugees into Europe using demilitarized zones known as humanitarian corridors.

Many of the refugees welcomed in Rome came from Moria, a camp that has become infamous because of its poor conditions. The refugee camps in Lesbos are operating far in excess of their capacity, with numbers doubling in just a few months as political and social unrest shakes Africa and the Middle East.

Maryam Moradi, originally from Iran, called life in Moria "the worst experience my family ever had." Ms. Moradi said she was grateful for Pope Francis' intercession and appealed to global leadership to "help each other, to be friends and to stop war and fights," insisting that refugees "just want a normal life."

For Mustafa Ahmadi, just shy of 17 years old, it has been "a long and dangerous journey" that brought him from Afghanistan to Iran to Turkey to Lesbos. He said the pain and desolation he has witnessed have "really hurt" him and described the intervention of the Vatican and Sant'Egidio as "a kind of miracle—a dream, really."

Claire Giangravé, *Religion News Service*



CNS photo/Paul Haring

Apostrophes to Mary

The 2019 George W. Hunt, S.J., Prize essay

By Mary Szybist

Hail

Mary who mattered to me, gone or asleep
among fruits, spilled
in ash, in dust, I did not
leave you. Even now I can't keep from
composing you, limbs & blue cloak
& soft hands. I sleep to the sound
of your name, I say there is no Mary
except the word Mary, no trace
on the dust of my pillowslip. I only
dream of your ankles brushed by dark violets,
of honeybees above you
murmuring into a crown. Antique queen,
the night dreams on: here are the pears
I have washed for you, here the heavy-winged doves,
asleep by the hyacinths. Here I am,
having bathed carefully in the syllables
of your name, in the air and the sea of them, the sharp scent
of their sea foam. What is the matter with me?
Mary, what word, what dust
can I look behind? I carried you a long way
into my mirror, believing you would carry me
back out. Mary, I am still
for you, I am still a numbness for you.*

*Mary Szybist, "Hail" from *Incarnadine*. Copyright ©2012 by Mary Szybist. Reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company, L.L.C., on behalf of Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, Minn., www.graywolfpress.org.



I can't remember the first time you frightened me. Just like I can't remember a time in which you did not hover in my consciousness, floating over the saints from my childhood books. It was as if you oversaw the orderly sameness of their stories: courage, suffering, heroic death.

How many times did my mother kiss her fingers and touch them to your lips when she passed you—your silent, small image on holy cards tacked up in her hallways.

•••

You'd been mute in me when I walked into the Uffizzi Gallery in Florence. Simone Martini, Sandro Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci: their Annunciation paintings hanging just a few meters from each other—and you in each of them, facing your angel. Between the two of you, the painters imagined different shapes of distance. In Martini, Gabriel leans toward you as you lean back: between you, the background's monochrome gold is broken by the stems of olive branches, lilies—that radiance is splintered into pieces. In Da Vinci, Gabriel seems a long reverential way away from you, his shadow stretched between you over an intricate expanse of spring meadow. In Botticelli, you reach down to take Gabriel's hand—a distance between you of, say, an infant's body. In no version has Gabriel yet crossed that space. In no vision does the annunciation happen all at once. They all imagine you in a small space of time in which no one gets to touch you. No visible guiding hand gets to touch you.

•••

The painters must have felt their distance from you as they touched you into visibility. No one painted you with a distinctively memorable face. But they all imagined you as unafraid of the stranger before you.

•••

Growing up with the name Mary was not, for me, an experience charged with possibility. I didn't so much feel like a Mary as I did a failure of Mary. Despite your many titles (Our Lady of Sorrows, Our Lady of the Sea) you floated in my mind as a singularity. My images of you were so similar they were not distinguishable. I knew there was more than one Mary in the Bible, but you were the one who was held up to me, the one who haunted me—you, *the* Mary, immaculate Mary. I felt like a tragic falling-off.

It's true I imagined you as silent, as beautiful and beloved, and those qualities, through the habit of thinking of you, became related to each other. Maybe I still half-believe I must be quiet to be loved. I think of this sometimes, trying to cajole young women into class discussions. They still don't speak out loud in my classroom in proportions even close to their male peers.

What difference would it have made to me if a fuller

range of Marys had been present to my dream life? What if Mary Magdalene had been present to my day-dreaming life?

Lately, when I close my eyes at night and try to give myself over to dreams, voices turn in my mind and accuse me: "You just want to re-make the church in your own image," they say.

But, Mary, who *doesn't* do that?

And who does and doesn't get to do that?

•••

Most devotional poetry makes me feel physically nauseated within a few lines—those poems where reverence bears a heavy relation to deference. Deference, for example, to the link between "holy" and "virgin." To imagine holiness as the absence of touch, is to imagine it, I fear, in stillness, in silence. I want to feel the holiness in touching the bodies of those I love. Many of the poems that matter to me—by George Herbert, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Lucille Clifton—do have a sense of reverence, but it is reverence as deep respect or awe. Clifton imagines in "island Mary" that you don't quiet your wonder: you worry for

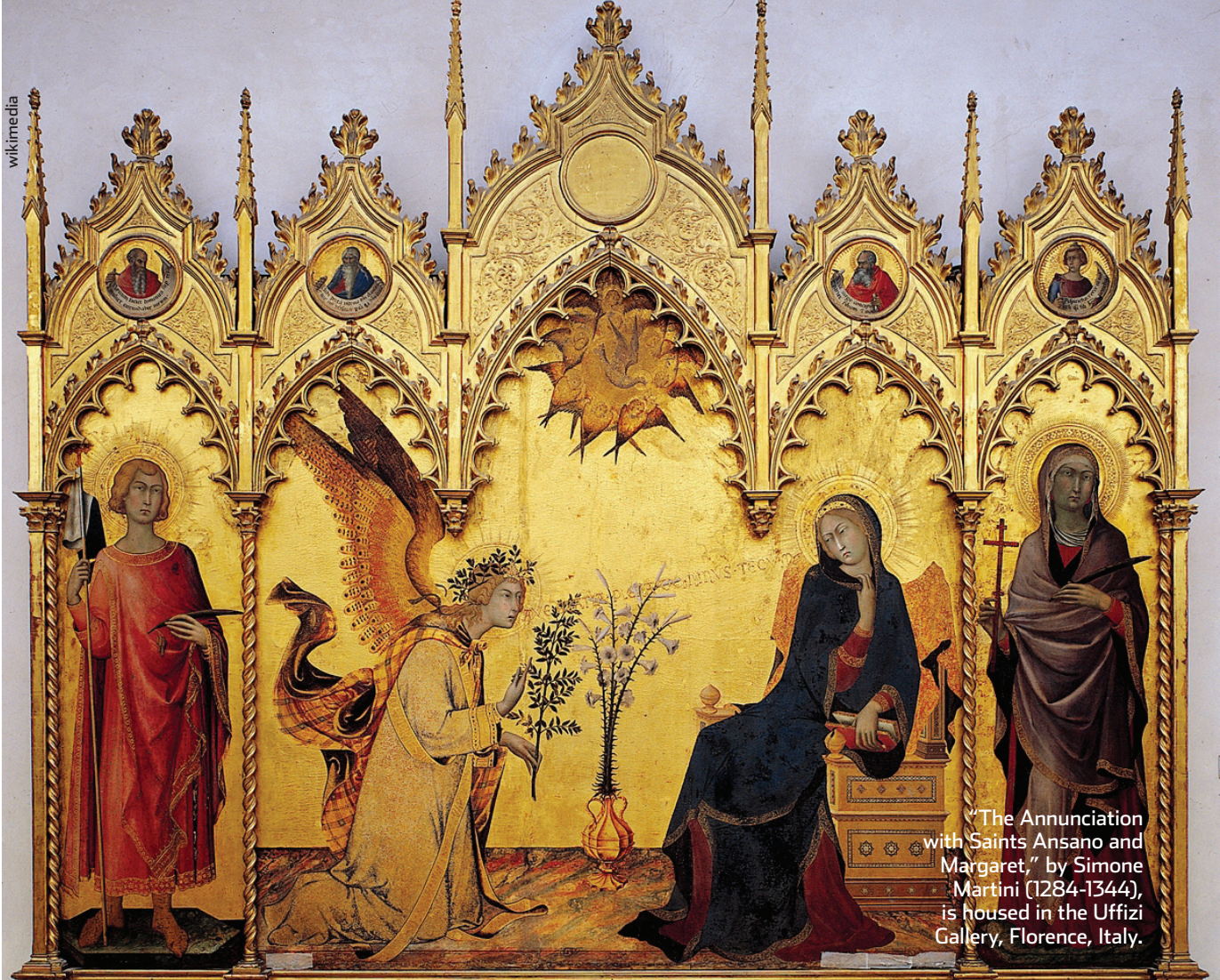
*another young girl asleep
in the plain evening
what song around her ear?
what song still choosing?*

In Clifton, to enter your voice is to enter this mystery: we don't choose most of what hovers in our ears—or understand how it shapes us, chooses for us.

•••

I don't know what to make of it: the trend of women, especially young women, wearing chapel veils to Mass again. I continue to think of what Professor Karen Eifler said, when I wondered this aloud. We were sitting next to each other at a dinner. It was a warm September evening, and she looked out a large window into the darkening twilight that was slowly at work in turning the glass into a mirror. She said she thought about how, at the moment of the crucifixion, the temple veil was torn—that thin barrier separating humans and God was torn away. Why are women putting the veil back on themselves?

A public expression of "submission," an experience of "authentic femininity," "a way to be like Mary"—these are some of the things women say. But I don't understand what it means to them. And I don't understand, Mary, why the veil is being singled out as a way to imitate you. Do the Gospels call any more attention to your veil than, say, to Salome's? How does the act of covering oneself speak to your example?



“The Annunciation with Saints Ansano and Margaret,” by Simone Martini (1284-1344), is housed in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy.

•••

I think of Corinthians 11:10: women ought to cover their heads “because of the angels.” I wonder if it’s true that this is a remnant from older, pre-Christian stories that featured gods and angels lusting after women—so the veil was a way of hiding from predators looking down from above.

•••

Sometimes I look at the icy lace whiteness of the veils and think of our thawing permafrost or our protective blanket of ozone riddled with holes. Sometimes I think the veil looks like a wish, a gesture that imagines life in a protective layer that can be lifted out of its drawer whenever it is needed.

•••

Almost daily something happens that makes me think of the gender-segregated retreat center episode of the series “Fleabag” and repeat it to myself like a good joke. Two sisters go to a women’s retreat, a silent retreat, where, to help them stay quiet, women are given day-long, repetitive cleaning tasks. Meanwhile the men, at their retreat, take turns screaming at a blow-up sex doll, and afterward, feeling a great deal better, enjoy loud conviviality at the bar.

It helps, this satire. I thought of it when a friend described to me how a crazy portion of his daily job as a judge consists of listening to men defend themselves for violence against women by blaming the women for provoking them—provoking them by speaking.

How is it that the speech of women is perceived as threatening by so many men?

I worry about aligning femininity with images of any kind of submission or silence. I worry about how your image is still made to do that.

•••

It was when I wandered into the Bible’s wilderness and read it for myself that I began to do more than picture you. To find you among the Bible’s juxtapositions, inside its bravado in placing different accounts side by side without any attempt to reconcile them, was to imagine you as a figure who could leap. To find you among the audacity of its collages was to feel you less tethered to your gauzy image on my mother’s holy cards.

Still, your scenes in the Bible seem strangely singular, isolated. They don’t proliferate, like other stories, in multiple

No one painted you, Mary, with a distinctively memorable face. But they all imagined you as unafraid of the stranger before you.

versions, multiple Gospels. The Annunciation and the Visitation are told just once, and briefly, in the Gospel of Luke.

And so it doesn't seem strange to me, my desire to write you, to re-write you, to magnify you and your scenes, to amplify them, to find more possibilities in them.

•••

The annunciation scene has often looked to me at first glance like an encounter between women. The feminine qualities painters often give to Gabriel aid this: delicate hands, sumptuous robes, hair loose and flowing. I know having a best friend since childhood named Gabriela aids this. I also realize that seeing it this way is also about my desire to see it this way. It's about my own hunger for stories of women talking to each other.

Are you and Elizabeth the only women who talk to each other at any length in the New Testament? I can't think of any other women who do.

It makes sense to me that it is in that intimate space of the Visitation—in a visit with a friend—that your voice emerges at length and takes space and you speak your Magnificat: "My soul magnifies the Lord—"

But you don't just speak about your soul. "He has put down the mighty from their thrones," you say. My friend Eileen made the point: at the Annunciation you say yes. At the Visitation you explain *why* you said yes: "He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty."

You agree to bring into the world a life with the power to put down the mighty and fill the hungry. Your *why* matters.

•••

I still don't know what to make of the climactic scene of *Fleabag* when the protagonist, in a literal confessional, is asked to confess something true about herself to someone

she loves. Having moved through the journeywork of her character, we are prepared for intimate, personal disclosure. What we get (whether or not we believe her) is the admission that she just wants to be relieved of choices. She just wants to be told what to do.

