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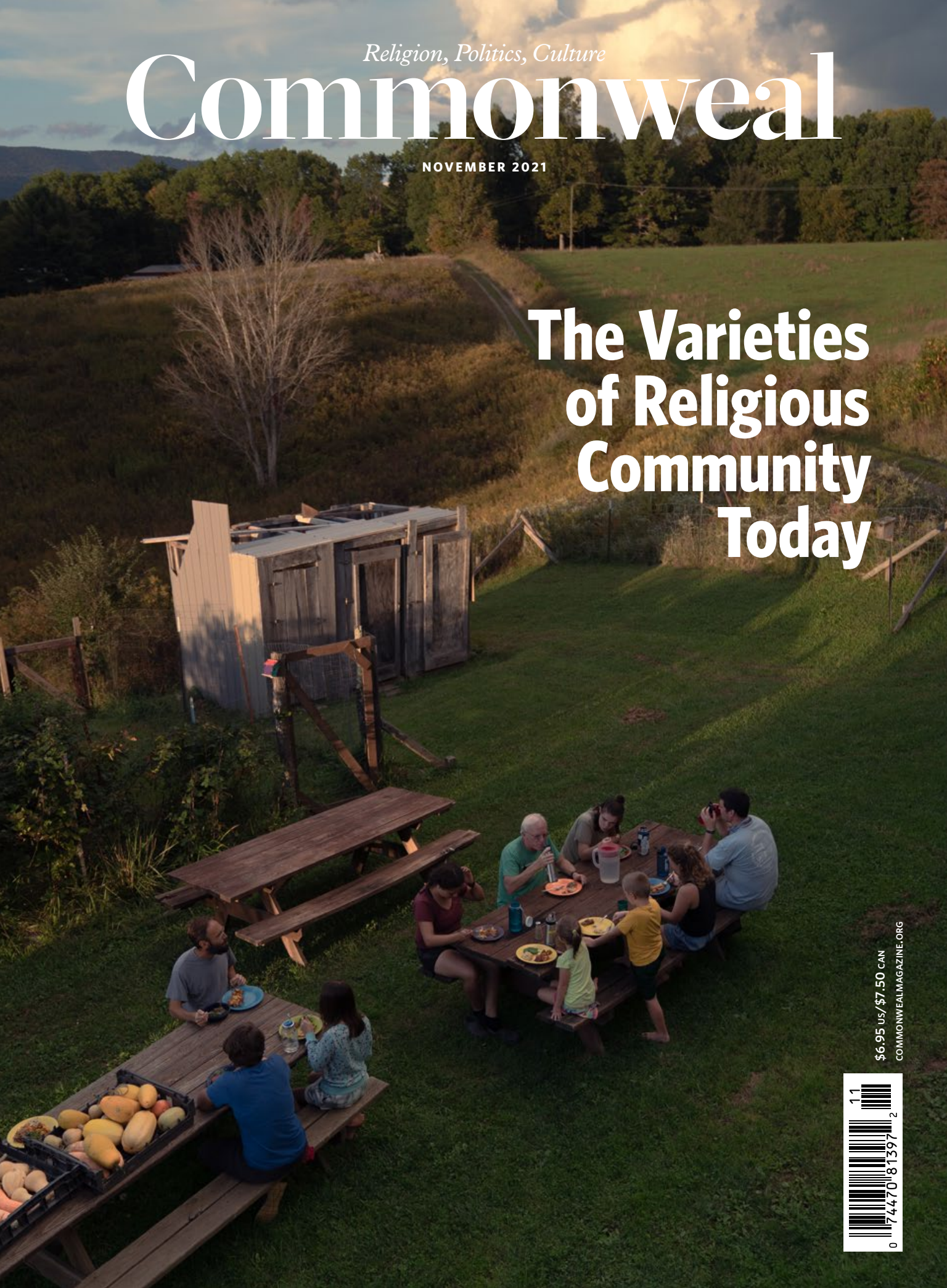

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THE VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY TODAY

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Members of the Bethlehem Farm community in Alderson, West Virginia, share dinner outdoors at sunset.

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LETTERS

On leaving Afghanistan

'RIGHT' TO DO?

I was disheartened to see the subject line "Leaving Afghanistan is the right thing to do" ("An Unwinnable War," September). It felt like clickbait designed to raise my blood pressure. But I generally trust *Commonweal* to have a thoughtful take, so I clicked.

I'm still disappointed. Focusing on whether the United States is "right" in leaving Afghanistan ignores the terrible suffering that is happening there now. Plenty of people are trying to "leave Afghanistan" and they can't because of our own failures. I think most people agree that the United States should leave Afghanistan; the question that divides us is *how* we should have left, and what we do now. Making pronouncements on what is "right" and "wrong" is childish scorekeeping and absolves us from the sins that are still being committed.

I am sure that there are some Afghans who do not care which regime is in power, but I can think of certain demographics who are less likely to feel this way. I do not want to ignore them. I think we should not assume that Taliban rule will mean that people will live without fear of violence, as you seem to be suggesting. I am not speaking as someone who is trying to justify a war, but as someone who was disturbed by the editors' attempt to put a tidy bow on an already remarkably bloodless essay.

Rachel Ehmke, Pikesville, Md.

THAT SPECIAL NOTHING

Thank you so much for Jeff Reimer's exceptional article on Walker Percy and acedia ("Giving the Sickness a Name," September). Citing Mary Gordon's comment that acedia is Walker Percy's great theme beautifully captured his lifetime of great, meaningful writing.

I first became aware of Percy when I was in the Peace Corps in the late 1960s. I was stationed alone in a "parish" (county) without a town in the West Indies. It was a lonely experience, but I was able to enjoy Percy's first three novels while there and everything else after returning to the United States. I believe that *The Moviegoer* may be one of the finest "contemplations" I have ever read.

What impressed me most about Percy's protagonists was their searching quality, consistent with Reimer's references to signs of hope and contemplation. My suspicion is that many liberally educated males from my era relate positively to Percy's endearing persona—a deep-thinking, curious, kindly wiseacre! As Percy said in one of his essays, in order to be a good writer, you had to have that "special nothing." He certainly had it. Obviously, I still miss his wit and wisdom.

Charles G. Blewitt, Kingston, Pa.

BACKWARD RAN THE SENTENCES

Luke Timothy Johnson writes in his review of Sarah Ruden's translation of the Gospels ("Too Original," October), "I have not been able to locate a genuinely negative review of her earlier efforts, which gives me pause, because I have so many problems with this translation." One place Johnson didn't check was *Commonweal* itself, where in my review of Ruden's book specifically about the challenges of Bible translation ("Shop Talk," July 7, 2017), I illustrated my problems with that book by doing just as Johnson does and quoting representative examples, such as Ruden's translation of the Lord's Prayer:

> Father, our father in heaven above,
> Spoken in holiness must be your name.
> Into the world must come your kingdom,
> And into being whatever you have willed,
> In heaven the same way as here on earth.

Of this I wrote, "All I could think of, reading these lines, was Wolcott Gibbs's famous parody of Henry Luce's 'Time-style': 'Backward ran the sentences until reeled the mind.... Where it all will end, knows God.'"

Perhaps not "genuinely negative" by Johnson's standards but by Ruden's, I should think, rather less than positive.

Jack Miles, Santa Ana, Calif.

BETTER DEAD THAN RED

Thanks to Michael Peppard for the enlightening analogy between COVID-19

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LETTERS

vaccinations and traffic signals ("Persuading Anti-vaxxers," October). May I also pose: suppose there is a small but vocal minority of citizens who believe that the stopping color "red" was chosen for political reasons, and violates their constitutional right to commandeer this color as a signal to action (go!). These individuals are largely clandestine, but ubiquitous on social media, and are occasionally encouraged or praised by prominent civic leaders as "patriots." How do we reconcile their beliefs and actions with those of the majority? What is the impact on our stature among other urbanized countries, where many of us wish to drive?

Richard Foote, Shelburne, Vt.

TAKE ME TO YOUR READER

Santiago Ramos provides a fascinating discussion of earthlings' notions of aliens, and their possible impressions of us ("First Contact," October). His description of our current Zoom culture of virtual interaction was strangely predicted in E. M. Forster's 1910 "The Machine Stops," which seems to have inspired Pixar's film *WALL-E*. Ramos's description of Voltaire's *Micromegas* makes me want to read it. However, though Voltaire's tale may "have been called the first true example of science fiction," it isn't. Francis Bacon's 1626 *The New Atlantis* doesn't include extraterrestrials, but its characters have invented phones, televisions, and planes.

Grace Tiffany, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Mich.

WHAT WE HAVE GIVEN AWAY

I can't tell you how much I appreciated Gordon Marino's article ("The Why & the How," September). As I enter my eighty-third year, Marino's words resonate deeply within me. Our society is so fearful of dying and we try so hard to sugarcoat the inevitable. If that "why" in life is rooted in goods and achievements, how will that "how" ever be embraced? As has been said: we take with us only what we have given away grounded in love.

Bill Whalen, Olympia, Wash.

Make Them Pay

Across the world, there's an ongoing reckoning with the Pandora Papers' revelations about shadowy offshore accounts and the wealthy elites who hide their money in them. From corrupt oligarchs to politicians to celebrities, those named in the documents—the largest trove of leaked tax-haven files in history—now find themselves facing public outrage, or, in some cases, possible prosecution. Pop star Shakira and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair make appearances, while other names are less familiar—the kind of billionaires who are not especially interesting or glamorous but who are supremely well connected, like the childhood friend of Vladimir Putin linked to $2 billion in assets. Fourteen current or recent national leaders also appear in the papers. One of them, former Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, might have lost his reelection bid in October because of reports that he'd purchased a $22 million chateau in France—complete with two swimming pools and a movie theater—through shell companies that hid his identity. Even royalty hasn't been spared. The King of Jordan, already dealing with domestic turmoil, had his secret real-estate holdings abroad exposed.

The reaction in the United States, however, has been more muted. None of the most famous American billionaires—Amazon's Jeff Bezos, Tesla's Elon Musk, or Microsoft's Bill Gates—were identified in the Pandora Papers. The most likely reason? As the *Washington Post* explained, "billionaires in the United States tend to pay such low tax rates that they have less incentive to seek offshore havens." Indeed, one of the most depressing findings from the Pandora Papers is the extent to which the United States has itself become a sought-after "offshore" financial shelter for plutocrats. In recent decades, they've moved millions into trusts in states such as South Dakota, which the *Guardian* claims now "rivals Switzerland, Panama, the Cayman Islands, and other famous tax havens as a premier venue for the international rich seeking to protect their assets from local taxes or the authorities."

Perhaps the lack of sustained anger can be traced to Americans regularly being inundated with propaganda about the "virtues" and exploits of the ultrarich. Their wasteful pursuit of "space travel" while this planet burns is sold as an inspiring adventure, while the 70 percent increase in the fortunes of U.S. billionaires during the pandemic—over $2 trillion dollars in wealth—is met with a shrug by politicians perplexed by how to pay for social programs. It doesn't help that the Pandora Papers involve detailed investigations of complex financial maneuvering. The scope of this material, published through the work of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), is astonishing. It consists of nearly 12 million documents—2.94 terabytes of confidential information—from fourteen offshore service providers, and the ICIJ says that six hundred journalists in one hundred and seventeen countries and territories spent two years combing through it all.