I watched that episode with Gabriela as my old orange cat moved between us with a not-very-dulcet meowing that seemed to stand in for the feeling moving between us.

"It's relatable," I offered.

"It's just not very interesting," she countered.

I know what it is to want to put down the responsibility for making a muck of my life, to wish not to make, but to be made. But I think of my mother. I think of the terms by which she tried to be a good mother, a good wife: to not have a self with preferences or distinctions that mattered enough to be given voice or attention.

I wanted to know her preferences. I wanted to know her.

•••

When my mother was dying she asked me to keep talking to her after she was gone.

But here I am talking to you, Mary—using you as a silence into which to speak. You're more than a set of expectations that has worked me over. You are part of how she lives in me.

•••

I believed my undergraduate teacher, Joseph A. Brown, S.J., when he said that voices have the power to save others and the power to destroy them. I believed him when he said that the same is true of silence. My silence. I still believe him. I hear his voice in me like a good angel, reminding. And yet.

To rage in quiet. To grieve in quiet. I worry that my deepest inclinations are for quiet.

•••

Sometimes I look at the chapel veils and imagine them as shields. I imagine that their wearers are about to speak in ways no one expects—and that, among the faithful, their shields will let them stay and be heard.

•••

I love the possibility that the Bible may have been assembled as a grand peace-making gesture, an attempt to bring together communities at war by assembling a single book inclusive of all the different ways they tell the same stories. I love how the Bible's stories are not smoothly blended but co-exist side by side. And I love, Mary, that your presence is part of it, that your speaking is essential to it. *He will fill the hungry with good things. The rich he will send away empty.* Before I read the Bible, I hardly thought of you as someone who spoke.

•••



“The Cestello Annunciation,”
by Sandro Botticelli (1444-
1510), is housed in the Uffizzi
Gallery, Florence, Italy.

Don't we celebrate you, Mary, for making a choice? For saying yes—yes to being a co-maker *with* God?

Don't we imitate you when we co-create life—biological, artistic, relational, communal? And when we care for that life?

Don't we imitate you when we use the imagery and language that the dead have cursed and gifted us with to participate in the creation of meaning?

I like how Ada Limon says it: “I, for one, have never made anything alone, never written a single poem alone. We write with all the good ghosts in our corners.”

•••

When I went to Chartres to see a color, I found it was many colors: Chartres blues. It's not just the moving sunlight that makes it multiple. The cathedral's thick medieval glass holds the various materials of its making: dust motes, bits of leaves. Your glass image floats there, newly clean of the soot of centuries of pilgrims' candle. Light moves through you again, through your glass tunic lightened by different densities of air bubbles into kaleidoscopic pale blue luminosities.

Whose version of you am I holding? I hold you as a voice and a silence.

I address you as a way of acknowledging the aftermath of you. I address you as a way to try to orchestrate how you persist in me.

•••

“To love a stranger as oneself,” Simone Weil says, “implies the reverse: to love oneself as a stranger.”

•••

At Chartres, there is a fragment of veil that looks like it would fall through my hands if I touched it. Kept in the cathedral behind bulletproof glass, it is disintegrating quietly. It is said to be your veil.

I've watched tour guides stand next to it and repeat its legend: how, in the spring of the year of our Lord 911, when Chartres was surrounded by Vikings, the Bishop saved the city by holding your veil high up from the tallest tower—

How it terrified. How that Viking army understood, and turned back.

I imagine your empty veil waving almost imperceptibly above the city, its gauzy colors nearly indistinguishable from an overcast sky.

Samuel Beckett called language a veil in which he wanted to “bore one hole after another...until what lurks behind it—be it something or nothing—begins to seep through.”

But when I write a poem, it is not to bore holes. It is not to use language for the hush work of cover. It is to take that veil from its stillness and shake it—to hold it among wind gusts, to wave it from the high windows—

It is not surrender.

Mary Szybist is a poet, professor and the author of *Incarnadine*, winner of the 2013 National Book Award for Poetry. She is the 2019 laureate of the George W. Hunt, S.J., Prize for Journalism, Arts and Letters, which is co-sponsored by America Media and the Saint Thomas More Chapel & Center at Yale University. This essay has been adapted from her lecture at the award ceremony in September, held at the Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage at Loyola University, Chicago.

FREUD AND HIS JESUIT HEIRS

How psychoanalysis took root in the Society of Jesus

By Adam A. J. Deville

This year marks the 80th anniversary of the death of our father among the saints of psychology, Sigmund of Vienna. That, of course, is a title Sigmund Freud would not accept, nor would Christians bestow it upon him, a man who described himself as a “godless Jew.” Freud’s atheism and his controversial views on sex too often gave many believers license to dismiss his far-reaching influence. As W. H. Auden’s poem “In Memory of Sigmund Freud” put it: “if often he was wrong and, at times, absurd,/ to us he is no more a person/ now but a whole climate of opinion/ under whom we conduct our different lives.”

Members of the Society of Jesus have been among the relatively few Catholic Christians with a discerning appreciation for Freud and his revolutionary psychoanalytic methods. Even while Freud was still alive, his ideas were being discussed in articles in **America** in the 1920s. After Freud’s death in London in September 1939, and down to our present day, a number of Jesuits have undergone psychoanalytic training.

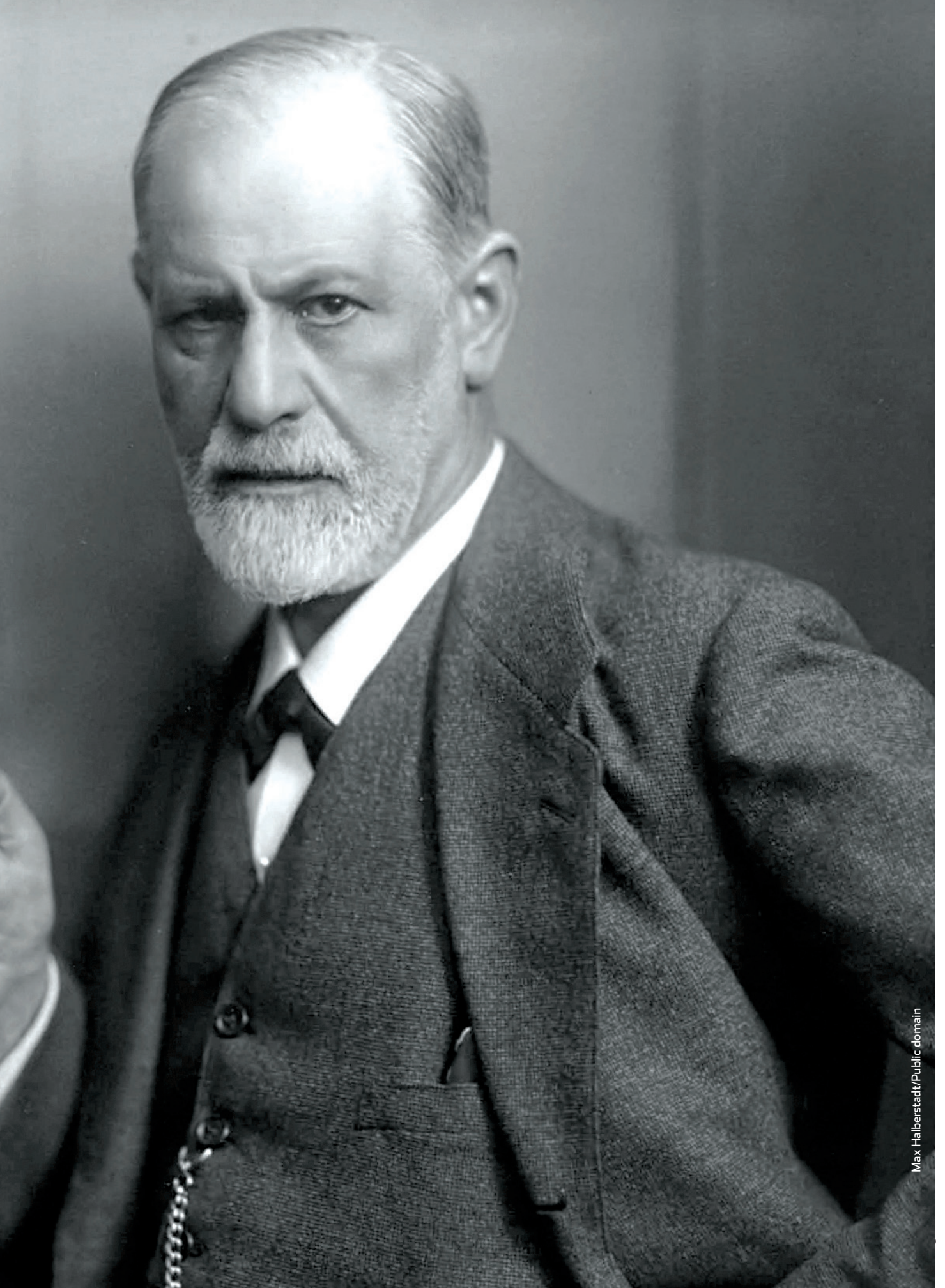
Jesuits have also availed themselves

of such therapeutic services, including the most prominent Jesuit alive today, the current bishop of Rome who, in 2017 revealed in an interview that as a priest he had seen a Jewish psychoanalyst in Argentina for six months—the first pope ever to admit to any kind of clinical consultation and therapeutic relationship. That Pope Francis could make such an appreciative admission reflects the latest phase in a winding journey among Jesuits, now dating back a century.

During this period there have been, to be sure, other orders within the church that engaged Freud and other Catholics who were involved in non-Freudian forms of modern psychology. The English Dominican Victor White, for example, wrote several books on Carl Jung and had a 15-year-long epistolary dialogue with him about his theories and beliefs. In 1956, the Irish Capuchin priest Peter J. R. Dempsey wrote a still-useful book, *Freud, Psychoanalysis, Catholicism*. Thomas Verner Moore (d. 1967), a priest who had lived as a member of the Paulist, Benedictine and Carthusian religious communi-

Even while Sigmund Freud was still alive, his ideas were being discussed in **America**.





ties, was the first to suggest some psychological screening of candidates for the priesthood.

But among the Jesuits, psychoanalysis took root with sophistication and staying power. Four Jesuit psychoanalysts stand out. Two of them lived and worked in Europe; two practiced in the United States. Three of the four are now dead. All of them have left an impressive body of hundreds of publications in several languages, and their insights still deserve our attention.

André Godin, S.J.

In Europe, the Belgian André Godin, S.J., who was born in 1915, entered the Society in 1933 and died in 1997. He did the usual philosophical and theological studies in Europe, and then received graduate training in psychology at Fordham University in the Bronx, N.Y., in the early 1950s. After this, he moved somewhat away from Freud and into the mainstream of the modern psychology of religion. Notable publications include the five volumes of *Cahiers de Psychologie Religieuse*, his 1985 book *The Psychological Dynamics of Religious Experience* and many other writings still found in bibliographies of pastoral psychology. Father Godin also established the prestigious International Prize in the Scientific Psychology of Religion.

Emblematic of Father Godin's approach is an essay in the journal *Continuum* in 1965, "Revelation and Psychotherapy," in which he writes, "I should therefore agree to seeing in the action of the therapist a sign of God." Unlike other analysts who have been too timid to discuss faith (his contemporary Nina Coltart in England, who died the same year as Father Godin, was a very notable exception in her thoroughly delightful book *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, 1992), Godin unashamedly discussed faith and God. In assessing Freud's 1927 book *Future of an Illusion*, Godin recognized (as Paul Ricoeur did in his landmark book *Freud and Philosophy*) how much Freud sought the destruction of idolatry and in so doing "situated the religious question in its proper place: on the side of reality, not as the fulfillment of compensatory desires; on the side of stimulation to reach maturity in opening out to the Other."

Edward Boyd Barrett

Stateside, there were two especially noteworthy and prolific Jesuits. The first of these was the onetime Jesuit Edward Boyd Barrett, whose life has been recently studied in both Robert Kugelman's *Psychology and Catholicism: Contested Boundaries* and in Paula Kane's chapter in *Crossings and Dwellings: Restored Jesuits, Women Religious, American Experience, 1814-2014*. (The details in the next two paragraphs are largely indebted to Ms. Kane,

who kindly sent me a copy of her text.)

Barret was born in 1883 in Ireland, where he joined the Society in 1904. He later studied psychology and psychoanalysis, first in Belgium and then England, before returning to Ireland and publishing scholarly books and articles, including eight articles on psychological topics in **America** in 1923, which also accepted a further six articles from him in 1924 and 1925.

In October 1924, Barrett arrived in the United States after the Maryland-New York Province of the Jesuits agreed to take him on. **America** solicited a further three articles, but they were censored by Jesuit superiors in New York. Such censorship happened regularly to Barrett and other clergy writers in an era when the taint of Modernism still attached to psychoanalysis and similar disciplines. Jesuit reviewers, as Mr. Kugelman has shown, were far from being of one mind that Barrett's views were heterodox: some in England were willing to publish what those in Ireland or America were not, and vice versa. We also cannot discount the possibility that some of Barrett's critics were unconsciously upset by his views on the War of Independence (1919-21) and the Civil War (1922-23) in Ireland.

After Fordham University invited Father Barrett to speak in 1925, the superior of the Maryland-New York Province censored his lecture. Barrett's Jesuit home province in Ireland recalled him, but he refused to go. By September he was no longer a member of the Society of Jesus. Whether he left or was dismissed is not clear, according to Ms. Kane and Mr. Kugelman, who says that "the available evidence supports both positions."

In any event, Barrett set up what he regarded as a psychoanalytic practice in Greenwich Village in New York City, though without the new professional credentials required in the United States. In 1926, in response to an international conflict over emerging U.S. regulations restricting analysis to physicians, Freud (whose only visit to this country in 1909 led him to exclaim afterwards to his authorized biographer Ernest Jones, "Yes, America is gigantic. A gigantic mistake!")



Jesuits have availed themselves of psychoanalysis, including the most prominent Jesuit alive today, Pope Francis. In 2017, he revealed in an interview that as a priest he had seen a psychoanalyst in Argentina for six months.



Associated Press

published his waspish essay “The Question of Lay Analysis,” in which he told both priests and physicians to keep their hands off analysis. Instead, he coined a striking phrase to describe the ideal psychoanalyst as a “secular pastoral worker,” which, as it turns out, was an apt phrase for Barrett in his post-Jesuit period (during which he married, was widowed and finally became reconciled enough to the Society to die in the Jesuit infirmary in Santa Clara, Calif., in 1966.)

Barrett’s therapeutic method was a hybrid of Catholic and Freudian notions designed, it seems, to placate Jesuit and Thomist critics. He insisted on explicit efforts to retrain the patient’s will, though such practices were in clear violation of Freud’s rule that the analyst practice “abstinence” when it came to offering any sort of advice or, worse, moral exhortation. As Barrett asked, “How can analysts face the reconstructive part of their work?...The weak will of the moral degenerate has to be built up!... It is a moral and religious problem.” This attempted synthesis, which predictably displeased hardcore Catholics and clinicians alike, allowed Barrett (and others, like Karl Stern) to clear enough room in the church to make it possible for psychoanalysis (as a therapy, not a metapsychology) to be approved by Pope Pius XII in the 1950s.


Barrett succeeded in part by arguing that Freud was neither very revolutionary nor very original. He regarded certain psychoanalytic practices as originating in ancient Christian ascetical methods. This is a view of considerable merit. When teaching courses on Evagrius of Pontus, I am

often struck by his methods as psychoanalytic *avant la lettre*. As the eminent historian Peter Brown would put it in a 1971 article on holy men of late antiquity, the monastic cells of upper Egypt had rather nicely furnished and frequently used consulting rooms.


William W. Meissner, S.J.

If some of Barrett’s confreres faulted him for blurring the boundaries between psychoanalysis and theology, the next Jesuit analyst of note took pains to be as conventional, if not conservative, as possible. If some of Barrett’s writings fulgurated polemically, then this second American Jesuit analyst was determined, it seems, to be as prolix and plodding as possible, policing the boundaries between Freud and God rather strictly. This was William W. Meissner, S.J., who was born in the United States in 1931, entered the New York Province of the Jesuits in 1951 and died in 2010. He trained at Harvard University in psychiatry and then pursued analytic training. While practicing both of these disciplines, he also taught at Boston College and wrote more than 200 articles and over 20 books.

Early books (for example, *Group Dynamics in the Religious Life*, from 1965, when Meissner was still training at Harvard; and *The Assault on Authority: Dialogue or Dilemma?* from 1971) have not aged well, being very narrowly aimed at a particular social context in the church now vanished. Some of the books from his middle period in the



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1980s and 1990s were commendably cautious attempts to shed light on the psychodynamics of Ignatian spirituality. Thus, a book like *Ignatius of Loyola: the Psychology of a Saint*, published in 1992 by Yale, emerged from the relatively young and frequently controversial field of psychobiography. Meissner, I think, very painstakingly laid out the benefits and risks of such an approach, but some reviews, predictably, sniped at him anyway for daring to apply Freudian categories to Ignatius at all.

Father Meissner wrote two other noteworthy books. *Psychoanalysis and Religious Experience* (1984) has been called by Ana-Maria Rizzuto (a fellow Boston psychiatrist and analyst, still living) a classic in the field, but I think that too much. It is, like all Meissner's books, very workmanlike and certainly a good place to start for those without any background in the field; but it contains few startling or creative insights not on offer elsewhere, including Ms. Rizzuto's own truly groundbreaking book *The Birth of the Living God* (which Meissner reviewed in *Theological Studies* as a "truly seminal work").

In his 2000 book *Freud and Psychoanalysis*, Meissner again offers a solid but limited historical introduction to Freud. But the hugely influential object-relations school in England under Melanie Klein, D. W. Winnicott, R. D. Fairbairn and Harry Guntrip—and more recently the important contemporary Anglo-American analyst Christopher Bollas—is severely downplayed while other significant figures (like Heinz Kohut) are totally ignored. For all that, however, I found the book's last chapter both insightful and moving in shedding light on my own experience as an analysand.

In three articles rapidly published in his last two years,

Meissner talked more explicitly about God, albeit more in clinical than narrowly theological terms, arguing to the end that blurring those boundaries never serves patients well. As Ms. Rizzuto would say in her memorial tribute to Meissner published in 2010, "He was first and foremost a psychoanalytic theoretician and clinician." But for a fuller appreciation of the man, this view should be set alongside the Chicago analyst Robert Galatzer-Levy's moving tribute to Meissner in *The Therapist in Mourning: From the Far-away Nearby*, published in 2013.

Carlos Domínguez-Morano, S.J.

God is front and center in our last Jesuit analyst of note. Here we return again to Europe. Unlike the other three just discussed, Carlos Domínguez-Morano, S.J., is still living and active. Born in Huelva, Spain, in 1946, he joined the Jesuits and studied philosophy and theology before going to Paris and Madrid for psychoanalytic training. Currently teaching the psychology of religion at the University of Granada, Spain, he is the author of numerous books.

Strikingly, several of his books have run through numerous editions in Spanish, a welcome reminder that while the fortunes of psychoanalysis have collapsed in the United States (as several analysts grimly confirmed to me last year when I was on a fellowship at the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute), in much of Latin America as well as parts of both Asia and my native Canada, analysis remains a real option for people in need of deeper structural alterations in the mind beyond what is available through psychotropics or short-term counselling dictated by insurance companies. (My seven-year analysis in Canada, four times a week, was covered by the universal health care system.)

Father Morano only really entered the anglophone world last year, having previously penned such works as *Psicodinámica de los Ejercicios Ignacianos* (which draws on Meissner's work), *Experiencia Mística y Psicoanálisis* (similar in some ways to the Jewish American analyst Michael Eigen's book *The Psychoanalytic Mystic*), and *Psicoanálisis y Religión: Dialogo Interminable. Sigmund Freud y Oskar Pfister* (which treats the very rich 30-year correspondence and treasured friendship between Freud and the Swiss Reformed pastor Oskar Pfister, the first Christian cleric to train as an analyst). In 2018 Routledge published a translation of what is the most important and profound engagement of Freud by any Christian thinker in over half a century: Father Morano's *Belief After Freud: Religious Faith Through the Crucible of Psychoanalysis*, already in its fifth edition in Spain (where it was published in 1998 as *Creer Después de Freud*). The book is a tour de

force and deserves a wide audience among Catholics, especially those whose faith has been shaken by the on-going sexual abuse crisis.

Father Morano's book may appear to some as a sort of manual of dubious ideas. Each of Father Morano's many discussions—on prayer and idolatry, capitalism and money, sex and the body, and Jesus and his Father as the one relationship free from all neurotic projections and masochistic temptations—may challenge smug suburban piety. I had just started my sabbatical last year when Father Morano's monograph landed in my lap. It totally upended my plan for a book on theology and Freud that in some ways I have been writing in my head intermittently for 20 years since undergoing a classical psychoanalysis while studying theology and thereafter regularly drawing on psychoanalytic insights in my work in ecclesiology and historiography. But I quickly came to thank God that Father Morano wrote *Belief After Freud*, for it is far braver than anything I would have attempted.

Father Morano did, in fact, become a major interlocutor in the book I ended up writing and publishing this year, *Everything Hidden Shall Be Revealed: Ridding the Church of Abuses of Sex and Power*. I draw on several of Father Morano's refreshingly blunt and unsparing arguments, including his excoriation of members of the hierarchy whose only response to any crisis is to exhort others to pray and fast more, a deflective move masking a sinister agenda: "Religious power structures have never been indifferent to prayer and have so frequently manipulated it to their advantage.... Prayer finds in power a perfect ally and associate to help pursue certain goals."

Perhaps the most powerful challenge in the book comes from Father Morano's dethroning of any and all father-figures with far greater theological sophistication than anything attempted by *Future of an Illusion* (a jejune work Freud himself repeatedly told his friends was his "worst book—the book of an old man!"). Drawing on Lk 2:42 ff, Father Morano finds in Jesus' relationship with Mary and Joseph the lesson that "nobody on earth can claim paternal authority." From this story Father Morano concludes that in...

Christian community, it has to be stated... the place of the father should remain empty. Father, teacher, or director are not Christian words insofar as they are used to describe a type of interpersonal relationship inside the community. Only God can take that place.

What does such a radical counsel do to so many of our

relationships in the church? How ought seminarians to regard their rector, or priests their bishop? How could a Jesuit—famously vowed to special obedience directly to the "Holy Father" of Rome—recommend such a radical reordering of terminology and relationships within the church? How would the Society and church at large operate if any of this were put into practice?

Father Morano does not answer those questions directly or concretely. Indeed, as he says in the epilogue of his book, an encounter with Freud should forever disabuse one of the "haughty pretension of having reached 'the answer.'" Many taxing questions will remain open forever. We are, thus, invited to the healthy asceticism of renouncing total synthesis. The faith that confronts psychoanalysis learns to live and remain in the modesty of tentative formulations."

Tentative formulations are, of course, what good analysts proffer all the time. And, strikingly, they seem to be more frequently offered during the pontificate of a man who was formed both by the Jesuits and also by his own psychoanalytic experience. As Stephen Toulmin and Albert Jonsen noted almost 30 years ago in *The Abuse of Casuistry*, tentative formulations are the fruits of a process going back to the Society's first generation: early Jesuit leaders "prepared their charges to meet problems of conscience with 'discernment'—a favourite Jesuit word."

Some 400 years later, Edward Boyd Barrett, André Godin, William Meissner and Carlos Domínguez-Morano rightly discerned in psychoanalysis ideas and methods to help people, including the current pope, heal from not just personal trauma or pathology but also from that universal disease of idolatry which, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reminds us, "remains a constant temptation to faith" (No. 2113). Eighty years after Freud's death, we can marvel, as he surely would, that it fell to four Jesuit priests to advance the atheistic Jewish analyst's iconoclastic project of challenging all of us to move (in Newman's felicitous phrase) *ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem* ("out of shadows and imaginings into the truth").