What the Pandora Papers prove beyond doubt is that billions of dollars are being shielded from governments, tax authorities, and those who have been abused or cheated by the rich and are seeking restitution. The documents offer proof, if proof were still needed, that billionaires operate under different rules than the rest of us, and that they often pay less in taxes, proportionately, than workers struggling to get by.

It can seem, as Pope Francis put it recently in a fiery address to the World Meeting of Popular Movements, that the economy "is escaping all human control." But the Pandora Papers remind us that allowing billionaires to steal from the rest of us and get away with it really is a choice. South Dakota became an offshore destination for wealth because of decades of bad legislation, legislation that can be changed. One model for reform is the agreement brokered last month by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and backed by the Biden administration to institute a 15 percent global minimum tax. The plan is only a first step, and it is imperfect—according to the *New York Times*, it applies only to companies with annual revenue of more than $866 million. Still, the fact that such a proposal was adopted at all confirms that the status quo is indefensible, and that we are not powerless in the face of grotesque inequality and shocking greed. —*October 21, 2021*

The Antisocial Network

In terms of measurable damage to Facebook, the revelations of whistleblower Frances Haugen probably did less than the global outage it suffered around the same time she was testifying on Capitol Hill. On October 4, Facebook's platform and family of applications, including WhatsApp and Instagram, went dark for nearly six hours. The outage disconnected billions of users, disrupted operations for businesses around the world that rely on Facebook to reach customers, and kept millions of people from logging into their internet-connected devices and services. Facebook lost $13 million in advertising revenue every hour the platform was down, and its stock valuation dropped by $50 billion.

That doesn't make Haugen's revelations any less important. The public surely benefited from hearing about Facebook's practices from a former insider, information the company would rather keep to itself. This included research showing the harmful effects of Instagram on the emotional and mental health of teenage girls. It also included documents acknowledging that divisive political speech and misinformation on Facebook are affecting societies around the world, and that it is able to address only 3 to 5 percent of this material, contrary to public assurances it has been moderating content much better. Haugen also revealed that the company still emphasizes a metric known as "meaningful social interaction," promoting controversial, hot-button posts—like divisive political speech and misinformation—that drive emotionally fueled engagement and are far more widely viewed. In short, Facebook prioritizes profit over safety. This likely comes as no surprise to anyone who's followed the actions of a company that the *Atlantic*'s Adrienne LaFrance calls "a lie-disseminating instrument of civilizational collapse."

The question is what to do about it. Haugen's revelations were met with familiar-sounding harrumphs from lawmakers, who seem to realize the importance of reining in Facebook but still can't figure out just how to proceed. Granted, Facebook presents a different kind of challenge from, say, Big Tobacco or Standard Oil. It's a $1 trillion company with 2.9 billion users worldwide. In a little over fifteen years, it's become intertwined with numerous aspects of human activity, from communications to commerce to politics. (Notoriously, the Myanmar government used it to facilitate ethnic cleansing and genocide.) Some foreign policy analysts increasingly view Facebook, along with other tech giants, less as a company than as a sovereign state in its own right. Facebook has also proved resilient in the aftermath of punishment, having pretty much shrugged off the $5 billion fine levied by the Federal Trade Commission in 2019 for violating users' privacy. CEO Mark Zuckerburg's wealth—he owns 55 percent of Facebook—and the power of the tech lobby have something to do with this, as does the weakness of the underfunded, century-old Federal Trade Commission, which had sought bigger penalties and wanted to hold Zuckerburg directly liable. This doesn't bode well for the antitrust suit the FTC filed against Facebook in August.

What Congress could do is follow the lead of European regulators, who have been far more aggressive in holding tech companies to account. Recent House and Senate proposals aim at seeking greater transparency from Facebook on its algorithms and promotion of user content, and at rolling back protections from liability for the material that appears on its platform. But partisan squabbles and industry opposition continue to hamper things. Meanwhile, Facebook is poised to hire ten thousand new employees to build the metaverse, a "virtual environment," according to Zuckerberg, "where you can be present with people in digital spaces…an embodied internet that you're inside of rather than just looking at." But not to worry: Facebook offers every assurance it will undertake its work on the metaverse responsibly.

—Dominic Preziosi

Seeking Asylum

Images of horse-mounted border-patrol agents in Texas driving Haitian migrants toward the Rio Grande in September rightly horrified the world and embarrassed the Biden administration, which denounced the tactics and insisted "this is not who we are as a country." But in fact this is just what our country must be willing to countenance as long as we continue our policy of turning desperate people away at the border before they have the chance to apply for asylum.

Legally, anyone seeking asylum in the United States has the right to enter the country and apply for it. The Biden administration, like the Trump administration before it, has flouted this long-standing provision by citing the threat of Covid and invoking Title 42, which permits the United States to stop travel at the border to prevent the spread of communicable disease. Many people, including the top doctor at the CDC, say it has had little effect on public health and is really nothing but a pretext for enabling easy deportations. And on that count, it has proven highly effective. So far, the Biden administration has used it to deport seven hundred thousand people, including asylum seekers and migrants more broadly.

Summary deportation makes it easy for Americans not to think about the people being sent back to the places they had sought to escape. But people don't just "go away" when they're put aboard a plane or bus. Migrants held at or returned to the Mexican side of the border, for example, are at high risk of being robbed or physically or sexually attacked, and are also vulnerable to kidnapping and extortion by gangs (the court-mandated reinstitution of the "Remain in Mexico" policy, which

President Biden had discontinued, will only exacerbate this problem). Many of the thousands of migrants who had gathered in the town of Del Rio in September were eventually deported to Haiti—some who'd originally fled after the 2010 earthquake, others seeking refuge from the unrest following this summer's earthquake and the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse. Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas claimed that, despite these dire circumstances, "Haiti is in fact capable of receiving individuals." The decision prompted the resignation of Special Envoy for Haiti Daniel Foote, who explained that "the collapsed state is unable to provide security or basic services, and more refugees will fuel further desperation and crime."

President Biden has talked a lot about making our immigration policies more humane and increasing funding for immigration services, but the use of Title 42 belies these promises. Furthermore, it's a tacit admission by the administration that our immigration system, with its inadequate infrastructure and extensive backlog, is too broken to cope with the influx of arrivals. Unfortunately, comprehensive immigration reform is probably a long way off. But there are approaches that could be tried in the meantime. According to immigration aid and advocacy groups like the Hope Border Institute and Human Rights First, "faith-led organizations, humanitarian groups, legal services organizations, and other volunteers stand ready" with more than two thousand shelter beds available in the El Paso–New Mexico region. As of July, less than 10 percent of that capacity was in use. Given the fact that "the vast majority of migrant families and adults stay within the border shelter network for only 24 to 72 hours before traveling to other parts of the country," these facilities could accommodate thousands of new migrants each week. Programs like these can't substitute for meaningful federal policy, but the Biden administration could be more forthright in seeking such partners. They're out there. Even small steps like these would be better indicators of who we'd still like to be as a country.

—Isabella Simon

Sex Abuse & the French Church

The comprehensive report compiled by the independent commission investigating sexual abuse in the Catholic Church in France leaves little doubt about the scale and scope of the scandal. It estimates that 216,000 people were sexually assaulted by priests and men or women religious between 1950 and 2020, a total that reaches 330,000 when including those attacked by "lay aggressors working in institutions of the Catholic Church." Commission president Jean-Marc Sauvé spoke bluntly about the findings at a press conference on October 5: "We must get rid of the idea that sexual violence in the Catholic Church has been completely eradicated and that the problem is behind us: no, the problem remains."

The report notes that sexual violence is "significantly" higher in Church settings than in other institutional and social organizations, such as schools or camps; only in family settings is the risk of sexual abuse higher. Boys were found to represent nearly 80 percent of the victims, with a high concentration in children aged ten to thirteen, which the report ascribes to an "opportunity effect" for priests thanks to easier contact with boys in that age range (something the 2004 John Jay Report on sexual abuse in the U.S. Catholic Church had previously identified). The years between 1950 and 1969 saw the greatest number of attacks, while the number of cases fell sharply in the 1970s and '80s and has remained at about the same level since the 1990s. But the lower number of cases is attributed in part to the decrease in the number of priests and men and women religious, and to the drop in attendance at ecclesial institutions. The report also goes beyond the numbers to distinguish between different "logics of abuse and systems of control": abuse in the parish, abuse in school and other educational settings, and abuse in the family—as well as victimization by charismatic leaders and within new ecclesial movements. The report also devotes attention to the concept of "constructed ignorance," which prevents or makes it difficult for victims to identify or acknowledge abuse, as well as to the "silence, solitude, and suffering" that takes root among the community of abused Catholics. It calls out the "deviations of authority" and "deviations of the sacred" as typical of a Church too concerned with protecting the institution and exhibiting little regard for victims.

The day after the report's release, Pope Francis expressed both the Church's and his own shame, decrying "the too-long inability of the Church to put the victims at the center of her concerns." Yet the report also takes Francis to task. It calls for an examination of the requirements of celibacy and proposes that married men be considered for ordination to the priesthood. It also recommends that the Church reform its power structure, using Francis's very language of synodality. It demands a review of the teaching on sexual morality that doesn't separate it "from the Church's social doctrine and the equal dignity of all human beings" and also calls for changes in catechetical formation.

"In the interest of impartiality," as the commission put it, the group did not include any member of the institutional Church or any victim. Nevertheless, it made clear that victims were always at the center of its efforts. "The victims have a unique knowledge about sexual violence and only they are able to give us access to the subject. It is thanks to them that the report was able to be conceived and written." As Véronique Garnier—who works in abuse prevention in the diocese of Orléans and was herself abused as an adolescent—said upon the report's release: "Our word is finally shouted."

—Massimo Faggioli

A longer version of this article is available online.

A Mass in St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York City, 2020

CNS PHOTO/GREGORY A. SHEMITZ

Context & Commitment

Two responses to Peter Steinfels on the bishops, Eucharist, and abortion

Cardinal Blase J. Cupich

In his article "Separate Challenges" (September 2021), Peter Steinfels argues that the U.S. bishops do not need another document on the Eucharist but rather a strategy on the Eucharist. Many bishops agree, and have therefore proposed developing a strategy designed to lead to a Eucharistic revival in our Church. The essential starting point must be the needs of our people as they live in this present moment and culture. Context is key. Every effort should be made to avoid an ahistorical presentation of the Eucharist that is abstracted from daily life.

With that in mind, I offer five themes that might be considered in shaping a process that invites dialogue with the people we serve and reflects the pastoral, catechetical, and formational challenges that are specific to the U.S. context today: the imperative to worship; the necessity of the Eucharist; the Eucharist as call to participation; the Eucharist as model of self-giving; the Eucharist as the sacrament of the Lord's abiding presence.