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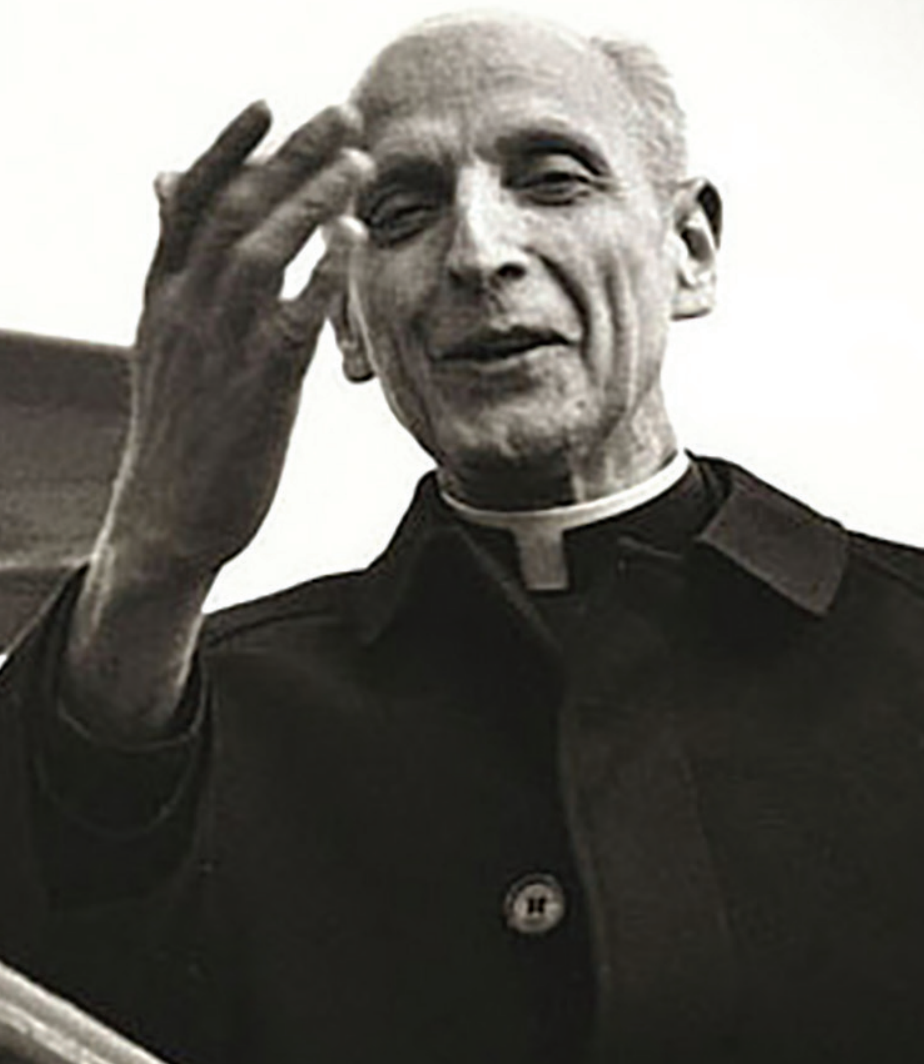
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Falling in Love With God

Bernard Lonergan, Pedro Arrupe
and the roots of a famous
Jesuit prayer

By Richard G. Malloy

In his 2018 essay “Ten Things That St. Ignatius Never Said or Did,” Bart Geger, S.J., acknowledges that Pedro Arrupe, S.J., was not the author of the famous prayer often attributed to him: “Fall in love, stay in love, and it will decide everything.” The actual author, Father Geger had recently discovered from another magazine, was the former Jesuit provincial, spiritual director and author Joseph P. Whelan, S.J. (1932-94). The full text is as follows:

*Nothing is more practical than
finding God, than
falling in love
in a quite absolute, final way.
What you are in love with,
what seizes your imagination,
will affect everything.
It will decide
what will get you out of bed in the*

Pedro Arrupe, S.J., was the 28th superior general of the Society of Jesus.
Bernard Lonergan, S.J., was one of the great philosopher-theologians of the 20th century.

*morning,
what you do with your evenings,
how you spend your weekends,
what you read, whom you know,
what breaks your heart,
and what amazes you with joy
and gratitude.
Fall in love, stay in love,
and it will decide everything.*

On hearing that Father Whelan had penned the prayer, I wondered if he had been influenced by the thought of another Jesuit, Bernard Lonergan (1904-84), one of the great philosopher-theologians of the 20th century.

Father Lonergan has a reputation for being difficult to understand. Years ago, I gave a talk at a meeting of Wisconsin Province Jesuits and threw in a few ideas from Lonergan. After the talk, a friend, using my nickname, said, "Mugs. Lonergan?" (pause). "Life's just too short."

In reality, Lonergan's work is actually more accessible than most people realize. He wrote two major works, *Insight* (1957), a massive philosophical treatise, and *Method in Theology* (1972), which is much more manage-

able. Hint: Start with *Method*, or even better, his eight-page essay "Dialectic of Authority." A good introduction to Lonergan is *Quest for Self-Knowledge*, by Joseph F. X. Flanagan, S.J., whose seminal programs helped shape the philosophy department at Boston College.

Early in my Jesuit life I read *Insight* and understood a little of it. But it was in the slow, deep reading of *Method in Theology*, and in writing an S.T.L. thesis on Lonergan and Jon Sobrino, S.J., that I began to incorporate the basics of Lonergan's teachings into my life and spirituality. Studying Lonergan gave me a better grasp of who and why and how we are as human persons, connected to and moving toward a deeper life in the mystery and love of neighbor and of God. Lonergan's work provides an owner's manual for the human person. His analysis reveals how our minds and hearts actually work. He demonstrates how our living can be intelligently charted, and vastly improved, by choosing to adhere to the inherent norms of our hearts and minds.

A Method for Living

Fans of Lonergan call him a philosopher for the ages for building a method out of insights like the following. In all times and places, in all communities and cultures, all human persons undergo experience. They strive to understand their experience. They make judgments based on those understandings. And they make choices and decide courses of action based on those judgments. Deep within this pattern of experiencing, understanding, judging and deciding exist common norms. To experience, we must be attentive. To understand, we must be intelligent. To judge, we must be reasonable. To decide, we must be responsible.

Lonergan urges us to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible. This is a method, a way of being human, on personal and communal levels. Practicing the "Be-Attitudes" of Lonergan's system makes for progress. Refusing to be faithful to them makes for decline.

As scientific method has revolutionized the world, so too Lonergan hopes that human beings will be revolutionized by becoming conscious of our own conversion processes on intellectual, moral and religious levels. Such conversions move everyone toward self-transcendence and authenticity. Converted people and groups will make for a world of peace and progress. Lack of conversion will make for a world of disaster and decline.

When Things Fall Apart

Inauthenticity destroys us and our relationships. Think of cheating spouses or unscrupulous business persons. Think of wars and genocides. Think of global climate change. Living authentically means progress is more probable on every level of our existence.

Lonergan offers an analysis of communal disintegration, rehabilitation, recovery and reintegration. When things fall apart, we need to recover the promise of progress. The alternative is to descend into the abyss. (Remember: Lonergan lived through two world wars.)

Lonergan describes the process of a community or culture descending into crisis. "Finally, the divided community, their conflicting actions, and the messy situation are headed for disaster," he writes. "For the messy situation is diagnosed differently by the divided community; action is ever more at cross purposes; and the situation becomes still messier to provoke still sharper differences in diagnosis and policy, more radical criticism of one another's actions, and an ever deeper crisis in the situation."

The solution, according to Lonergan, is an invitation to cooperate with "that love of God above all and in all [that]

so embraces the order of the universe as to love all men with a self-sacrificing love.”

Loneragan’s method reveals values. The more we are faithful to the demands of values inherent in our human being—the realities of truth, justice, goodness and love—the more we move toward fulfillment in God. The more we truncate truth with lies, undermine good with evil and violate love with selfishness and sin, the more we retreat from our horizon as those destined to live in joy with God forever.

Institutions too must respond. For example, “Religion...in an era of crisis has to think less of issuing commands and decrees and more of fostering the self-sacrificing love that alone is capable of providing the solution to the evil of decline.” The church should be a prime mover in dialogue leading to conversion and common meaning.

The Arrupe Connection

While he prized and privileged the power of the intellect, Lonergan also reflected a great deal on the realities of emotion. His deepening realization of the transformative power of the Holy Spirit to convert and change us, our communities and our world led him to preach that being in love with God is the point and meaning of our existence as human persons. Ultimately, our capacity as transcending persons issues forth in love. Lonergan lyrically writes:

That capacity becomes an actuality when one falls in love. Then one’s being becomes being-in-love. Such being-in-love has its antecedents, it causes, its conditions, its occasions. But once it has blossomed forth, and as long as it lasts, it takes over.... From it flow one’s desires and fears, one’s joys and sorrows, one’s

discernment of values, one’s decisions, and deeds.

That sounds a lot like the Arrupe prayer to me. I bet Joe Whelan read Lonergan. Whelan’s own book, *Benjamin*, is an essay on mystical theology. And the Irish Jesuit William Johnston, who also wrote on prayer and mysticism, informs us that he visited Lonergan shortly before the great man’s death. Johnston suggested that Lonergan’s method “culminates in mystical experience. Lonergan smiled and said, ‘Yes, yes!’”

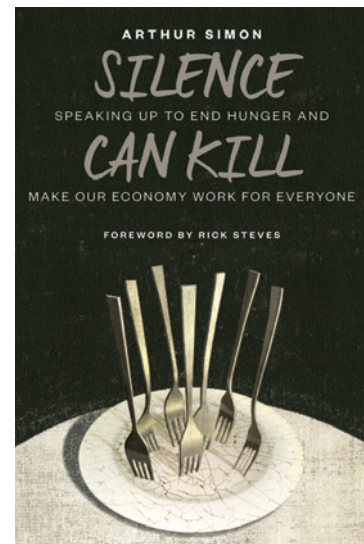
Loneragan’s mysticism is grounded in our human experience and consciousness. It reaches beyond us to others, and then to the reality of God. In *Insight* he writes that our “detached, disinterested, unrestricted desire to know” is not satisfied with “mere answers.” Rather, our desires make us those who “endeavor to enter into the mystical pattern of experience.” Our deep desire to know is actually a deep desire for God. He continues:

So, being in love with God is the basic fulfillment of our conscious intentionality. That fulfillment brings a deep-set joy that can remain despite humiliation, failure, privation, pain, betrayal, desertion. That fulfillment brings a radical peace, the peace the world cannot give. That fulfillment bears fruit in a love of one’s neighbor that strives mightily to bring about the kingdom of God on this earth.

Alleluia!

Richard G. Malloy, S.J., is director of mission and ministry at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Baltimore, Md., and the author of *Being on Fire: Top Ten Essentials of Catholic Faith and Spiritual Direction: A Beginner’s Guide*.

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The Must-Have Gift

What all of us really want for Christmas

By Peggy Weber

In 1984, there was a phenomenon that seems silly now: the Cabbage Patch Kids craze. Everyone wanted these homely little dolls with yarn hair, plastic heads and each with a unique birth certificate. News reports showed shoppers camping out overnight at toy stores to get them. Others stormed the displays that had them, triggering fights and riot conditions. *Merry Christmas, I bring you tidings of great joy and peace—now get out of my way so I can get a doll to make my child happy!*

At first, I was not too caught up in the craze. My first-born daughter was just 2, and her little brother was barely 1.

What need did my children have for this sought-after toy? But then, while on a trip to Milwaukee from Massachusetts to visit family for Thanksgiving, the phone call came: My sister-in-law told me that she had gotten word from her sister-in-law that the store where she worked was getting a shipment of Cabbage Patch Kid dolls, and she could get us some if we came right away. I could no longer resist.

We both jumped at the chance to get these must-have dolls. Like two spies on a mission, we ran to the car and drove 45 minutes to the store. We were told that we had to act quickly and quietly because the dolls were going to



with my two actual children, a diaper bag and my purse. I stowed them safely in the overhead compartment. It is embarrassing to admit that I kept an eye on those dolls while we were on the plane. And I breathed a sigh of relief when I got them home.

On Christmas morning, my 2-year-old opened the present. She looked at the doll and seemed to like it, but she did not care that much about it. Why would she? She had no idea it was the toy to have. She seemed just as happy with her other gifts. And, like most little ones, she had more fun with the boxes and wrapping paper. It was a true epiphany for me. I had been so very silly, listening to the voices telling me that a certain toy would make a child happier or a holiday more special.

The story has been the subject of much amusement in our family, but an occasional glimpse of the doll in my daughter's childhood bedroom still reminds me not to get too caught up in trends and must-haves. It is a strong symbol of how acquiring an object can become more than just a purchase.

Christmas is probably the holiday on which people feel the most pressure around material things.

You want to give tangible gifts to others, which is understandable. I thought that giving my daughter the doll would make her happy and I would be a better parent because she got the toy of the year. But do these items really make one's life better or easier? The story still makes me ask: What really helps us connect with the people we love? What gifts do our loved ones most need from us?

•••

Thirty-five years later, my best lessons in giving come from my grandchildren. As my oldest grandson was learning to talk, he often called out to me saying, "Hand, hand, hand!" He would reach out with his sweet, sometimes sticky little fingers and then lead me toward something. Usually he directed me to a toy, a book or some food. And then I would look at the train or Play-Doh or Cheerios or truck book and see what he wanted. Then he would say, "Sit, sit, sit."

He did not just want me to see the object of his great interest from afar. He wanted me at his level, right next to him, so that he could show me more closely what it was that had captured his interest. He wanted me to look at his amazing cement mixer or to squish clay with my fingers or to admire his picture—all from his viewpoint.

He wanted me to be present to him. He wanted me

be put on the shelves soon. We met the sister-in-law of my sister-in-law near the back of the store. She handed us wrapped packages. Each contained two dolls. We clutched them tightly as we headed back to the car. One of my dolls would go to my niece in Massachusetts. The other was a Christmas gift for my daughter, who I was sure would want this after all. We were thrilled.

A few days later, my husband and I flew back to Massachusetts with our children. I was reluctant to put the dolls in our suitcase for fear that they would be taken. So I carried the two significantly sized dolls onto the plane along

What really helps us connect with the people we love? What gifts do our loved ones most need from us?

right there and involved. He did not want to have me looking down at his item of interest and not really paying attention. He did not want just a nod or a pat on the head from me. He did not want a small gesture from the sofa that required no effort. No, he wanted it all. He wanted me on the rug and shoulder to shoulder. He wanted me to be able to look him in the eye and understand. He wanted to get me to really see the truck or the ball or the story of an owl or the yummy snack. He wanted me to give my time and focus. He wanted me to give my commitment. He wanted me to give my love.