The Imperative of Worship

In Catholic tradition, the Eucharist is the central act of worship that sustains the life of faith. Worship itself, however, is often marginalized in a culture that is driven by deep-seated commitments to individual freedom, self-fulfillment, and self-expression.

In practice, Americans, including many Catholics, view worship as one choice among many, something one does if one so desires, or has time. My predecessor, Cardinal Francis George, OMI, suggested that many people, again including Catholics, put Sunday worship on par with other recreational choices or tasks to complete. If one has the time and inclination, one will go to church—or, if not, choose to go shopping, do laundry, or watch football.

If Eucharistic formation, catechesis, and revival are to happen, then the Church and its leaders must address this fundamental question of worship: Is it, in fact, optional or is it necessary?

The words of the Yiddish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer come to mind. He said, in effect, that if we don't worship God, we will worship something else, and perhaps, tragically, we will worship ourselves.

In Catholic catechesis, the Sunday obligation has traditionally had its roots in the Third Commandment, "Remember to keep holy the Lord's Day." Of course, keeping holy the Lord's Day entails worship. But perhaps the obligation and, even more, the necessity of Sunday worship is more tied to the First Commandment: "You shall not have false gods before me." We will inevitably worship because there is something

in our nature that moves us to awe and surrender before something greater than ourselves. The question, however, is what or whom will we worship? In a self-referential age plagued by all kinds of addictions and a (not unrelated) thick culture of consumerism, our worship can easily steer us away from God. The ever-present danger in this moment is idolatry. Consequently, if we are to spare ourselves the entrapments of the many idols that mark our lives, then worship of God is necessary. Indeed, there is a Eucharistic imperative. And this leads to a second and related theme of the vital importance of the Eucharist.

The Eucharist as a Matter of Life and Death

Americans might be able to comprehend the great importance of worship, but to characterize the Eucharist as a matter of life and death may seem to be an excessively dramatic description. In fact, the words of Jesus support this vital sense of the Eucharist and Eucharistic worship: "Jesus said to them, 'Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day'" (John 6:53–54).

We need to take Jesus at his word. Any Eucharistic formation, catechesis, and revival must have a strong biblical base in the words and actions of Jesus. This passage from John 6 illustrates the importance of staying close to the Word as a means of staying close to the Eucharist. And the words of Jesus about the bread of life clearly resonate in these trying days when death-dealing forces appear to have the upper hand. Think of the pandemic, the street violence and killing that plagues our cities, the disrespect for human life in its most vulnerable stages and conditions, the lethal degradation of the environment, and the specter of war that haunts the world. An essential catechetical task today is to draw a line from the deadly challenges we face today to the Eucharist as the bread of *life*. If we do so, then it is no exaggeration to say that the Eucharist is a matter of life and death.

The Eucharist as Summons to Participation

The heart of the Eucharistic prayers we hear at Mass includes four actions that we are to perform in memory of Jesus: *he took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it.* The Eucharist is not fundamentally a static reality. The Eucharist is an action or an event, the Lord's action in his Paschal Mystery, which summons our participation.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Pope St. Pius X identified the essential nature of liturgical participation. He said that the first and foremost source of the Christian life is active participation (*actuosa participatio*) in the liturgy. This summons to active participation developed across the twentieth century and culminated in the directions offered in the Second Vatican Council's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (SC)*. The Council identified the internal and external aspects of participation and its dimensions as active, conscious, full, and fruitful (*actuosa, conscia, plena, fructuosa*).

Some sixty years after the promulgation of *SC*, many Catholics neither know their call to active participation in the Eucharistic mysteries nor have they made an intentional commitment to it. At best, active participation seems to mean having a particular role to play in the liturgy (greeter, server, lector, Communion minister). The full and conscious participation that means internally joining ourselves to the death and resurrection of the Lord celebrated in the Eucharist seems to have eluded many Catholics.

In place of active participation, some seem to view their engagement with Eucharistic worship in a number of other ways: the fulfillment of an obligation, a meditative moment in their otherwise busy lives, or as an opportunity to receive inspiration or encouragement. How many of our Catholic brothers and sisters seem to conceive of the liturgy as a spectator sport? How often do we hear, "But I don't get anything out of it"? The passivity suggested by such an approach is the opposite of active participation.

Any effective Eucharistic catechesis, formation, or revival must take into account not only the Eucharist in itself but also our response to the Eucharist. That means focusing on the understanding of active participation in the Eucharist.

From the Sacrifice of Jesus to Our Sacrificial Living

Active participation (*participatio actuosa*) must also be fruitful participation (*participatio fructuosa*). As we join ourselves to the self-sacrificing love of Jesus manifested on the cross, we are called to replicate his sacrifice in our daily lives. When we do that, we live out his mission through our decisions, actions, and relationships. The sacrifice of Jesus encountered in the Eucharist is both the model for our lives and what enables our self-sacrificing love.

Too few Catholics truly grasp that the Eucharist necessarily leads us out of the liturgy into ordinary life, where we enact what we have celebrated. Our context may be marriage and family, the workplace, the wider community, and even the natural world itself. More commonly, people tend to view the Eucharistic celebration as self-contained, whose lessons and imperatives can be safely left in church until next Sunday. Yet true participation in the Eucharist necessarily shapes our moral choices, orienting us to serve those in need, and guiding us to strengthen relationships.

Americans tend to live largely compartmentalized lives. We feel comfortable separating realms of living—for example, the private, public, religious, civic, financial, or recreational. The Eucharist, however, calls us to an integrated life marked by the same self-sacrificing love that is celebrated as the great mystery of our faith. In effect, the challenge of Eucharistic catechesis, formation, and revival in this context is really a challenge of imagination. We are invited to reimagine our lives as oriented toward unity and integration through the Eucharist. It is for this reason that great care should be given not to make the Body and Blood of Christ

into an object we control. No, active participation in Eucharistic worship is rather the primary way in which we experience our transformation in Christ.

The Eucharist Is the Sacrament of the Lord's Abiding Presence

Eucharistic adoration is a legitimate development of piety in the Western Church with many benefits for those who engage in it. Adoration highlights the abiding presence of the Lord in his sacrament. And with that sense of presence, we also grasp his availability to us. As a spiritual practice, adoration offers an opportunity for quiet and meditative prayer focused on the Lord present in his sacrament. In recent decades, this form of prayer has gained followers in the United States for whom it has become a very important dimension of their spirituality.

Although there are many positive elements in Eucharistic adoration, it also needs the context and direction of Eucharistic catechesis and formation to avoid narrowness and even distorted perceptions of the sacrament itself. For example, without the proper context, Eucharistic adoration can privatize one's relationship to the sacrament and to the Lord himself. Although the prayer associated with adoration can and should be personal, it cannot be merely private and authentically Eucharistic at the same time. The liturgical books that offer the pathway for adoration assume a community context—proclamation of the Word of God, perhaps some music, and a common gathering of the faithful for adoration. Similarly, adoration cannot "objectify" the Eucharist, making it a static reality. Adoration must come from and lead to the Eucharistic celebration. It is never detached or entirely separated from the liturgical celebration.

These concerns about Eucharistic adoration also apply to various forms of popular piety that have a Eucharistic dimension. Catechesis and formation must help the faithful see the link between the Eucharistic liturgy and their own devotional practices. That same catechesis and formation should also encourage these manifestations of popular religiosity to maintain and even strengthen their communal or community character.

Catholic leaders, including bishops, should not be afraid to give this matter the time and attention it deserves, as our singular aim must be serving the people of God in a way that builds up the Body of Christ. Peter Steinfels is right: we do need a strategy for launching a Eucharistic revival that begins with addressing the particular cultural-historical context and the questions that belong to this moment in American life. But if that strategy is to be successful, it must be grounded in a robust and sound theology that reminds us what the Eucharist means, not only for our practice of worship, but also for how we leaven the world the Lord made for us.

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Robert P. Imbelli

Peter Steinfels's article "Separate Challenges: The bishops, the Eucharist, and abortion" poses a challenge not merely to the bishops, but to the whole people of God. It is the challenge to appropriate and to *realize* our Eucharistic identity as the Body of Christ. Indeed, Steinfels endorses Timothy O'Malley's claim that "the whole Church is a Eucharistic reality."

The proximate occasion of Steinfels's article is the proposed document on "Eucharistic coherence" being drafted by the Doctrinal Committee of the United States Bishops Conference. Steinfels proposes that what Catholics need is not a document on the Eucharist, but rather "a pastoral strategy on the Eucharist." In support of this stance, Steinfels cites a 2019 Pew survey that found that only 31 percent of Catholics believe that at Mass the bread and wine "actually become the body and blood of Jesus Christ." To his great credit Steinfels takes this sobering fact seriously. Hence his contention that "what is needed is not another doctrinal statement on Real Presence but a strategy that would reverse the decades-long decline in weekly worship."

This is where he finds O'Malley's insights helpful. Among those insights is the imperative that "every aspect of our lives become Eucharistic." Hence the need to create "a Eucharistic culture of affiliation" that moves beyond liturgical worship to embrace the entirety of the believer's life, personal, social, and political. Moreover, an examination of conscience regarding Eucharistic coherence is incumbent not only on the individual believer, but upon parish and diocese as well. Eucharistic celebration and Eucharistic reception are not private, but public and corporate: the privileged manifestation of the Body of Christ.

I fully endorse all these principles. Indeed, over the years I have maintained that, as a constitutive dimension of Christian faith, one can and must become, with God's grace, a "Eucharistic self": one who embodies a Eucharistic consciousness and practice. Hence the following observations are intended not to counter Steinfels's proposal, but to press it further, to suggest the magnitude of the challenge and the commitment required.

To speak of "declining belief in the Real Presence" or "disaffiliation" from the Church does not yet meet the full seriousness of what we face. There is a yet deeper disaffiliation. It may be broached by posing the question: *Whose* "real presence" are we talking about? If the Eucharist is an encounter with the living person of Jesus Christ, then disaffiliation from the Eucharistic liturgy is defection from Jesus Christ himself.

Decades of theological and cultural questioning of the salvific uniqueness of Christ have conspired to promote a de facto "apostasy"—a turning away from Jesus Christ as Savior of the world. If the stark term "apostasy" seems excessive, one need only attend to the unsentimental witness of the New Testament itself. The Gospel of John speaks of those who *turned back* because of Jesus' "hard

saying" (John 6:66), while the Letter to the Hebrews sadly laments those who "*forsake* the assembly" (Hebrews 10:25).

Thus, "who do you say I am?" remains the crucial question antecedent to any meaningful examination of belief in the Real Presence or participation in Sunday Eucharist. For one's response to that question will determine the importance attached to the sacrament. If Jesus Christ is merely an exemplary human being from a remote era, then claiming to encounter him really present in the Eucharist is wishful thinking and liturgical pretense.

A second point follows. Uplifting terms like "Eucharistic selfhood" or "holistic Eucharistic formation" must not camouflage the true cost of discipleship, the price of transformation. As (the Anglo-Catholic) T. S. Eliot put it, "the cost is not less than everything." But here Eliot is only recapitulating centuries of spiritual classics from Augustine through John of the Cross and Teresa of Ávila to Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein). And they, in turn, are rooted in Paul's inspired recognition of the radical consequences of transformation in Christ. "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you which you have from God? You are not your own, you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19–20). Note that the "your" in both cases is plural, indicating the corporate nature of the new reality Paul is describing.

"You are not your own, you belong to Christ." By giving his body for us, Christ has incorporated us into the new reality that is his ecclesial body. And the Eucharist is the privileged sacrament of incorporation. We must be expropriated of the "old self" so that we may be appropriated into Christ: beginning with Paul, this is the constant teaching of the great mystics—those who have perceived most acutely the implications of belonging to Christ. They all testify that the movement toward the new Eucharistic self passes through the crucified heart of the Lord. It is ineluctably paschal in shape, but its fruit is the new creation. And this paschal logic must govern all efforts to create and sustain a "Eucharistic culture."

This leads to a third observation. Although Steinfels makes passing reference to believers being "formed or malformed by cultural liturgies"—the various cultural activities to which we devote much more time than to the ecclesial liturgy—he gives little attention to the anti-Eucharistic nature of the culture in which Christians are immersed and "malformed." This is understandable in a programmatic article, but a pastoral strategy on the Eucharist would also need to consider what Eugene McCarraher calls "the Enchantments of Mammon"—the title of his recent book on the conflict between capitalism and Christianity. (David Bentley Hart wrote an appreciative review of it in *Commonweal*, January 2020.)

I am not suggesting that McCarraher's eight-hundred-page tome be assigned reading for all Catholics, but its concerns need to figure in any realistic attempt to work towards a Eucharistic culture of affiliation on the multiple levels Steinfels indicates.

I would, however, strongly recommend as required reading chapter three of Pope Francis's encyclical, *Laudato si'*: "The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis." Here the pope severely criticizes the reductive anthropology of secular modernity. Its rampant individualism, which wreaks havoc upon both the human community and the natural environment, manifests itself in a "disordered desire to consume," resulting in what the pope calls "a throwaway culture." He argues there can be "no ecology without an adequate anthropology." Such an anthropology would insist on humanity's relational nature. As Francis puts it: "It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected."

In this regard I find myself in strong disagreement with one assertion in Steinfels's article. Commenting on the two topics of the Eucharist and abortion, Steinfels writes: "At one narrow point they overlap." I would argue that the point is not "narrow," for it concerns the essence of Eucharistic selfhood and culture. Factors like fear and despair may diminish subjective culpability for abortion; objectively, however, abortion is the very icon of an anti-Eucharistic attitude. It is the radical contra-diction of the generative Eucharistic word: "My body for you." Pope Francis is unambiguous on this point: "Since everything is interrelated, concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion." Eucharistic coherence is "catholic"—that is, comprehensive—because all is interconnected.

In the last chapter of *Laudato si'* Pope Francis issues an urgent appeal for an "ecological conversion." As he develops this, it becomes ever clearer that, at its deepest, ecological conversion is Eucharistic conversion. He summons his readers to embody attitudes of "gratitude and generosity" as we realize our participation in a "universal communion." Such conversion culminates in, and is sustained by, the Eucharistic sacrifice itself, which is "the living center of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life." The Eucharist is the Real Presence of the living Lord where, "in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation," Jesus Christ chooses "to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter.... The Eucharist joins heaven and earth, it embraces and penetrates all creation."

May such Eucharistic faith and imagination inspire all Catholics as they write documents, create strategies, or advocate policies. Let the epigraph for each of these undertakings be the apostolic exhortation: "I beseech you, brothers and sisters, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" (Rom 12:1–2).

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AUSTEN IVEREIGH

Speak Boldly, Listen Carefully

Inside the synod

At the start of July, in preparation for what has become known as the "Synod on Synodality," the general secretariat of the synod's spirituality commission convened a meeting of the heads of religious orders in Rome. In the big aula of the Jesuit Curia on the Borgo Santo Spirito were gathered the superiors general of the Jesuits, the Marists, the Claretians, the Eudists, and the Salesians, along with the master of the Dominicans, the vicar general of the Augustinians, the Benedictine abbot primate general, and so on, together with the presidents of the umbrella bodies of male and female religious across the Catholic world, whether contemplative, apostolic, or charismatic. The point of the gathering? To share experiences from the many different traditions of synodality and collective discernment. Or, in simpler language, to find out how the different orders make decisions, elect leaders, and hear the Holy Spirit nudging them to change.

While in Rome for the October 9–10 launch of the synod, I heard about this gathering from a number of those who were involved, among them the woman who has become the synod's face and voice. What the meeting showed, the French Xaverian Sr. Nathalie Becquart told me, was how each of the orders had developed different mechanisms of deliberating as a body and reaching consensus—whether classically, in the form of the "General Chapters" of monasteries and friaries, or as exercises in group discernment as developed, say, by the Jesuits. Many religious institutes had regular assemblies, others engaged in consultations prior to decision-making, while some combined consultative and deliberative practices. The diversity of methods and traditions was tremendous. Yet alongside the clear lines of authority and obedience in most religious orders were two elements they all seemed to have in common.

Pope Francis celebrates a Mass to open the process that will lead to the assembly of the world Synod of Bishops in 2023, October 10, 2021.

CNS PHOTO/REMO CASILLI, REUTERS

The first is that discernment and decision-making are the business of the whole body, not just of the few entrusted with governance. In his landmark October 2015 synod speech, Pope Francis quoted an ancient maxim: *Quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus tractari et approbari debet* ("what affects everyone should be discussed and approved by all"). And because, as St. Benedict notes in his seventh-century rule, God sometimes speaks through the youngest in the community, enabling participation means paying special attention to the timid edges, to the unlikely places, to those outside.

The second is that this business of consultation and deliberation is not separate from the life of prayer but intrinsic to it. The *habitus* of community decision-making is attentive listening to others, straining for the whispers of the Spirit even in the mouths of people we resent or disagree with. It calls, therefore, for giving time to all, in equal measure, for speaking honestly and boldly but not hammering others with our views, for sitting in peaceful, open silence so that we can hear what words do not always say and can often conceal. Synodality requires us to understand that we do not possess the truth, but that sometimes, when we put aside our emotions and agendas, it possesses us, overflowing the narrow channels of our thinking.

In short, participation and prayerful listening are the hallmarks of these religious orders' *modus vivendi*, *operandi*, *et cogitandi*. This is synodality. It has been used for Church elections ever since the apostles asked God to reveal to their hearts who should take the place of Judas. It has been used to transcend problems and conflicts ever since the "Jewish question" threatened to blow apart the early Church. Chapter 15 of the Acts of the Apostles relates how, at the Council of Jerusalem, the people, the elders, and the Spirit were all engaged in discerning the new path for the Church, announced by St. Peter's in those famous words: "It has seemed to the Holy Spirit and to us."

Yet for reasons of history—the corruption of worldliness, the lure of power, the entanglement with empires—synodality was squeezed out of the Church, leaving its authority structures looking less like what we find in Acts and more like the absolute monarchies and corporate command-and-control structures of the modern world.

No one now needs to be told where that has gotten us. The morning of my meeting with the synod subsecretary, Sr. Nathalie, the newspapers were full of stories about the 2,500-page Jean-Marc Sauvé report commissioned by French bishops looking into clerical sexual abuse since 1950. The figures were astonishing, and the headlines and quotes carried the usual shock-and-shame adjectives, worn from repetition. But I was struck by the timing of the report, just days before the opening of the synod, and the way it honed in on what it called the "excessive sacralization of the person of the priest," as if the sacralization of any person could ever be other than excessive. Clericalism—the idolatry of clergy, the worship of the institution, the abuse of power—had again been laid bare, and it was not just a *trahison des clercs* this time but of lay people too: endemic, cultural, systemic "deviations of authority," as Sauvé put it, that seemed to be built into the very structures of the Catholic Church.

Over *caffé lungo* opposite the synod offices at 34 Via della Conciliazione, Sr. Nathalie also seized on Sauvé's report. A "synodal conversion" meant, she said, we can no longer have a Church that permits the kind of culture of domination shamed in the report. A Church in which ordinary people are heard, and recognize themselves as having agency—as missionary disciples, distinct from clergy by function but equal in dignity—is no longer a Church that allows for, or is blind to, the abuse of power and conscience on which the sexual exploitation of vulnerable people depends.

"There is no need to create another Church," said Pope Francis in the synod hall on October 9, quoting Yves Congar's *True and False Reform in the Church*. The task was instead "to create a different Church," the one reimagined by the Second Vatican Council's *Lumen gentium*. A synodal Catholic Church is still a *communio hierarchica*, but authority is no longer exercised in a remote and authoritarian way. Leadership becomes "co": a matter of collaboration, cooperation, and co-responsibility. (This comes easily to young people, says Sr. Nathalie, who has worked with them for years. She calls them "*Generation Co.*") In a co-responsible Church the Spirit leads us all; the priest and the bishop are in the midst of the people of God, not hovering over them. It is the Church founded by Jesus Christ, but also reflecting him: no longer abusive, no longer clericalist, but *synodal*.

And then this occurred to me. Historians will gaze back at 2021, see the accumulation of scandals and dysfunctions, and tell how a Jesuit pope—assisted by a dynamic Xaverian French missionary sister—set in motion a vast reform, centered on rewakening the dormant Catholic tradition of synodality. Pointing back to the monastically inspired eleventh-century Gregorian reform, or the Franciscan revolution of the thirteenth century, or the Jesuits at the Counter-Reformation, historians will see a new chapter in an old story, repeated so often throughout Church history, of the religious orders again coming to the rescue of a crisis-ridden diocesan Church.

So it is hardly surprising if your bishop and parish priest seem to be irritably going through the motions of this new synod process, trying their best to shrug it all off. It is, after all, how most of the secular Church first responded to the Gregorian Reform.

To my grateful surprise, I was invited into the synod hall itself on the morning of October 9, along with scarlet-capped curial cardinals, many fewer diocesan bishops (each continent has been asked to send a delegation of ten), and plenty of religious and lay people, many of them young. In our armrests were the microphones and earphones bishops at synods use to "speak boldly and listen carefully," as Francis

instructed them to do at the start of the family synod in October 2014.

Despite an unusually heavy week, the pope was in cracking form. He reminded us that the synod is not a parliament or an opinion poll but an "ecclesial event whose protagonist is the Holy Spirit." He doled out some conciliar ecclesiology: the three keywords of this synod—communion, participation, and mission—are intrinsic to the Church regenerated by Vatican II, the first two reflecting the life of the Trinity, the third reflecting the apostolic commitment to today's world that flows therefrom.