Of course, I gave it to him. And as I have watched him grow, I have seen that he is just a big sponge who wants to absorb love and learning. At 3½ years, he communicates much more easily now, but his message is the same. He wants me to pay attention and be with him. With his sweet blue eyes and adorable smile he asks me: “Grandma, read book? Grandma, come upstairs and play trucks?” He is open and honest about his need for love. And he instinctively knows that he will get it from me. He is clear and forthright. “I need you. I want you. I love being loved,” he says in so many ways. He is a great teacher to me about

In 1984, the author's daughter Kerry, then 2, received a much-coveted Cabbage Patch Kid doll.

Photos courtesy of the author.



what it means to give of oneself.

One evening I was putting this same grandson to bed, and he was quite restless. I did this rarely, and he wanted the routine and comfort of his folks. His devoted parents are almost always home, but on this night I was in charge of bath, bedtime story and sleep. He had already told me with a sigh: “I miss Mommy! I miss Daddy!” I told him that I understood that he missed them, but they would be home soon. He nodded and seemed to realize that I was all he had at that moment. He sighed again.

But then he looked at me and said, “Big hug!” I complied happily and told him I loved him. This helped evidently; he fell asleep. I guess I would do for the time being, and I was glad that he settled down and settled for me as a substitute. This experience is a tender memory for me. But it is more than that. It showed me how, from young age to old age, the need for a hug, for reassurance, for love is very real. It is a powerful need that never ends.

•••

Love can be complicated and risky when you are older. You wonder if you should let another person know that you care. You wonder if it is worth making the extra effort for another. You might get hurt. You probably will get hurt somewhere along the line. *Is it really better to have loved and lost?* You wonder.

All of us need to be loved. Sometimes we dismiss that need, but it remains. Whether through friendship, marriage, a religious vocation or devotion to family, we desire to love and be loved. We try to fill this need in many ways, try to figure out what is good, what is enough. But most of the time it requires being vulnerable. It means asking someone to take your hand and sit. It can be amazing, but it can hurt. It truly is a mystery. And it can be hard.

Committing to love can be scary, and it sometimes seems that fewer people are willing to take that plunge. And in a world that seems busier and more hectic each day,

we discover that we have less time for friends and family. How do you know when it is worth putting out your hand? I do not have a perfect answer.

But the advice I was given by a good Dominican priest in college has stayed with me. The priest was teaching a seminar on T. S. Eliot, but often the class discussion went beyond poetry. He would talk about religious life, faith and figuring out what we students were going to do with our lives. Naturally, the topic of marriage came up. He looked at us and asked: "Beyond the talk of love, what is an important question you should ask about your future spouse? Remember you are giving yourselves to each other." Many answers were offered but several centered on the idea that you should ask if you were worthy of and committed enough toward your intended. The priest surprised us when he said adamantly: "No! What you should ask is if your intended is worthy of you. It is not arrogance. You are giving the most precious gift you can give: yourself. Do not squander it. Be sure that your future spouse is worthy of you."

Those words have stayed with me for decades. The priest's message was simple: Do not settle for just any life or any love. Do not think that your being lovable requires you to be prettier or smarter or cooler. You need to recognize all that you have to give to your spouse or your religious vocation or your chosen life. That good priest said love yourself and give that self away to someone who appreciates all that you are. Of course, his advice requires a good sense of self-esteem and real commitment. But it is a clear path that guides you in love. When you give your love to a spouse, a partner, family or friends, you want it to be accepted and appreciated. You do not want it to be dismissed or recognized only sometimes. You want someone who will sit with you, be present to you and truly care for you. You want someone to take your hand. You want that big hug. You want someone to sit shoulder to shoulder looking toward the God who gives us all we need.

Peggy Weber is the author of *Enough As You Are: Overcoming Self-Doubt and Appreciating the Gift of You* (Loyola Press), released this month, from which this essay is adapted. Her oldest daughter, Kerry, an executive editor at *America*, still owns that coveted *Cabbage Patch Kid*.



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The Making of 'The Mission'

By Jim McDermott

Among the many works of the Society of Jesus in its nearly 500-year history, its missions among the Guaraní people of present-day Paraguay and Bolivia remain perhaps its most fabled. Known collectively as the Jesuit Republic or Lost Paradise, the Jesuit missions, or reductions, combined 17th- and 18th-century visions of the kingdom of God with a respect for indigenous culture that

infuriated the secular powers that had allowed the Jesuits access to the region in the first place. For a time the Catholic music created by the Guaraní transfixed the Christians of Europe. But eventually the Jesuits were expelled for standing up to Spanish and Portuguese slave- and landholders, and the missions collapsed.

Inspired by research on the re-

ductions by the Jesuits Philip Carman and C. J. McNaspy, among others, Warner Brothers released a film in 1986 about that shining, tragic moment in Catholic history. For those involved, the making of “The Mission” would unexpectedly recreate elements of the original experience of the Jesuits and the Guaraní, and the movie would inspire a new generation of missionaries.



Before its debut in the United States in 1986, "The Mission" won the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival. The film starred Jeremy Irons as the Jesuit missionary Father Gabriel.

Origin Story

In 1984 "The Killing Fields," a drama about the Khmer Rouge, debuted to great acclaim. It was Roland Joffé's feature film debut, and it received seven Oscar nominations, winning three—including to Chris Menges for cinematography and to Jim Clark for editing. Usually, when a project ends the members of the production team go their separate ways. But Joffé and

his producing partner, David Puttnam, had something more in mind for their "Killing Fields" team.

"After I'd done 'The Killing Fields,'" Joffé told *America*, "I met Robert Bolt and an Italian producer named Fernando Ghia." Bolt, whose body of work included the screenplays for "Lawrence of Arabia," "A Man for All Seasons" and "Doctor Zhivago," had an unproduced stage play about a

saintly Jesuit and a former slave owner who is trying to redeem himself in the Jesuit reductions in Paraguay. "He said, 'I'd always thought this would make a wonderful film.'"

"Poor Robert was a bit of a forgotten man," Jim Clark wrote in his memoir, *Dream Repairman*. In 1979 a stroke had paralyzed Bolt's right side and made it almost impossible for him to speak. "It was very touching [watching him] struggle to find his words," Joffé remembered. Joffé told Bolt he was interested in adapting the play, with one recommendation: "We'd need to bring the Indians to life."

With Bolt's approval, Joffé went in search of an indigenous community that might fit the bill. The Guarani themselves were not an option. "There are very, very few of them," he explained. "I really wanted to use [them], but they'd been so badly mistreated, so spiritually decimated, there was really no way to make it work."

Joffé traveled extensively looking for a substitute. Finally, in a remote part of Colombia he found the Waunana, an indigenous community of 300 people. The tribe had some exposure to metropolitan civilization, but not much. "They'd sort of seen the television," Joffé recalled. "They didn't really know what a film was, but they sort of got it."

"I found myself in an oddly similar position" to the Jesuits, he said, "trying to explain to the tribe what the story was about and suggesting maybe we would find a way of working together."

He also found himself a witness to the kind of systemic threat that the Guarani had experienced. After he explained his proposal to the community, they spent days debating among

Daniel Berrigan, S.J, served as a consultant on the film. ‘He and Jeremy spent about three weeks basically closeted together talking about the idea of what it would mean to be a priest.’

themselves whether to accept. “I was sitting by the river,” Joffé recalled, “and a little old couple came and sat next to me. The man said the two of them were prepared to come with us right away, but we had to guarantee we would not take any children.”

This was a condition Joffé could not accept; children would play a key role in the film. “I said, ‘Ah, I’m not sure I can guarantee that,’” he said, and he wondered why they made such a stipulation. In a matter-of-fact tone, the man explained to Joffé, “When you’re finished with us, you’ll kill us. We’re so old it doesn’t matter, but if you take the children, there will be no more tribe.”

Joffé was stunned. “I said, ‘Why would I kill you?’ The man responded, ‘We don’t know, but you always do.’”

“That accusation, made without bitterness,” Joffé remembered. “After that, there was no way I could not make the movie.”

Jesuit Casting

Jeremy Irons and Robert DeNiro were cast as the placid, peace-loving musician Father Gabriel and the former slaver Mendoza, respectively. The New York Times film critic Vincent Canby later described “the self-effacing earnestness” of the actors’ performances. But during

filming, Clark worried that Irons was too young. “The priest role was originally conceived by Robert for Alec Guinness,” he wrote. And DeNiro’s acting method made for massive editing challenges. Each take “he would try all sorts of different voices, different deliveries, varying the whole thing somehow.” In the end, Clark wrote, “you don’t edit him, you mine him. You have to create the performance because it varies so much from take to take.”

As Joffé was developing the film he sought counsel from the Jesuit peace activist Daniel Berrigan. “I really felt [that] to understand the psychological and emotional content of what it was to be a Jesuit, someone like Dan Berrigan was going to give me tremendous insight,” he said. They met in Berrigan’s home, “this very simple room,” and as they were talking Joffé had this sudden impulse to invite him to join the crew. “He kind of looked at me as if I’d left my senses,” Joffé remembered. “And to my surprise, he took me up on it.”

Berrigan served as a consultant. “He and Jeremy spent about three weeks basically closeted together talking about the idea of what it would mean to be a priest,” Joffé remembered, “what he would gain by being a priest, what he would be giving up.”

Joffé also ended up casting Berrigan in the film as Sebastian, one of the Jesuits working for Father Gabriel.

Berrigan later wrote a book, *The Mission: A Film Journal*, about the experience of those months in the jungle. In Irons he found “a ready spirit, very supple of mind, a listening being who went away silent and returned curious.... We dwelt a long time on the meaning of faith, which appeared to me as a kind of unexpected intervention, a third party, so to speak, entering an impasse and bringing, if not relief, at least a measure of light and hope.”

Joffé remembered Berrigan’s presence on set with gratitude. “He had an indomitable spirit, a kind of spiritual feistiness that was really engaging,” Joffé explained. “In a way he was an inspiration to my life, just the kind of man that he was, so open and concerned.

“I think [he was] a human being who lived the idea that love must come first. And every day of the shoot he proved the purity and elegance of his position. And that was inspirational.”

Berrigan was equally inspired. “The actors (men all) are attempting something audacious,” he wrote, “miming the incandescent spirit of the Jesuits who blazed a path through the eighteenth-century jungle of ig-



Robert DeNiro's acting method in "The Mission" made for massive editing challenges. At each take "he would try all sorts of different voices, different deliveries, varying the whole thing somehow," according to Jim Clark, the film's editor.

norance, lust, and avarice and who created so splendid a utopia, on behalf of others, that one still gasps for wonderment." Of Joffé he wrote, "If we [actors] are the film, what of him? Guiding spirit? Bearer of good news, holy and secular? Encourager? Wiper away of tears? Stern exactor? Friend? Father confessor? All and any. Indeed, he appears to me at times as the only authentic Jesuit of us all."

Improvised Grace

Watching just the opening scene of "The Mission," the viewer is immediately made aware of the audacity of what Joffé and his team were attempting. Writing in *The Los Angeles Times*, Sheila Benson described Iguazu Falls, which figures prominently throughout the film, as "the movie's star." "I kind of clambered and crawled all over the falls," Joffé recalled. "There's something startling and humbling about it, the power that nature had. I really wanted to capture

that on film."

But those falls were thousands of miles south of the film's main location in Colombia, which meant asking the Waunana to get on airplanes. "When they were going to get on a plane, I asked a woman, 'Are you afraid?'" Joffé remembered. "She said, 'No, because we've seen you feeding it with butterflies.' I thought it was kind of wonderful. And really, they understood as much about what we were 'feeding it' as I did."

The film required lots of actual clambering not just for Joffé, but for the cast and crew, including those astonishing scenes in which DeNiro's Mendoza climbs the falls with his old suit of armor tied to him. "We had to be very careful," Joffé said, and not just with the falls themselves. "Robert would be crawling around, and there [would be] a nest of scorpions or a snake."

But DeNiro's capacity for improvisation in those moments also proved

a huge gift. "Dragging his bundle through the jungle, he gave us all kinds of things we didn't expect," said Joffé.

Surprises and challenges on set "happened all the time," he noted. For example, the site for the mission "happened to be on the main cocaine route down the Santa Marta River," which "didn't go over very well with cocaine dealers because we had army soldiers with us very often." Working with a go-between to the dealers, Joffé learned that the film crew's presence would be allowed as long as they and their soldiers left by a certain time each Friday and did not come back until Monday morning.

At one point Joffé noticed that a box he was sitting on had "six or seven coral snakes" beneath it. "They're the most venomous snakes on earth, and I was sitting on top of them."

But Joffé found those challenges only added to the shoot. "What we were experiencing and what we were doing was so fused," he said. "It was

Ennio Morricone's famous compositions for 'The Mission' bore little resemblance to the actual music of the Guarani, which was almost entirely unknown at the time of filming. 🌊🌊

kind of like trying to cook a risotto. Everything just fell together in the right flavors.”