But then Francis leaned into one of the keywords in particular. Without *participation*, he said, synodality risks remaining abstract and "talk about communion remains a devout wish." Without "real involvement"—turning up, speaking, being heard, acting—synodality stays on paper. Participation, he said, is a matter not of form but of faith. What happens at baptism is the conferral of "the equal dignity of the children of God." Baptism therefore demands that we take part in the life and mission of the Church, in all the diversity of its charisms and ministries.

Yet, fifty years after the Council, Francis knows that is not what happens. Despite some advances, "a certain resistance [*fatica*] remains," he said, treading delicately. Recognizing "the frustration and impatience felt by many pastoral workers, members of diocesan and parish consultative bodies, and women, who frequently remain on the fringes," he then added that the participation of all is an "essential ecclesial obligation." I was struck by the wording: the obligation is on the Church to enable participation. The lack of participation of God's people is the result not of their reluctance, timidity, or *acedia*, in other words, but of a Church that too often denies them agency. Later in the speech, speaking of the graces of this worldwide synodal process, Francis returned to the point: now is the chance, he said, to advance "not just haphazardly but *structurally*" in the direction of a synodal Church, which he defined as "an open square where all can feel at home and participate."

This critique was not taken up in the other speeches, which stressed the invitation to participate but passed over the ecclesial obstacles to doing so. "The entire people of God are being called, for the first time, to take part in a Synod of Bishops," said Cristina Inogés Sanz, a Spanish theologian, "and included in the invitation are those to whom we did not know how to listen, who left without our noticing they were gone—they too are invited to make their voices heard, to send us their reflections, their concerns, their pain." The synod's chair or general relator, the Luxembourg Jesuit Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, who is tasked with summarizing the responses, said the pages of the future working document were blank and he had no idea what he would be writing. It is "up to you to fill them," he told us, stressing that "everyone can participate, especially the poorest, the voiceless, those on the periphery." But no one noted the *how* question Francis had gently raised: how the structures of the Church would need to change in order to facilitate the participation of the whole body.

At mid-morning came the chance to model the synodal method, when we broke into pre-assigned small language groups of about twenty people each, made up of curial heads (there were three dicastery chiefs in my English group "E"), diocesan bishops, Rome-based religious, the odd ecumenical guest, and lay people of various sorts. Our facilitator invited us to speak about how "journeying together" happened (or not) in our local Church, and our hopes and fears for the global synod process.

The method was interesting. After introductions, we reflected silently for five minutes, preparing our input. Each person spoke for a maximum of three minutes. Then came five more minutes of silent reflection. Then, after re-reading their notes, each person shared for a further two minutes whatever had enlightened or resonated with them. (The guidance we were given beforehand invited us to consider what the Spirit seemed to be calling us to, what paths were being opened, and to note "inner spiritual movements" of joy or sadness, anxiety or confidence, consolation or desolation.) Finally, there was a free-form time of about twenty minutes for "discerning and elaborating the synthesis," which would be written up as a *verbale* to be sent to the synod secretariat.

It was striking that the senior Vatican people—cardinals and bishops—offered theological soundbites, while the religious and lay people spoke of experiences. The soundbites were good: Francis was giving the Church permission to be what *Lumen gentium* envisaged; synodality was the antidote to individualism and tribal division; we had now the chance to recover the original way of "being Church," allowing decisions to bubble up from below. But the experiences were far more compelling, especially those of religious sisters who described the efforts of their orders to become more synodal in their way of governing and making decisions. It meant, they said, a shift in mindset and culture, accepting a greater degree of uncertainty and tension than many were comfortable with. Yet building prayer and listening into the processes had led to a heightened awareness of the margins, to more unity and joy, and to greater humility. They spoke of the temptation of worldliness, of lapsing into an authoritarian attempt to present an outward face of uniformity and efficiency, rather than accepting their conflicts and uncertainties and waiting on the Spirit for answers to emerge.

As they spoke, it seemed obvious that synodality and holiness were intertwined, that a synodal Church better reflects, as Francis had just told us, "God's style, which is closeness, compassion, and tenderness." In my small group I saw no tongues of fire. But reviewing the experience afterwards, it felt authentic, as if this is how the Church should be: where cardinals, bishops, religious, and lay people listen to each other as equals.

And then, almost at once, I felt sad at the thought of how far so many of our dioceses and parishes are from this culture, and how the Church's many

non-synodal structures would soon be deployed to resist it.

The following morning, in St. Peter's—my first papal Mass in well over a year due to Covid—Francis officially opened the synod. It was gently joyful, expectant, but with no fanfare. The Gospel reading was about Jesus meeting a rich man on the road. Jesus, said Francis in his usual homily habit of picking out three words, *encountered* him, *listened* to him, and *helped* him discern what he must do. So, too, in this synod process: we need to be present to others, to listen with the heart and not judge. "Let us not soundproof our hearts; let us not be barricaded in our certainties," he urged. Jesus was calling us, as he called the rich young man, "to empty ourselves, to free ourselves from all that is worldly, including our inward-looking and outworn pastoral models; and to ask ourselves what it is that God wants to say to us in this time."

The day before, in his synod speech, Francis had mentioned the neglect of Adoration, and he mentioned it again now, in his homily, where he spoke of the importance of "devoting time to Adoration." The repetition niggled at me. Why bring up this form of prayer so dear to him—he practices it every evening at 9 p.m. without fail—in relation to the synod? Then I realized: Adoration is the synodal prayer *par excellence*, because it is where we awaken to our agency. When we are present to Jesus, in communion with him in the Eucharist, we are known, recognized, and loved. We *participate*.

Sitting in on its commission meetings during the following days, I could not help being struck by the fragility of the synod's infrastructure in comparison with the scale of its ambition. No secular organization would ever launch such a great enterprise with so few resources and with such little preparation. The tiny synod leadership team, recently bolstered by an experienced new communications director, Thierry Bonaventura, is superb, and they are supported by four commissions: spirituality, theology, methodology, and communications. But most commission members are meeting in person now for the first time, and the scale of what needs to be done seems absurd.

In the comms commission we chew over the challenges, beginning with unfamiliar terminology. How to define synod when it is at the same time the standing institution in Rome and the process just launched? How to get across that this is a transformative process, a synodal *conversion* whose fruit is a change of culture, while at the same time communicating that it is an unconditioned process, open to the prompts of the Spirit? How to explain that, while anything can be discussed and raised, only bishops vote and the pope decides? How to deal with false expectations and misplaced fears? We work hard, draw up documents, bring in the Vatican film crews to do mock interviews with members of the methodology commission. But it seems amazing to be doing it all just days before the diocesan phase opens.

And yet, when at lunch the next day a veteran Vatican official tells me it is foolish for the pope to launch such an ambitious process during what he calls the "declining chapter" of the pontificate, I vigorously disagree. Francis has been building to this over the past eight years, I say, teaching us synodality in speeches and documents and the gatherings of bishops to wrestle with big topics such as family, young people, and the Amazon. He has decided to bring the people of God together now, to invite them into the synodal process as discerning subjects, because he has glimpsed a *kairos*, an opportune time. After more than a year of fearful self-isolation and closed churches, what better moment to assemble the faithful to listen to the Spirit? From a worldly point of view it looks impossible, I say, but who is in charge here? How did it look when St. John XXIII announced the Second Vatican Council?

The next day, in a joint meeting of the commissions in the Jesuit Curia, tensions surface. The theologians—there are some big names here—worry that they have not been given a clear mandate to develop a theology of synodality. Some of the spirituality members are concerned that these meetings are themselves insufficiently synodal. How to develop a synodal *habitus* with such long, content-packed meetings? Such frustrations are part of the synod experience, which is always, as a Jesuit puts it, a "race against time."

Nowhere is that truer than in what will be the hugely complex task of distilling what has been said and experienced. The Latin Americans, who have been doing this since 1968, say that while it's important to be creative in synthesizing, the main task is to be faithful to what you receive, to look for the "fine pearls" in the language of the people. What is needed, says one theologian, is *homo sinodalis*: people with a synodal heart, who facilitate rather than impose, who can spot the emergence of the "new thing" the Spirit is calling forth.

There are no illusions here. A PowerPoint slide lists the obstacles: the lack of interest and awareness, the paucity of information and skills, the infrastructural challenges of poor nations' dioceses, the huge task of somehow coming together in parish groups yet at the same time reaching out to the wounded, the alienated, and the disaffected.

And yet this is not an anxious meeting. The interventions are good-humored and confident. There is joy here, a quiet faith that all will be well, that a synodal Church—tense, messy, humble, but an open square for all—is what God asks of Catholicism in the third millennium. There is confidence, too, that the people of God will, over time, hear the call to assemble. And when they do, that they will speak boldly and listen carefully, and that somehow, in spite of all the resistances and obstacles, not another but a *different* Church will come forth. *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*.

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SUSAN BIGELOW REYNOLDS

Going Gray

November reminds us of the communion of saints and the company of the dead.

I've been observing with some tenderness the ways in which my friends are going gray. One at the temples, another with ethereal opal strands, a third with magnificent waves of peppery black. My younger brother started graying in his twenties. They came in patchy at first: a sideburn, a cowlick, a shock of white on the back of his head. A decade later, the gray has established itself with authority. My husband, whose sandy brown hair makes a less obvious contrast to gray, is manifesting the passage of time in his eyebrows, which have begun to grow gangly and askew in that unmistakable old-man way.

When I was young, the women around me talked about the appearance of gray hairs with the same repulsed urgency I use when reporting cockroach sightings to the exterminator. Grays were dreaded indicators of mortality, confirmations of the ways we're beholden to time. Such antipathy always confused me, though: gray seemed mysterious and dignified, the undisputed coif of choice for writers and lighthouse-keepers and lupine-planters. Not long after the pandemic's first apocalyptic spring, I began to notice my own gray hairs emerge, then multiply. One morning I knelt to tie my oldest daughter's shoes, and she exclaimed with mischievous glee that the top of my head was speckled with white. The sudden ingression of these unbidden strands seemed, for all intents and purposes, right and just. Death was doing its thing on the world. The hair was my own *memento mori*, a cross of ashes threaded onto my body. Reminders of death's nearness were everywhere, and they were almost uniformly terrifying. But these slivers of gray forecasted my someday-death in a different voice: they felt beautiful, familiar, like the whisper of a confidant. Here, it seemed, was the companion to St.

A painting of the communion of saints, Padua

Francis's Sister Death. I could wear fragility like a crown.

November is the month of mortality—the month of saints and souls. God may remain confoundingly hidden, but saints leave trails of matter: bones and teeth and corpses that miraculously refuse to decompose, catacombed skeletons adorned with jewels, vials of blood and locks of hair, tunics and tilmas and roses out of season, and things stranger still—severed heads and eyeballs on a plate and candles that heal throat ailments. It's little wonder that these November days give way to dark Advent longing for God enfleshed.

An old friend, now ordained, sent us a second-class relic of Alberto Hurtado, Chile's beloved saint of the poor. The tiny square of black cassock is laminated onto a holy card the size of a sugar packet. The relic lives on the makeshift altar in our Useless Wall Alcove, a distinctive feature of early 2000s-era home construction built to contain faux-Tuscan vases filled with decorative sticks. Alberto Hurtado's cassock fragment is joined by the artifacts of fellow faithful departed: a soft-focus portrait of my grandmother as a young woman, my great-grandmother staring down the camera with Depression-era severity, my husband's late mother cradling him at his baptism. My great aunts—their pictures are there, too—lived in a small Midwestern brick house whose contents were roughly 80 percent holy cards. You couldn't open a cookbook without somebody's funeral card falling out. I have since learned that if you live in a place long enough, it's only a matter of time before the dead start making their homes between the pages of books, wedging themselves into the corners of picture frames, fastening themselves to the side of the refrigerator.

My middle daughter, age five, talks about death with the macabre familiarity of a mystic. After a driveway visit with our 91-year-old neighbor, Lucy asked when my face would be covered in lines like Mr. Ed's. Then she asked me when I'll die. Once I took a video in which I asked her ordinary questions, hoping to create a charming artifact of her innocent early years.

"What's your favorite food?" I asked.

"Skeleton bones," she responded, cackling.

These days I find myself looking down at my hands with their veins like dried riverbeds, like distant satellite images of possible planetary water. I look in the mirror at my forehead with its permanent creases, evidence of too much squinting and smiling and furrowing. I sweep back my scattering of gray hairs. It feels like such a different thing, to watch the passage of years written on my body.

"*Contento, Señor, contento*," Alberto Hurtado was known to say, even as pancreatic cancer was ending his life. "I'm content, Lord. I'm content." Hurtado, a Jesuit, seemed to have embraced that elusive Ignatian spiritual discipline of indifference, a non-defensive vulnerability to the will of God and to reality. Paradoxically, his practiced contentment made him more, not less, committed to justice, which he sought in corporal—which is to say, bodily—works of mercy among those whose own bodies society had deemed most expendable. Maybe it's contentment I'm seeking when I marvel at the graying hair of the people with whom I was once young. Sanctity is often miscast as the ascetic subordination of our fallible, decaying bodies to the eternity of the soul, as if the one can be extracted from the other. But November's saints invite us, I think, to embrace the body as the site of companionship: with one another, with time, with God. Maybe that's what relics are; their bones speak to our bones, their flesh to our flesh. In the communion of saints, the dead keep company with one another. In funeral programs and fragments of cloth and steadily graying hair, they keep us company, too.

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Where Two or More

The varieties of religious community today

Members of the Norbertine Fathers' St. Michael's Abbey process on the grounds of the abbey in Silverado, California.

CNS PHOTO/COURTESY ST. MICHAEL'S ABBEY

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In April 2020, just as Covid began sweeping across the United States, *Commonweal* published a special feature about parish life in this country, examining how recent changes visible in the pews reflected broader dynamics in the Church and society at large. More than a year and a half later, with the lasting effects of the pandemic beginning to come into focus, we are now publishing a set of articles devoted to Catholic religious communities, in the broadest sense of that term.

The subtitle of this feature alludes to William James's famous book *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), which argues that the essence of religion is individual experience, not doctrines or institutions. Our subtitle, "The Varieties of Religious Community Today," is both a tribute to James's great work and a partial challenge to its thesis, for in Catholic Christianity individual religious practice is usually mediated by some kind of community, and even the most solitary mystical experiences are intelligible in reference to the whole Body of Christ. Just as we understand the Trinity as a set of relationships within the Godhead, we understand the practice of Christian faith to entail a set of relationships—first between each of us and God, but also between the members of families, parishes, and the universal Church.

In addition to these ordinary levels of community, the Church has, from its earliest centuries, also found room for special intentional communities: religious orders, secular institutes, confraternities and sodalities, lay ecclesial movements, pious houses and houses of hospitality. Most of these categories are represented in the following pages. Regina Munch reports from Bethlehem Farm in rural West Virginia, which describes itself as a "contrast community." Griffin Oleynick writes

Are Gathered

about the achievements and challenges of a Norbertine abbey in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Paul Elie talks with two members of the New York chapter of the Community of Sant'Egidio, which offers meals to homeless people in Grand Central Station and teaches English to recent immigrants. Kaya Oakes describes the spiritual practices of Camaldolese monks and oblates in Berkeley, California. And Louise Zwick, the co-founder of Casa Juan Diego, a Catholic Worker house of hospitality in Houston, Texas, relates how the events of the past year have affected her community's outreach to the poor and refugees. In between, there are shorter testimonials by members of a Marianist lay community, the Dominican Sisters of Peace, and the Knights of Peter Claver.

Despite the impressive variety of these communities, some common themes emerge: the importance of a shared prayer life; the difficulty of adapting to new circumstances; the relationship of community to place. Perhaps the most prominent theme is a sense of hope in the face of precariousness and uncertainty. All of these communities—both the new and the very old—know that they could disappear within a generation or two (religious vows of stability aren't incompatible with a keen appreciation of fragility). The pandemic has underscored just how quickly and unexpectedly things can change, and it has forced many of these communities to make some hard decisions. But it has also underscored the value of the work they do, and the importance of their example to the rest of the Church. In the early months of the pandemic, it was common to hear that "we're all in this together." This was, alas, rarely more than an aspiration. In each of the communities profiled here, we see how it might become a reality.

—The Editors

A Spirit of Abundance

Regina Munch

Bethlehem Farm in Alderson, West Virginia

A Caretaker pulls weeds at dusk in one of the gardens at Bethlehem Farm.

PEARSON RIPLEY

"Welcome home." This is the greeting all visitors receive at Bethlehem Farm, a Catholic intentional community dedicated to service, hospitality, and simple living. As I arrive at the community's forty-seven-acre homestead atop a mountain in rural West Virginia, the community members pause their work to greet me with a hug. It's June 2021, a year into the pandemic, and a hug, especially from a stranger, still feels like something from a bygone era.

The Bethlehem Farm community consists of twelve long-term members, called Caretakers, who live communally on the homestead—once a Catholic Worker farm—where they grow their own food, teach sustainable ways of living, and serve their neighbors by doing low-cost home repair. Volunteers also live on the farm, some for a week as part of a high-school or college service trip, others for a longer period of time as one of the "Summer Servants." With four cornerstones of living—service, prayer, simplicity, and community—the Caretakers of Bethlehem Farm seek to live the Gospel in every part of life. They commit to being radically accepting toward one another, gentle toward creation, and generous in their service.

In its vision statement, Bethlehem Farm calls itself a "contrast community"—borrowing Cardinal Avery Dulles's concept of a "contrast society." Dulles wrote that the first such community—the disciples—was "intended to attract attention." Moreover, "it had a mission to remind the rest of the people of the transcendent value of the Kingdom of God, to which the disciples bore witness. It was therefore important for them to adopt a manner of life that would make no sense apart from their intense personal faith in God's providence and his fidelity to his promises."

What is the contrast Bethlehem Farm wishes to draw? How does it intend to be different from the rest of society? What are people looking for when they come to a place like this, and do they find it? More than anything, I wanted to know: Is an intentional community like Bethlehem Farm actually a sustainable model of community life that more Catholics should emulate?

On most days, the community gathers at 7:30 a.m. for morning prayer in the main residence—a two-story lodge with a big common area and fifteen dormitory-style rooms. With comfortably worn couches, board games, a couple of guitars, and lots of books, it resembles nothing so much as a summer camp. On the walls are an image of Óscar Romero, crosses of different sizes and styles, posters about solar power and invasive mining practices, and a hand-drawn cardboard sign with the words "Be Gentle." The bookshelves contain hymnals, encyclicals, books on prayer and spirituality, but also novels and children's picture books.

People begin to trickle in—the Caretakers, the volunteers, and a family staying on the farm for a retreat. It's Wednesday, the day the community holds a Eucharistic service. Designated a pious house by the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, Bethlehem Farm is permitted to conduct the service without a priest. Colleen, one of the community's founders, leads the service. She and her husband, Eric, started Bethlehem Farm in 2005, and they live in the community with their children, who are playing around us as the service begins. As we sing "All Are Welcome," we can hear the chickens clucking just outside.

After the service, Colleen assigns morning chores. Some Caretakers and volunteers prepare breakfast; others load up trucks for visits to construction sites; a few work in the garden. I head to the garden, where a friendly volunteer who has just graduated from high school shows me how to harvest garlic. She gently corrects me when I pull the bulbs up too hard.

The breakfast bell rings, and everyone gathers around tables in the common area. The community tries to eat food produced locally. They grow as much of their own food as possible, and what they can't grow themselves they try to obtain from other local farmers. Of course, that isn't always possible; I do see a few Kroger labels. People eat heartily here, sometimes going up for seconds, to fuel a long day of physical work.

Before arriving at the farm, I spoke with a few community members about their sustainable practices and community rules. Bethlehem Farm uses sawdust toilets: over time, "humanure" decomposes into compost and is used to fertilize the community's garden. ("It just makes so much sense," Eric tells me.) To save water, community members limit themselves to two showers a week. Caretakers, volunteers, and visitors are expected to dress modestly and simply, without makeup. Cell phones are permitted for Caretakers and long-term volunteers, but not weeklong volunteers, and are generally not used during the day. (When I asked for the WiFi password upon arrival, I discovered that the router is switched off until 6 p.m.)

Tori, a Caretaker from California who joined the community after graduating from college in 2019, tells me that her family "doesn't really get why I poop in a bucket." Part of the gardening team, she explains the community's food practices. They don't use any pesticides in the gardens, and they prioritize the renewability of the soil and use water carefully. She breaks into a smile as she tells me about the quiet of the garden, "where you can marvel at the soil moving and plants growing." ("Weeds, they're so incredible," she adds.) I ask if the work contributes to her prayer life. "I'm not very good at praying," she says, but "right after God makes a garden, he makes us. We are earth people, and what we eat and grow becomes us." It matters, she says, that her work sustains people she is called to love: "Praying before a meal has meaning when it was your sacrifice in the garden."

Molly, a Caretaker and one of the house managers, tells me about the ethos of work at the community. She is usually the person who plans the community's meals and does the shopping.

On the walls are an image of Óscar Romero, crosses of different sizes and styles, posters about solar power, and a hand-drawn cardboard sign with the words "Be Gentle."

"There's something holy in the work itself."

Much of her job, she tells me, involves deciding "how we use our purchasing power well and how we can feed our bodies well." She says she enjoys teaching high-school and college volunteers how to cook and clean—that is, how to take care of each other. When I ask her about the relationship between work and prayer, she tells me, "We want to get a lot done for homeowners [on construction sites] and grow great food and minister to people. But there's also a lot of care for ourselves and one another. There's something holy in the work itself."

After breakfast, Colleen gives assignments for the workday. I'll be going to one of the home-repair sites. I pile into a pickup truck with two volunteers and two Caretakers, Raine and Tori, to drive down the mountain, on dirt roads with few guardrails, to a small, worn-down house. The homeowner, Margaret, is eighty years old and lives alone. Raine tells me that when they began working on the house a few weeks ago, the floor in the front of the house was so rotted out that it "felt like a trampoline." The steps from the front door to the driveway had fallen apart, too.