Over the course of filming, Joffé and his team struggled with Father Gabriel's fate. The original script had him dying with his parishioners in the mission church after it is set on fire by the Portuguese soldiers. “Are we to concede, as in the theology of Milton, that evil had best be granted the last word, that the evildoer is essentially more interesting than the virtuous?” Berrigan wrote. In the end, the example of Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi led them to a different answer for Gabriel. Berrigan writes: “He takes in hand his life and the lives of his people and leaves the mission church... confront[ing] the worst and evok[ing] the best in the massed adversaries.”

Berrigan asked whether his character might be able to walk with Gabriel, in keeping with the image of the Jesuits as a bonded community of faith and companionship. Joffé agreed.

The Music of Human Longing

One of the elements for which “The Mission” has become most remembered is its soundtrack by the legendary film composer Ennio Morricone. But in the beginning, according to Joffé, Morricone was reluctant to commit himself. “We'd

initially used [Alessandro] Marchello's Oboe Concerto” for Father Gabriel's key song, Joffé explained. At a private screening meant to pique Morricone's interest, “When it was over, he couldn't speak. He was in tears,” Joffé said. “But then he looked at me and said, ‘Rolando, you don't need music in this film. I can't write anything better than Marchello.’”

Joffé feared that in showing Morricone the film he had made a huge mistake. But his producing partner Puttnam encouraged him to wait and see. “Three weeks later, I got a phone call,” Joffé recalled. “Rolando! Ennio *qui!* I've got a little tiny idea.” And then, after initially trying to play something on the piano over the phone and becoming dissatisfied, Morricone began to sing the theme for Gabriel's Oboe Concerto. “My hair stood on end,” said Joffé. “That's not a tiny little idea,” he told Morricone. “That's the film.”

Looking back, he reflected on that instantaneous reaction. “I think it has the strangest blend of comfort and loneliness,” Joffé said of Gabriel's oboe theme. “The two of them work together in a way; it's both lonely and stark, but also amazingly connected. And I felt that's what it means to be a human being. We are both those things all the time if we're honest.”

“And then we got into the chants,

they had a certain joy that I thought really comes at the moment when those two things fuse in human beings. That's what joy is, when those two elements of loneliness and longing that normally live side by side in us fuse.”

Clark, as the film editor, was initially fearful about Morricone's work. The two weeks of recording with the London Philharmonic cost 250,000 pounds, he wrote, and for the first week “all we ever heard from them was: ‘Zuum zuum, zuum zuum, zuum zuum.’...There was no tune at all.”

In the second week, as other instruments and choirs were brought in, the crew began to appreciate the layering of sounds Morricone was creating. “After two weeks of recording, we were able to actually hear the score,” Clark wrote. “It was magnificent.”

Morricone's compositions “were so much more telling than using words,” said Joffé. “Words are poor things compared to the rich panoply of music.”

At the same time, as inspiring as Morricone's compositions were, they bore little resemblance to the actual music of the Guarani, which was almost entirely unknown at the time of filming. The missionary and musicologist Piotr Nawrot, S.V.D., who has spent three decades living in Latin

American indigenous communities studying their mission-era music, explained that before 1987, when Western scholars, including the American Jesuit T. Frank Kennedy, discovered an astonishing 5,000 pages of music manuscripts in Bolivia, “The music was lost to us.”

But he went on to clarify: “It was never [lost] to the Indians.” Rather, they prized these documents as sacred texts of their communities. “It was like the Ark for the Jews; no matter where they moved, they took this sacred music. For them this music is not just sound and harmony—this is the history of their sacred salvation.”

Nawrot has nothing but praise for Morricone’s score. “His project is not about making something as close as possible” to the music on the reductions, Nawrot explained, but about recreating in the film’s audience that encounter with the divine that the original music of the Guarani and the Jesuits provided. “His music played the role that the original music played in the first evangelization of the Indians,” Nawrot said. “The soundtrack is totally seductive.”

“The story is quite accurate,” Nawrot noted, “very few exaggerations.” And lacking the original musical texts, “I could not imagine better music for this movie than what Ennio has done. I’m a musicologist, I have lived in Indian communities for more than three decades, and I tell you it is just unbelievable. I have only admiration. I would call Ennio an apostle of the modern time.”

A Fire That Kindles Many Fires

Before its debut in the United States, “The Mission” won the Palme d’Or, the highest prize at the Cannes

Film Festival. It went on to receive nominations for seven Oscars, including one to Joffé for best director and to Morricone for best score, and won one for Chris Menges’ astonishing cinematography.

The film never took off at the American box office, making only \$17 million in the United States. But Nawrot said it has had a radical impact on Catholic ministry in indigenous communities in South America. “It is not that no one knew about the reductions or knew what was going on,” Nawrot explained. But the movie was “a provocation.” “Suddenly we started to talk again about this,” he said. Not only that, “we wanted to be a part of this.... There was a beauty [to ‘The Mission’] that seduced us. We wanted this story again.”

Nawrot left his native Poland to work and study with the indigenous of South America. Over the years communities allowed him to read and share over 13,000 pages of music from the Jesuit and Franciscan missions. “If you’d like to hear the same [indigenous] Mass a second time you’d have to go to Mass every single day for four months to get it,” he said.

He has also helped encourage these communities in their music. Today, he noted, they are among the most musically proficient people in Bolivia and beyond. “One in four Bolivians in the jungle can read music,” Nawrot said.

And even though the songs of “The Mission” were not actual Guarani compositions, Morricone’s work remains the seed out of which missionary efforts grow. “Today when you go to Bolivia and sing Guarani [reduction songs],” he explained, “quite often we start with Ennio Morricone and

then we go to the original, as though he were the father of this. I would say he is one of those human beings that everyone here loves, even if he is unaware of it.”

The same is said of the film and Morricone’s work by many Jesuits. Gabriel’s Oboe is frequently featured at Jesuit institutions during Masses of the Holy Spirit, baccalaureate celebrations, ordinations, funerals and on the feast of St. Ignatius. Today, for many Jesuits that simple melody captures the “strange blend” of consolation and longing at the heart of their vocation and sense of humanity.

Berrigan wrote that the film was “a rare, even unique undertaking. It dares to raise questions both crucial and neglected: how humans choose to live, and for whom, and with what resources; also how they choose to die, and for what vain or dearly purchased cause—the pivot, the vexed, tormented, central question of all.”

Looking back, Joffé said, “For me it was an attempt to touch what lies behind spiritual journeys. I love the idea that the truth is evanescent, difficult to find and may often take opposing points, often for the same reason and the same motivation.

“I describe myself as a wobbly agnostic. And I suppose my sense of the divine is that he speaks through other people, through life. I had Dan Berrigan on the one hand and the Waunana Indians on the other,” he noted. “It makes one ask serious questions about what [life is] and what might we be here for.”

Jim McDermott, S.J., is a contributing writer for America and the magazine’s Los Angeles correspondent.



Her 'greatest dream' came true, and then some

By Randy Boyagoda

AP Photo/Ron Fehlm



Sontag
Her Life and Work
By Benjamin Moser
Ecco
832p \$39.99

For the first 704 pages of Benjamin Moser's compendious biography of Susan Sontag, I enjoyed imagining what Sontag herself would make of his efforts, were she alive. After all, as Moser notes, "One of Susan Sontag's strengths was that anything that could be said about her by others was said, first and best, by Susan Sontag." Moser makes this clear by quoting from Sontag's personal journals and by thoughtfully and persuasively revealing the hidden array of self-consideration and self-reference in much of her public writing.

But all of this happy speculation about her response to Moser's work

gave way, as I read the biography's final page, to fear. There Moser makes a concluding statement about Sontag's lasting importance by evoking the pilgrimage-like activity that has grown up around her gravesite in the famous Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris since her death in 2005:

The black slab covering her remains grew into one of the most visited destinations in a cemetery packed with the illustrious dead, and was often heaped with flowers or stones. Yet in an ironic tribute to her life, it was not Susan Sontag's body these visitors honored. It was what she stood for. After her death, it no longer mattered, exactly, that she had written bad books as well as great ones, or said dumb things as well as brilliant ones, or been wrong as well as right. The same could be said about any

writer. What mattered about Susan Sontag was what she symbolized.

But Sontag would rage at the notion that her lasting achievements had to do with what she symbolized for others, as opposed to what she wrote. And yet, as Moser decisively establishes, whether in ways that were harmonious or dissonant, the person and personas of Susan Sontag mattered as much to what she wrote as what she wrote mattered to that person and those personas.

She had interests and ambitions from an early age that pointed her in the direction of eventual full public view. She attended the University of Chicago by the age of 16 and impressed professors by writing authoritative correctives to T. S. Eliot's reading of Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*. She married the Chicago psychology professor Philip Rieff in a matter of days after first becoming his research assistant.

Her marriage to Rieff produced a

According to a new biography by Benjamin Moser, Susan Sontag's "success was literally spectacular: played out in full public view." Pictured: Sontag with Gay Talese, Norman Mailer and Gore Vidal on Feb. 15, 1993.

child, David, in 1952, when Sontag was 19, creating a new context for the continued playing out of a raw and jagged relationship to her own mother and to maternity and family life more generally. This would eventually have public and professional dimensions after her son grew up, became Sontag's book editor at Farrar, Straus, and Giroux (at her insistence) and pursued his own career in writing, with his mother serving as his most formidable advocate, critic and occasional competitor.

In the late 1950s, Sontag's then-husband was working on a major study of Freud; it was eventually published under his name but was substantially written by Sontag. She agreed to this invisibility in exchange for a gradual dissolution of the marriage that began with her pursuing graduate studies at Oxford, which she soon abandoned for a bohemian intellectual life in Paris. She eventually returned to the United States and took a job at *Commentary* in New York in 1959. Thereafter, she might have just lived out her endearingly cerebral hope—"My greatest dream...was to grow up and come to New York and write for *Partisan Review* and be read by 5,000 people"—were it not for a newsmaking essay she wrote in 1964, "On Camp," for that journal, which led to her being read and seen and known for the rest of her life.

In tone, evidence and argument, the essay, which is dedicated to Oscar Wilde, made the case for the deep connectedness of high and low culture. Sontag reveals this relationship through an intellectually rigorous, deeply read and serious-minded con-

sideration of unconventional, experimental and intentionally playful of-the-moment forms of contemporary art and culture. "Like so many of Sontag's best writings," Moser notes, it "was effective at the time, and remains effective now, for the feelings it gives: of insiders...a guided tour...a work of critical genius."

Sontag provoked intense responses with the essay, which set the defining pattern of her career. Some of her peers attacked her for subverting the high, Eurocentric sense of culture and tradition that she otherwise so robustly affirmed; others welcomed the liberating, animating spirit of her essay. Either way, people—and not just *Partisan Review* readers—were paying attention to her. Sontag was written up in *Time* magazine and *The New York Times* after "On Camp" was published, and soon she was dining at Elaine's with the likes of Leonard Bernstein and Jackie Kennedy. The latter's brother-in-law, Bobby, was one of many men, according to Moser, with whom Sontag had a brief affair; others included Warren Beatty, Richard Brodsky, Jasper Johns and her longtime publisher, Roger Straus, who served as her financial backer, providing outsized book advances that were quickly spent because of Sontag's penchant for extravagant living. (She enjoyed caviar and the *Concorde*.)

But other than her son David, men were, for Sontag, a decidedly secondary interest. She never publicly acknowledged her sexuality in its fullness and rejected even the most sympathetic queries about it. But Sontag pursued, over decades, numerous

passionate and volatile affairs with women from various cultural and geographic locations. Her romantic life took a more stable turn when she met Annie Leibowitz and they entered into a long-term relationship.

Sontag inspired fellow writers and intellectuals into taking action against the *fatwa* on Salman Rushdie, but she also offered an intellectual defense of the motives behind religiously inspired terrorism against the United States mere days after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Later she challenged European audiences to think beyond their reflexive anti-Americanism. Rather than try for a master insight on Sontag's recalcitrant, oppositional tendencies, Moser instead presents her in the fullness of these complications.

She argued everything and took on anyone until the end, as when she was informed that a new bout with cancer was terminal, weeks before she died. "A doctor's assistant tried to comfort her," Moser writes.

"You might want to take this time to concentrate on your spiritual values."

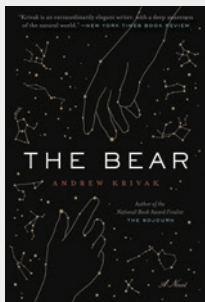
"I have no spiritual values."

"You might want to take this time to be with your friends."

"I have no friends!"

Whether right or wrong, she was, until the very end, first and best, Sontag.

Randy Boyagoda is a professor of English at the University of Toronto, where he is principal of St. Michael's College and holds the Basilian Chair in Christianity, Arts, and Letters. His latest novel is *Original Prin*.



The Bear

By Andrew Krivak
Bellevue Literary Press
224p \$16.99

The cycle of life

The Bear is nothing if not a beautiful book. When we learn that a book is about the last two people on earth, we might assume it is part of the wave of dystopian novels that have crested into our literary ocean in the last decade. But it would be a mistake to classify this haunting novel that way; rather, this is an elegiac tale that resonates deeply with the creation spirituality that has also been rising in our collective imagination.