Margaret is one of dozens of local homeowners whom Bethlehem Farm serves every year. The community provides at-cost home repair to those who otherwise might not be able to afford it. Bethlehem Farm acts as a sort of microbank, allowing homeowners to reimburse them for the cost of supplies at a rate as low as $20 a month. Recently, a grant from the Wheaton Franciscan Sisters has allowed the farm to purchase environmentally sustainable materials, which tend to be more expensive, while still charging homeowners the lower price.

Raine and I take on the stairs, and as I dig holes for the posts, I ask what brought her to Bethlehem Farm. At thirty-four-years old, she's about in the middle of the age range for Caretakers.

"I grew up Catholic, but I felt pretty distant from my faith," she says. "I wondered if there was more to being Catholic than going to church and then forgetting about it the rest of the week." She was drawn to Bethlehem Farm because of its emphasis on sustainability and social justice, but particularly by the four cornerstones of simplicity, community, service, and prayer. "I wanted to get back to basics. I wanted to know what was the most important thing about being human." She tells me she has struggled with anxiety and depression for most of her life, and that when she first joined the community, it was difficult to leave her room on some days. But the community supported her and let her take the time she needed. "I've grown a lot since I came to Bethlehem Farm," Raine tells me. "It's the best decision I've ever made."

Pat, a Caretaker in his early twenties, had told me something similar the night before. "There's a lot of hurt and dissatisfaction with mainstream culture," he said. Bethlehem Farm was "a place to live counter-culturally, to foster something I didn't know I was looking for."

We stop for a break when Raine realizes that the wood we're using for the stairs is warped, and we'll have to measure and dig again. I take a few minutes to talk with Margaret, who has lived in this house for forty-eight years. One of eight children, she was raised by her mother after her father died in a logging accident. They were poor, and she tells me without hesitation that she's "had a hard life." In the past few years, she and her family members have often attended Bethlehem Farm's community nights, when the broader West Virginia community is invited to the farm for dinner.

I had been skeptical when Caretakers told me that Bethlehem Farm, whose members are mostly non-locals from relatively privileged backgrounds, had integrated well into the local community. The town of Alderson is home to about 1,100 people, more than a quarter of whom live under the poverty line (compared with 10.5 percent nationally). The town is known for its spectacular multi-day Fourth of July celebration. For a brief time in the mid-2000s, the national media became interested in Alderson's women's prison, where Martha Stewart was serving a five-month sentence for felony conspiracy. But otherwise, the area that Bethlehem Farm serves—Summers, Monroe, and Greenbrier counties—is a region that the rest of the country tends to stereotype as backward or, at best, "left behind."

The Caretakers make a point of educating themselves and their visitors about the region, especially its history of exploitation by extractive industries like mining and logging. These industries have been both the primary sources of employment for the region and the chief perpetrators of its poverty and environmental damage. The Bethlehem Farm website lists resources for volunteers to learn about Appalachia, and prominently features two lists of "books you should read instead of *Hillbilly Elegy*."

I talked with one of the Caretakers, Gemma, about Appalachia and Bethlehem Farm's place in it as she organized the farm's construction-supply closet. She told me that she came to Bethlehem Farm because she "gravitated toward people invested in being Catholic and making their lives look different because they're Catholic." She was familiar with "a bougie Whole Foods kind of sustainability," but the Caretakers of Bethlehem Farm had a different brand of sustainability—one that borrows a lot from Appalachians: "There are a lot of people here who value growing their own food and take pride in that because it's traditional. They know how to do things with their hands. So much of the culture here is self-sufficiency and homesteading, so we do kind of fit in with that."

Colleen and Eric, two of the Caretakers at Bethlehem Farm

PEARSON RIPLEY

Every Thursday evening after dinner, the community gathers for a "covenant meeting." Community members agree to abide by the Covenant of Cooperation, a set of guidelines for how they should communicate with each other. This involves some familiar techniques for conflict resolution. Anyone who has a problem with another community member must discuss it directly with that person rather than complain to others. The use of "I statements" is encouraged. Everyone should take each other's words at face value—never assuming hidden intent—and, in turn, everyone is encouraged to be honest about their intentions and needs. What makes such trust and truthfulness possible is, fundamentally, a "spirit of abundance." In the words of the Covenant:

> I want a cooperative relationship with you. I will act in this relationship on the assumption that there will be enough of what we really need to grow, solve our problems, support each other's deepest needs, and participate in the building of God's empowering life between us.... Cooperation is part of the Good News.

At covenant meetings, members use the Covenant of Cooperation to share their experiences of the week, to nurture their own spiritual growth, and to resolve conflicts. I was asked not to attend the weekly meeting, since these discussions can be quite personal.

Steve, a friendly and energetic Caretaker in his sixties, spoke with me about the meetings and community life more generally. Before he joined, he said, he "couldn't imagine that [he] would be in an intentional community." Part of his process of "discernment," as he put it, was learning what it really meant to be in community. At first it was an adjustment to plan his life around people who weren't family or close friends. But Bethlehem Farm is "a community that's more open than some family life may be."

Steve joined the community three years ago, after decades of working in the corporate world. I asked him if it was hard to be vulnerable in these meetings—if it was exhausting to put so much work into communicating well. He shook his head. "It's harder to live outside the farm in some ways. There are a lot of conflicts that you have to maneuver through constantly. That was my world for most of my life." At Bethlehem Farm, he found, "we're able to focus on our values, our beliefs, and the cornerstones. Society in general doesn't necessarily have those same principles."

On one of the days of my visit, rain forced work at two construction sites to be rescheduled. The Caretakers quickly convened to reshuffle the day's tasks and assignments. They spoke with one another directly and practically, but also respectfully. No one seemed to mind too much when his or her individual project had to be put on the back burner. At another such ad hoc meeting, the Caretakers went over what had to be done to prepare

for a group of volunteers arriving the following week: a shower had to be repaired, groceries had to be bought and meals planned, spare rooms had to be cleaned and prepared. Each Caretaker spoke candidly about what they thought they could achieve, and they traded tasks with each other according to their schedules and interests. Raine had said to me about the Covenant of Cooperation that "every family, every couple should have this." Seeing how the principles of the Covenant worked out in practice, I was beginning to agree.

But what about when circumstances are more challenging? Joseph, a twenty-six-year-old Caretaker, told me about the difficulties the community faced during the pandemic. Some people wanted to "hunker down" and cease all activities off the farm; others, he said, couldn't live that way. Together, they had to make a lot of hard decisions—about how to visit family or when it was safe to go to a work site: "How do we take that trust of each other generally and extrapolate to this new scary situation that we don't know a whole lot about?"

Some days, Joseph said, it was hard to find agreement. "It's difficult when we start conversations without recognizing that everyone wants the best for the farm. That's why trust is so important." Eventually, he said, the community was able to make adjustments and continue their service in the broader community. All the Caretakers are now vaccinated, and the farm welcomes vaccinated volunteers (with exceptions according to CDC guidelines).

Even when it's going well, Joseph said, living in community can sometimes be exhausting. He told me a story of Dorothy Day on her way back to her room after a long day. When a homeless man approached her for help, she turned him away. "She just wanted to go to sleep and not have to meet Christ in someone else."

Eric and Colleen have three children—ages ten, seven, and four. Though Eric and Colleen aren't "in charge" of the community—the Caretakers make all decisions by consensus—it was largely their vision that created Bethlehem Farm. I wanted to know what it meant for them to be what Cardinal Dulles called a "contrast community." Such a term could suggest wariness, if not condemnation, of the world outside.

"We should look different from mainstream society because we're trying to live an authentic Christian life," Colleen said. "But we're not supposed to look weird on purpose. Are we intentionally choosing the ways we try to be different in ways that make sense and bear fruit?"

Eric quotes St. Paul: "We should look like fools for Christ. There are aspects of a Christian lifestyle—like nonviolence, maybe like composting—that seem to some people like a stupid thing. But it flows from our Christian witness. And when they flow from our Christian witness instead of from the world, they probably are going to look different."

The differences Eric and Colleen described—living simply on a farm, volunteering one's time in service—seem to be most appealing to a particular type of person at a certain stage of life. Most Caretakers are young, single people, college-educated and secure enough to live on the monthly stipend Bethlehem Farm provides. Some Caretakers told me they were applying to grad school or eventually wanted to find a partner and start a family. But if most of the community members are there only temporarily, is Bethlehem Farm really sustainable as a *community*?

One way to make the community more permanent is to welcome couples and families who plan to stay long-term. Eric told me that the community is "very supportive" of their parenthood and have made childcare a regular part of the life of the community. One of the assigned tasks in the morning is "Kid Care"—if school isn't in session, a Caretaker or volunteer watches the kids. Sometimes Gemma gives them violin and piano lessons, or Steve takes them biking. On the other hand, it can be hard to manage a crowd of volunteers as well as family life: "Imagine forty people getting up from evening prayer and one door separating them from the baby you *just* put down."

Colleen told me a fellow Caretaker has helped her balance the duties of being a good parent and being a good community member: "Sometimes they're in perfect alignment and sometimes they're not." When I asked if she ever wonders whether the relatively unconventional family life is good for her kids, she says she is constantly asking herself that question. Then she laughs. "I wouldn't be surprised if they talk about living here in therapy someday, but there are so many ways they are nourished here. There are teachers everywhere. They see people praying and they see people being kind. This is village parenting."

By the end of my short visit to Bethlehem Farm, I was exhausted, both physically and emotionally. As some of the Caretakers had told me, this kind of intense community life can be draining, especially if you aren't used to it. One night, evening prayer was particularly intense: each of us shared his or her own dreams for the future. We prayed for each other to be guided where God wants us to go.

I had found a few of the community's rules hard to abide by, even just for a few days. After a particularly sweaty day in the garden, I snuck an extra bucket shower. One morning, I put on a little bit of makeup. And one evening when the community was supposed to be fasting from electricity, I talked on the phone with my husband instead.

Still, I came to respect what rules mean within the community. Colleen had told me that what counts in their practices is not how weird or counter-cultural they appear, but whether they bear fruit. As soon as the Caretakers decide

together that a particular rule or practice no longer makes sense, they scrap it. They take things as they come, responsive to each other's needs and to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps it was just the stark contrast from my usual city surroundings, but I couldn't escape it anywhere I looked: so much life, everywhere. The soil was wriggling with insects, the trees grew tall and strong, the chickens played, the gardens were bursting. Tori was right: even the weeds were amazing. One of the summer volunteers, who had done several stints at the farm, told me why she keeps coming back. "I know God is with me all the time," she said. "But when I'm not here, it's easier to forget."