On its surface, this is the story of a young girl and her father, the last two remaining humans, who live in a beautiful land that has been mostly reclaimed by nature. In the forest, the man has fashioned nearly everything they need not only to survive but to thrive. But they need salt to cure their meat, so they set out on a perilous trip to the ocean. The father is bitten by a snake, leaving the girl alone to complete the trip and return home to the cabin in the forest. That's when things get fantastical—with talking animals arriving to help guide her through her grief.

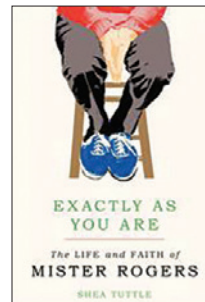
A bear that accompanies her for much of her journey shares some wisdom. “I miss whom I once could touch, as all must do when we make our way through whatever forest or wood it is in which we travel or are

raised. This does not mean the man is lost or has disappeared forever,” the bear says. “For although he no longer walks beside you, he still remains in the time and place of memory, and this is where he will appear again and again, as often as you will seek him.”

This seems to echo directly what Jesus tells the disciples about always being with them and what the apostles tell the early church. Before they begin the journey, the father tells the girl, “But there’s still much you can’t understand. So much you shouldn’t have to. Not yet.” In a foreshadowing of what will happen in this universe, the girl “lay on the ground beneath a warm sun and wondered if the world and time itself were like the hawk and eagle soaring above her in long arcs she knew were only part of their flight, for they must have begun and returned to someplace as of yet unseen by her, someplace as of yet unknown.”

Krivak has created a powerful allegory about the struggles and graces of life.

Cynthia-Marie Marmo O’Brien, a writer and editor, has reviewed for *America*, *Booklist*, *Kirkus*, *The Literary Review*, *Publishers Weekly* and *Words Without Borders*, among others.



Exactly as You Are The Life and Faith of Mister Rogers

By Shea Tuttle
Eerdmans
211p \$23.99

Husband, father, minister

A number of years ago, while attending the College Theology Society annual convention at St. Vincent College in Latrobe, Pa., I was delighted to find that the campus hosts the Fred Rogers Center, offering educational training to teachers and featuring a huge archive of materials from “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood,” the children’s program that Fred Rogers hosted on public television from 1968 to 2001. (He died in 2003.) But when I shared this exciting news with some of the younger theologians in attendance, they told me something that shocked me: They were still in grammar school when “Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood” went off the air.

Exactly As You Are: The Life and Faith of Mister Rogers will prove of interest to theologians of any generation, however. Shea Tuttle employs her theological expertise (she holds a master of divinity degree from Candler School of Theology in Atlanta), several years of research and interviews, and her own fond reminiscences of watching Mister Rogers in this well-timed new book. (“A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood,” a film starring Tom Hanks, was released in November, a month after the book’s release.)

Tuttle remembers the show as a conversation she had regularly with

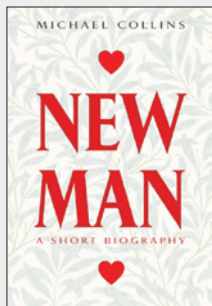
Rogers. Often, “he’d bring something with him—maybe pretzels, wooden blocks, or a musical instrument.” And, of course, he always performed two rituals: trading his blazer for a zippered sweater and methodically exchanging his shoes for the famous navy canvas sneakers.

But there was another side to Rogers as well. Asked in 1986 to describe himself, he listed off a long catalog of descriptors but concluded with “a husband and a father. And I am a minister.” Ordained a Presbyterian minister in 1963, Rogers was “a religious person through and through, extraordinarily thoughtful and intentional,” Tuttle writes, “and his faith was constantly present to him.” (One surprising revelation: During the early years of his television career, he stopped by St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York to pray on his way to NBC in the mornings.)

From the beginning, Tuttle notes, “he got to bring all the insights of his theological and child development coursework to bear.”

Rogers had strong opinions about television—he reviled and spoke out strongly against most of the programming he saw—but instead of denouncing the medium, he said, “It’s not so simple (or cheap) as writing letters of complaint!” Instead of “being fed slick stimulating sound-tracked trash,” a child could be taught that he or she “is accepted as he is: happy, sad, angry, lonely, *exactly* as he is.”

James T. Keane, a senior editor at *America*.



Newman
A Short Biography
By Michael Collins
Messenger Publications
94p \$10.95

A new saint, an ancient faith

By the time John Henry Newman entered the Catholic Church in 1845, he had grown disillusioned with his former Anglican faith. In 1839, after reading about the heresy of monophysitism, Newman spoke of “doubts about the tenableness of Anglican tenets.” In 1841, his sermon declaring the Catholic character of the Church of England provoked the ire of the bishop of Oxford, who demanded Newman’s silence.

And on Sept. 25, 1843, after concluding his final sermon as an Anglican priest, Newman symbolically removed his stole, eliciting public lament. As the clever typesetting on the cover of the Rev. Michael Collins’s excellent new biography suggests, John Henry Newman, who was canonized by Pope Francis on Oct. 13, truly became a new man—and not just once.

This brief biography of Newman succeeds in portraying Newman as more than a formidable, occasionally irritable prelate or an eminent Catholic theologian, although both descriptions are apt. Instead, Collins portrays him as a human being, the kind that loves, grieves, struggles and at various times triumphs.

At his death on Aug. 11, 1890, Newman left behind nearly 20,000 letters, numerous books and two au-

tobiographies. He publicly clashed with various church leaders throughout his life, including some Irish Catholic bishops who proved antagonistic toward Newman’s establishment of a Catholic university in Ireland in 1854. He endured the insults of the Cambridge University professor Charles Kingsley and sparred in writing with Prime Minister William Gladstone of England.

But Collins also pays special attention to Newman’s rich friendships, particularly with the Oratorian Ambrose St. John. Upon the death of St. John in 1878, Newman suffered tremendous grief. “I have ever thought that no bereavement was equal to that of a husband’s or wife’s, but I feel it difficult to believe that any can be greater, or anyone’s sorrow greater than mine,” wrote Newman. According to his final wish, Newman was buried in the same grave as St. John and remained there undisturbed until Newman’s exhumation in 2008.

Newman is chiefly remembered today for his theological contributions, particularly his 1845 work, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, in which he contended that doctrine developed organically from the Bible. This essay garnered praise from many Catholic theologians, including Giovanni Perrone, a Jesuit professor at the Gregorian University.

In all, Father Collins understands Newman not as “a stainless saint” but as a dutiful friend and a multifaceted defender of the Catholic faith.

Ryan Di Corpo, *Joseph A. O’Hare* fellow.



Two popes—and two actors—dueling and dancing

By John Anderson

“The Two Popes” addresses the weightiest questions confronting the church—and not just about financial crimes and sexual abuse.

“The Two Popes,” a fly-on-the-tapestried-wall account of a one-on-one conclave between Pope Benedict XVI (Anthony Hopkins) and pontiff-to-be Jorge Mario Bergoglio (Jonathan Pryce), is a tour de force of acting, of actors interacting, of actors dueling and dancing—literally, at one point, as Pryce’s earthy Argentinian tries to teach the tango to Hopkins’s less-than-flexible German.

But in addition to its sly humor, Vatican locations and visually lush production design (inspired by Michelangelo, among others), the film addresses, however fleetingly, the weightiest questions confronting the church—not just about financial crimes and sexual abuse but dogma, ritual and the Christian mission. The movie does not really know how to end, it must be said. But as a character study it is an exhilaratingly intellectual, deftly directed drama that in

the end suggests very strongly not just that desire is destiny, but that temperament dictates theology.

“The most important qualification for a leader,” says Cardinal Peter Turkson (Sidney Cole), during the 2005 conclave that opens the film, “is not wanting to be leader.” The cardinal adds, somewhat gratuitously given his audience, “Plato.” What he says without saying it is “Bergoglio.”

“The Two Popes” does not dwell on the 2005 election, but the event is necessary to establish both the political climate and the characters involved. With the death of Pope John Paul II, Joseph Ratzinger, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and dean of the College of Cardinals, is a leading contender for the Chair of St. Peter. And he very much wants the job—something that the director Fernando Meirelles (“City of God,” “The Constant Gardener”) implies mostly

through gestures and reaction shots. Among the outliers in the balloting is Bergoglio, who to his own embarrassment gets 10 votes. It is not a close election, but everyone recognizes the cosmic significance of a Jesuit “from the end of the earth,” as Pope Francis would later describe it, having so solid a bloc of support.

The years skip by until 2012, and a summons from Benedict to Bergoglio, who has tendered his resignation as archbishop of Buenos Aires. He wants Benedict’s permission to quit his post and become a “simple parish priest” once again, and the pope isn’t inclined to give it: The pope has something quite different in mind, which is part of the brilliant evolution of Benedict as a character.

He is something of a stiff, who lives in a pontifical bubble and doesn’t know who the Beatles are. There is a snippet of the jazz musician Thelonious

Monk playing on the holy TV set, which Benedict switches to his favorite show, about a dog detective. The little windows into Benedict's inner life are almost mocking, especially as compared with his visitor's open-hearted humanity and devotion to spirituality (and soccer). But Benedict's intellect is fierce and his self-awareness not entirely absent, as evidenced in the scene in which he tells his visitor about his plan to abdicate.

Bergoglio is shocked and dismayed. There can't be two popes, he moans.

"There were three popes in 1978," Benedict replies.

"That's not the same thing," says Bergoglio.

"It was a joke."

"It wasn't funny."

"It's a German joke," the pope concludes. "It doesn't have to be funny."

The archbishop's own plan to resign is tied up with his guilt over his experiences during the military dictatorship in Argentina from 1976 to 1983. As portrayed in the film, Bergoglio made the preservation of life a priority over resistance to the junta, and for this he suffered recriminations from others as well as his own regrets. The Argentina chapters are the less engaging parts of the film, frankly (the sequences involving the two principals in contentious discussion in Rome were the highlights for this viewer), but they help the audience to understand more deeply why Bergoglio does not see Rome moving in a satisfactory direction, and to appreciate his opposition to the more rigidly dogmatic side of the church—something Benedict personifies. Or so Bergoglio thinks.

While Meirelles and his cinematographer, César Charlone, were able to use some locations in and around Rome, including the summer residence at Castel Gandolfo, they had to substitute for Vatican locations and even recreated some—notably their Sistine Chapel, fabricated at the famed Cinecittà Studios. Part of Bergoglio's tour when he visits Pope Benedict is a two-man visit to the chapel which, as the pope no doubt intends, is awe-inspiring. So is Charlone's lighting—the characters seem to become part of the frescoes surrounding them, and in turn part of church and papal history. At the same time, the contrast between such Vatican magnificence and the humble Bergoglio could not be starker. "You imply that the rest of us aren't living simply enough," says the pope. He isn't really kidding.

Both Pryce and Hopkins deliver astounding performances, and their presentation of their complex, multifaceted characters is enhanced by Anthony McCarten's nuanced script (adapted from his stage play) and the director Meirelles's appreciation for how much his two main characters' body language, facial reactions and even clothing reveal their very divergent personalities. Pryce is the ostensible star of the film, of course, and his Francis-to-be is its hero, but there is a reason Anthony Hopkins is Anthony Hopkins. He makes the less charismatic Benedict a heroic figure in his way, someone deserving not just of admiration, but also of sympathy. "This popularity of yours," he asks Bergoglio. "Is there a trick to it?" It's enough to break your heart.

John Anderson is a television critic for The Wall Street Journal and a contributor to The New York Times.



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The 'Holy Angels' mural

The characters in the Christmas story are belovedly familiar: Mary and Joseph with the Christ child at the story's center; the shepherds watching over their flock by night and then becoming the first witnesses of God born among us; the wise men from the East with their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh; raging Herod killing all the male children of Bethlehem who might be a threat to him. But what of the angel who appeared to the shepherds and first told them the good news? And what of the multitude of the heavenly host who suddenly appeared with the angel? I fear we overlook these vital heralds.

Not so at Holy Angels Catholic Church on the South Side of Chicago, where since 1990 a vibrant black parish has worshiped before the marvelous "Holy Angels" mural, by Engelbert Mveng, S.J. At its diamond-shaped center is a simple scene of the Holy Family attended by the shepherds and overseen by a sky of angel heads bent in benediction over the child. The figures are dark-skinned, in African garb. Set in smaller diamond forms around the nativity scene are depictions of angelic activity through salvation history. Counterclockwise they begin with Michael the archangel vanquishing the serpent-dragon, Satan. Then there is the angel who delivered Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego from the fire of King Nebuchadnezzar, followed by another act of deliverance as an angel frees Peter from Herod's imprisonment (Peter's face closely resembling Nelson Mandela's).

In the lower left, the Virgin Mary, appearing as a young Nigerian woman in her village hut, is visited by the arch-

angel Gabriel as the Holy Spirit hovers above. The miracle of resurrection and ascension is announced by angels at the lower center of the painting, while reverse chronology then shows angels appearing to comfort Christ during his agony in the garden. Angels from the Book of Revelation next appear as our protectors at the Judgment. Two beloved stories follow: The three traveler-angels bring Abraham and Sarah the good news that they will bear a child, Isaac, and the blind Tobit is healed through the intercession

of the archangel Raphael. Again at the top, the star of Bethlehem shines down upon the multitude of angels (actually 49 faces, recalling the call to forgive seven times seven).

The mural and its church are together a sort of miracle. Built in 1896, Holy Angels burned to the ground in 1986. Its enterprising pastor, the Rev. George Clements, persuaded the dis-



The "Holy Angels" mural by Engelbert Mveng, S.J., has been on display at Holy Angels Church in Chicago since 1990.

tinguished architectural firm Skidmore, Owings & Merrill to help him rebuild it (free of charge) and commissioned Roy Lichtenstein to design the stained glass windows and Father Mveng to do the central mural. By this time Mveng had been a professor of history at the University of Yaoundé, Cameroon, for over 20 years. Born on May 9, 1930, to Presbyterian par-

ents, he entered the Society of Jesus in 1951 and was ordained a priest in 1963. As a young Jesuit he became acquainted with Bamun drawings and Bamiléke art and became convinced that there were universal principles to be found in traditional African art.

He was prolific, writing significant treatises in theology, history and anthropology and producing such masterworks as the “Ugandan Martyrs” altar at Libermann College in Douala, Cameroon; “Our Lady of Africa” for the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, Israel; and, perhaps most famously, the “Stations of the Cross” and the “Resurrection” mural for Hekima College in Nairobi, Kenya. The stations are particularly powerful and strikingly embody Mveng’s “theology of life”—his affirmation of life over all threats to it. And the “Resurrection,” which unites a sense of crucifixion and its transcendence, with Mary and John both witnessing the cross and pointing to the risen Christ, is interestingly also known as “the eucharistic fresco” because of the vivid side panels recalling the marriage feast of Cana and the multiplication of the loaves and fishes.

To the horror of many, Mveng was assassinated by an unknown assailant on the night of April 22, 1995, in Yaoundé because of his defense of poor people against political oppression. And yet, with Father Mveng this Christmas, we can scarcely pray over any more consoling or challenging words than those of the heavenly host he painted for Chicago, who praise God and say: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among all with whom God is pleased.”

Leo J. O’Donovan, S.J., is president emeritus of Georgetown University and director of mission at Jesuit Refugee Service/USA.

Spire

By Peter T. Donahue

You thank the wife of the inn-keep
for the clean water and blotting cloth,
and kneel in the hay and fenugreek.
Your knees shake and you smell the ox.

“The messenger called him Son of God,
but never told me how soft his hair
would be,” you whisper, tired and awed.
The swaddling clothes are threadbare.

As your post-partum womb pulls tight,
your soul, one drop of dew, magnifies
the sun: the gothic timbers light
and bloom, a rose on Jesse’s tree.

In rising smoke you feel your lowly bones
lifted up, up from pediment to spire;
you choke on joy; kings are thrown from thrones;
again we’re blessed in unforeseen fire.

*Peter T. Donahue lives in northern New Jersey, where he teaches creative writing at Morristown-Beard School. His essays have appeared in *Electric Literature* and *concis* and his poetry in *The Lyric*, *Verdad* and *Exit 13 Magazine*.*

Family Values

Readings: Sir 3:2-6, 12-14; Ps 128; Col 3:12-21; Mt 2:13-15, 19-23

Today's readings, celebrating the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, elucidate aspects of familial relationships and human values. The first and second readings address the parent-child relationship; the Gospel provides an example of parental protection. The second reading also describes marital relationships and presents us with the challenge of interpreting texts that reflect a patriarchal society and have been used to advocate for injustice.

In the Gospel, the Holy Family leaves Judea and flees to Egypt to avoid King Herod during his massacre of the infants. This reading shows the perseverance and care of Jesus' parents and speaks loudly to contemporary conversations about asylum and immigration. At today's borders, families seeking refuge are turned away, arrested and even separated. Imagine if the Holy Family experienced these situations when they sought refuge in Egypt. The Gospel clearly rejects the injustice of Herod's persecution and recognizes the importance of a safe haven for Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

The background text for both the first and second readings is the commandment to honor one's parents (Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16). Sirach insists that caring for parents is beneficial to parents, children and society. Similarly, Colossians advocates for care of parents and emphasizes reciprocity in the parent-child relationship. Importantly, Colossians encourages believers in Christ to clothe themselves in compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience and love. These readings call us to treat one another like family, with dignity and respect.

But in the longer Lectionary reading from Colossians, we also read: "Wives, be subordinate to your husbands, as is proper in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and avoid any bitterness toward them" (Col 3:18-19). As these are optional readings, it might be preferable to proclaim the shorter reading that ends with an encouragement for Christians to offer words and deeds in the name of the Lord (Col 3:17).

With its insistence on the subordination of wives, Col 3:18-19 has the dangerous power to promote injustice in marriage and in society. This sentiment is not unique in the

Clothe yourselves with compassion, meekness and patience. (Col 3:12)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How can I foster relationships that are grounded on love and respect?

Do I consider all people to be members of my family?

New Testament (see 1 Cor 14:34; Eph 5:22; Ti 2:3-5; 1 Pt 3:1-6). How should we interpret these verses today?

Some may argue that this Scripture shows that the subordination of women is warranted. This is a mistake. Let us not seek value where there is none to be found. Or we could read this text as a metaphor for our relationship with God. In this case, all Christians are wives who are subject to their husband/God's authority and love. This approach has support in passages that describe the church as the bride of Christ (see 2 Cor 11:2-3; Eph 5:22-33).

But it may be most helpful to recognize honestly this text's context and limitations. Colossians reflects the patriarchal society in which it originated. It asserts a hierarchical relationship between wives and husbands because that sentiment was endorsed by many people, institutions and laws. We must make moral judgments about how Scripture is interpreted and applied today. We should acknowledge its historical setting, recognize the immorality of the subjugation of women and move beyond it to promote relationships that are grounded on love and respect rather than principles of subjugation.

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

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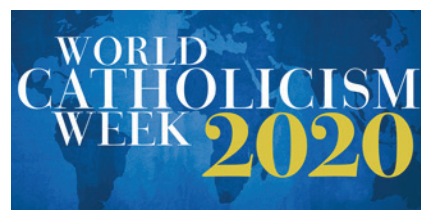
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Guiding Light

Readings: Is 60:1-6; Ps 72; Eph 3:2-3, 5-6; Mt 2:1-12

As we near the end of the Christmas season, today's readings remind us to be guided by the light of Christ throughout the year.

In the first reading from Isaiah, Judean exiles return home after their forced removal to Babylon. The reading celebrates their arrival by highlighting the city of Jerusalem as their guiding light. On the first Sunday of Advent, the readings spoke of walking in the light of Christ (Is 2:5) and putting on the armor of light (Rom 13:12). Light imagery reminds ancient and modern readers to lead lives focused on God. Similarly, according to Isaiah, the city of Jerusalem will be visited by various people who will bring gold and frankincense and offer praise to the Lord. Matthew's description of the magi's journey and their gifts in today's Gospel parallels this passage from Isaiah.

Matthew's infancy narrative also includes the story of King Herod's insecurity and deception. Herod, the Jewish client king installed by Rome, is visited by the magi, astronomer-priests from the East looking for Jesus. Herod considers this a risk to his political authority. Shrewdly, though unsuccessfully, Herod attempts to use the magi and prod them for information about Jesus' whereabouts. Unfazed,

They were overjoyed at seeing the star. (Mt 2:10)

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How can I welcome all people into the Christian community?

What signs in my life can bring me closer to God?

Do I recognize corrupt intentions and work to promote truth and honesty in the world?

the magi follow the light of a star, joyfully offer gifts and return to their home country, avoiding Herod on the way. Like Joseph (Mt 1:20), the magi receive dreams as vehicles of divine revelation (Mt 2:12).

The feast of the Epiphany celebrates this occasion as an acknowledgement by Gentiles of the significance of Jesus. Because the magi are from the East, it is assumed that they were not Jewish. The second reading from Ephesians supports this notion, as "the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel" (Eph 3:6). The magi can represent the openness and universality of the Gospel.

It is unclear if Matthew's narrative reflects a known historical event or if it was a literary invention useful for the larger message of the Gospel. The traditions in Matthew 2 are not found in the other Gospel accounts, but they fit well with Matthew's interest in establishing Jesus' Jewish heritage while affirming Jesus as the Messiah for all people. The tradition of three magi is connected to the three gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. Matthew does not give exact numbers or names for these visitors. Their offerings may reflect traditional gifts brought to royalty, or they could signify aspects of Jesus' identity. Gold may represent Jesus' royal lineage as a descendant of David. Frankincense may reflect Jesus' priestly role, as incense is used in ritual contexts. Frankincense and myrrh were also used in burial rituals, which could speak to Jesus' humanity and death.

Throughout the year, we can be inspired to act in the manner of the magi. They were faithful along their journey and joyfully paid homage to Jesus. The magi also worked against the duplicitous actions of a political leader in order to fulfill God's will. Let us be brave in the face of corruption and follow our guiding light to draw nearer to the Lord.

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

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The Road to Bethlehem

This Christmas, let us walk toward the hope of Christ

By Stephanie Saldaña



Twelve years ago, on Christmas Eve, I walked from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, nine months pregnant with my first child. He was due on Christmas Day, and I was planning on giving birth in Holy Family Hospital, not far from Manger Square, where Jesus was born. I convinced myself that if I walked there, I might go into labor when I arrived.

Instead, I crossed into Bethlehem exhausted and with feet so swollen that I had to take off my shoes, with not a contraction to be felt. My husband and I celebrated Christmas Mass that year in Shepherds' Field, my heart anchored to a star. My son, Joseph, with his characteristic sense of humor, finally made his appearance 10 days later.

I still live with my family in Jerusalem on the road to Bethlehem, and as Christmas approaches, my heart turns toward the city of Christ's and my own son's birth. On Christmas Eve, I will journey again with my husband and three children to celebrate beneath that now-familiar star.

But this year feels different. I am tired. I am scared.

I keep thinking about the refugees I have met, stranded across the region and in camps in Greece, or the Christians leaving en masse, the violence in Syria and the demonstrations in Lebanon and Iraq. And it is not just the Middle East—it is the world. I remem-

ber the children separated from their parents on the border of my home state of Texas. I worry about my own children. I cannot ignore that if I keep walking on this road to Bethlehem, I will soon run into a checkpoint and a wall.

This year, when I think about Christmas, I keep remembering a lecture I recently gave in Jerusalem about my work with refugees. I spoke about those who have inspired me with their courage, carrying their music, languages and embroidery with them as they started anew. A well-meaning friend told me when I had finished: "You need to make your stories less hopeful." His words stung. His criticism, common in the Middle East, is that a hopeful story about a violent world is in reality a destructive story. It is only possible if the teller is avoiding something of the truth.

I have meditated over his words for months now. *No*, my heart keeps telling me. Real hope is not an escape from the truth. Nor is it a shortcut. Hope is hard. Hope is the long road to Bethlehem.

That is why, as I write this, I am sitting in the ruins of the Kathisma church, an octagonal Byzantine church built on the pilgrimage road to Bethlehem in the fifth century. Here, tradition says, Mary rested on the way to give birth: tired, thirsty, needing to sit down. For centuries pilgrims also

rested here, praying in the chapels around Mary's seat, drinking water from the wells before continuing on to the site of Jesus' birth.

I pass these ruins abandoned on the side of the highway almost every day on the way to pick up my children from school—Mary's journey to Bethlehem inserting itself into my afternoons. Each time, my heart is pulled toward them. A voice within me says: *Rest. Don't go too quickly to Bethlehem.*

So here I am, trying to heed that voice. I sit in the ruins. I remember. I take in the faces of those I have seen. I whisper their names. I ask God to help me carry all that I have witnessed in my heart. I pray to drink from the well. I give thanks for all of my loved ones, who join me on this pilgrimage. I pray for the strength not to turn around.

We bring our hearts with us to Bethlehem. This is what Christmas means. Our hope is not cheap. It is facing the violence and the mess, only to discover that this journey has brought us to the manger, where God comes to meet us.

We go deeper. We keep walking. Christ is born.

Stephanie Saldaña is the author, most recently, of A Country Between and the founder of the website Mosaic Stories. She lives in Jerusalem.



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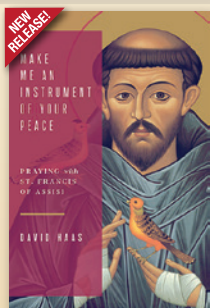
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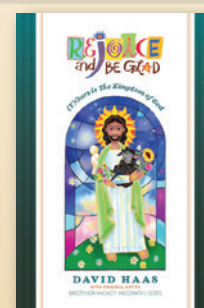
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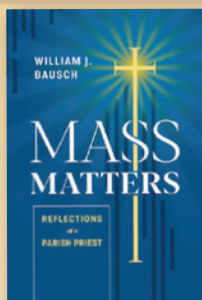


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