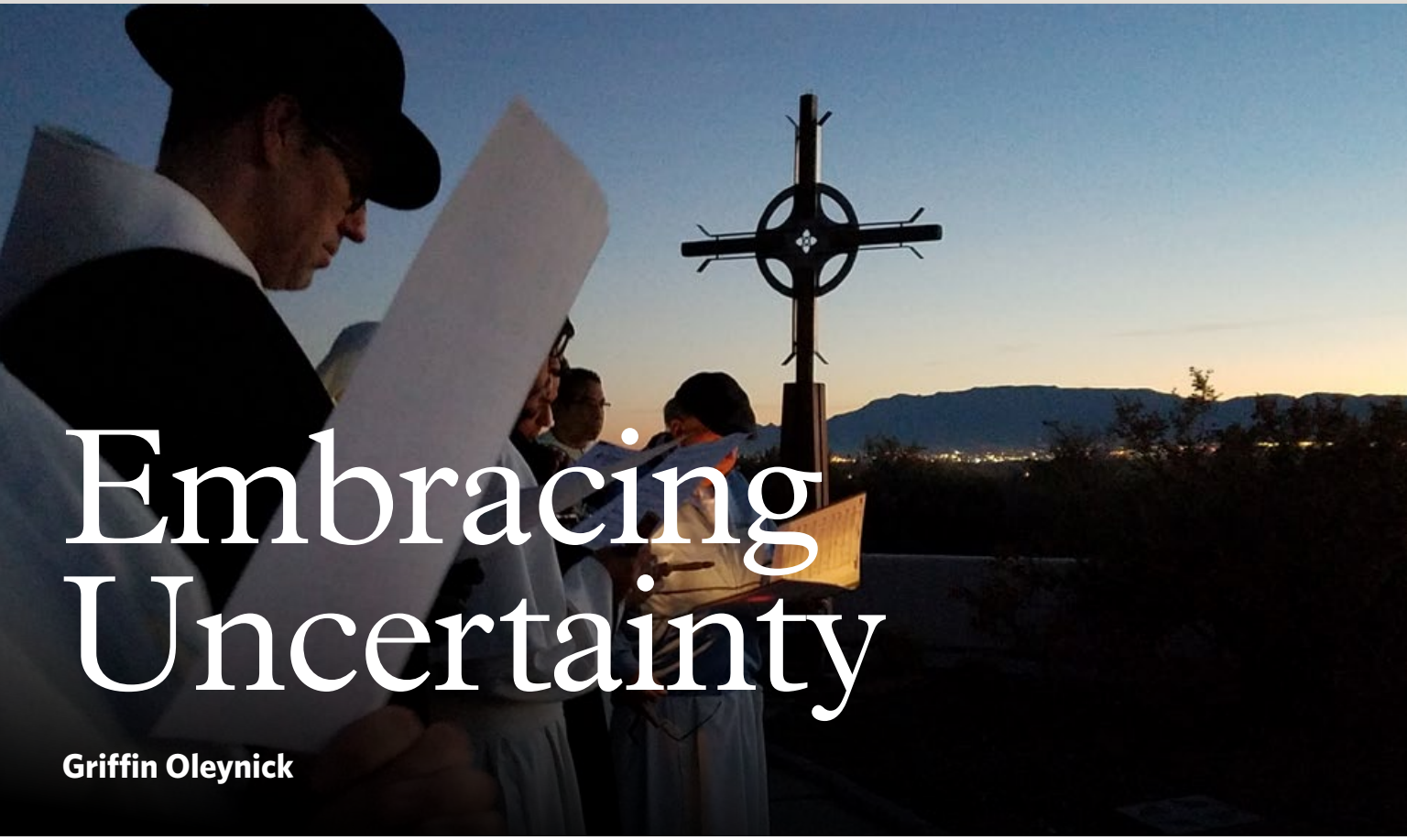
One afternoon, I helped Colleen cook dinner. Using kale that volunteers had picked that morning and eggs from the farm's flock of chickens, I made two huge casseroles. When Molly said the blessing, she thanked God for me and the other cooks along with the food. I felt the immediacy of seeing how my labor was sustaining other people—even a whole community. And it was those same people who had picked the kale and collected the eggs, making my contribution possible.

Most of us don't get to see immediate connections between our daily labor and the good of others. At Bethlehem Farm, it's visible every day. Everyone contributes, everyone benefits. Together. Here, work ceases to be toil for individual gain and becomes mutual care. I can't think of a better vision of the Kingdom of God: a place where everyone's gifts are honored, where no one is extraneous, where all are loved.

REGINA MUNCH *is an assistant editor at* Commonweal.

Here, work ceases to be toil for individual gain and becomes mutual care.

Dinner at Bethlehem Farm. Cooking and cleaning responsibilities are shared among community members. PEARSON RIPLEY



Embracing Uncertainty

Griffin Oleynick

Santa Maria de la Vid in Albuquerque, New Mexico

The Norbertine community gathers at dawn on All Souls' Day to honor community members who have died.

JOSEPH SANDOVAL

"To tell you the truth, the parish was nearly moribund when we first arrived," admitted Abbot Joel Garner, OPraem, head of the Norbertine community of Santa Maria de la Vid in Albuquerque, New Mexico. We had left the abbey grounds to visit Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary, a working-class parish in the city's predominately Hispanic West Mesa neighborhood. The drive wasn't exactly scenic. Cruising north along busy Coors Boulevard, we passed a seemingly endless strip of trailer parks, tire shops, and big-box stores.

We crossed historic Route 66, then pulled into the church parking lot. Abbot Joel's energy belies his eighty-some years. Back in 1985, he was one of five Norbertines sent from St. Norbert Abbey in De Pere, Wisconsin, near Green Bay, to begin a new foundation in New Mexico. The goal was to serve the growing number of Hispanic Catholics in the United States and, eventually, to attract New Mexican vocations. Albuquerque, a mid-sized city with a large Catholic population and natural beauty, seemed like an ideal fit for their *vita mixta* of active ministry and contemplative retreat.

"Things were pretty rough at first," Abbot Joel recalled. "We lost two guys to illness early on. Then two others left." We were walking across a small plaza in front of the church, centered around a stone fountain hewn from a fossilized tree. "But the people embraced us, that's what kept us going." As we entered the church, with its bright adobe baptismal font, soaring wooden ceiling, and tiers of semicircular pews surrounded by hand-carved statues, each the work of a local *santero*, I found it hard to believe the place had ever struggled. I asked how such renewal had come about. Abbot Joel said that Small Church Communities, a program inspired by the Latin American *comunidades de base* formed in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, had

been crucial. Members meet weekly to pray over the readings for the following Sunday; their small size fosters a level of intimacy and accompaniment that simply isn't possible in the context of the wider Sunday assembly. "But most important," Abbot Joel insisted, "were the changes we made to the liturgy: music at all seven Masses, with the full and active participation of lectors, Eucharistic ministers, altar servers, and ushers, all from the community."

As we made our way back to Santa Maria de la Vid, Abbot Joel explained how Holy Rosary's transformation also included the growth of the RCIA and adult-education programs: "People got used to seeing and being around each other; they also began experiencing their faith differently, learning about it and taking ownership of it. They trusted us, and each other; it gave them the confidence to take the lead."

It also gave the Norbertines the assurance that they could step back. Last summer, they made the decision to cease serving as pastors at Holy Rosary; the abbey's numbers are too small to sustain such a demanding ministry. Abbot Joel is unperturbed, though: "The parish is a healthy community. They'll be fine without us!"

Back at the abbey grounds—seventy acres of natural high desert, with dramatic views of downtown Albuquerque and the jagged peaks of the Sandia Mountains beyond—we pulled up next to Santa Maria de la Vid's next project. Right now, it's just a deep hole in the sand, filled with plastic pipes and electrical wiring. But come 2022, it will be home to a new spirituality center, complete with private hermitages, additional retreat rooms, and conference space. It will also be, after several recent closures, the only retreat center in the entire Archdiocese of Santa Fe. The Norbertines view it as a sign of hope, and a vote of confidence in their future.

There are currently just four Norbertine abbeys in the United States, home to almost two hundred "canons regular." Spend time at any one of them, and you're likely to hear the word *communio*, something Abbot Joel regards as Santa Maria de la Vid's primary ministry. The term, which translates to "community," "communion," or even "fellowship," denotes a form of religious life inspired by the early Church, in particular the Jerusalem community as described in the Acts of the Apostles. Santa Maria de la Vid's *Book of Customs* specifies that members are to cultivate "simplicity of life," limiting themselves, for example, to buying only used cars and not owning individual televisions. But for Norbertines the spiritual fruits of *communio* are more important: being of "one heart and one mind," as their Rule of St. Augustine puts it.

Abbot Joel has a simple threefold recipe for achieving such unity at Santa Maria de la Vid: "Common prayer, common Eucharist, and common table." In practice, that means the community gathers twice per day: once in the morning, to chant morning prayer and celebrate Mass (on Mondays it's in Spanish), and once in the evening, to sing vespers and eat dinner. In between, community members attend to their various ministries, selected to be within easy commuting distance to prioritize and preserve *communio*.

It's arguably been that way since 1121, when St. Norbert of Xanten, following a dramatic conversion and a stint as a *Wanderprediger* preaching poverty and repentance across his native Germany, selected Prémontré, in the dense forests of northern France, as the site for a new religious foundation. The secluded setting was conducive to prayer and fostered an austere common life. (Norbert's first followers, a group that included both men and women, likely lived in primitive wooden huts.) But it was also located near a major travel artery—a trade route connecting Paris to Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands—which in turn facilitated quick access to lay audiences for preaching, and a path for rapid expansion.

Founded for no particular ministry by a saint whose only consistency was constant change, the Norbertines are unique in the history of medieval religious orders. Scholars liken them to a bridge between preceding monastic movements, such as the Camaldolese, Cistercians, and Carthusians, and the mendicant orders that followed, such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians. Their nine-hundred-year-old tradition has accordingly featured considerable variety. Medieval Prémontré may well have been spartan, but later Norbertines built some of the grandest abbeys in Europe: Strahov, with its frescoed Baroque library, still towers over Prague, while Berne, on the banks of the River Maas, remains the oldest extant religious community in the Netherlands.

Santa Maria de la Vid is far more modest. Even so, its architecture communicates the Norbertine values of learning, stewardship, and prayer that have kept the order intact even after centuries of suppression, contraction, and dispersal. The Norbertine Library, dedicated in 2008, contains more than twenty thousand volumes, making it the largest

Founded for no particular ministry by a saint whose only consistency was constant change, the Norbertines are unique in the history of medieval religious orders.

theology collection in New Mexico, and a major resource for retreatants, the scholarly community, and students enrolled in the Master of Theological Studies program, held in conjunction with St. Norbert College in De Pere (the only Norbertine institution of higher education in the world). Public events and other large gatherings take place in Our Lady of Guadalupe Commons, adjacent to the recently completed Pope Francis Solar Field, an array of panels—erected in response to *Laudato si'*'s call to care for creation—that generates some of the community's electricity, as well as some extra income.

The Abbey Church, designed in the mid-1990s by Robert Habiger with input from Abbot Joel and the Santa Maria de la Vid community, is a small masterpiece. There's no nave, but rather a circular worship space enclosed by polished wooden arches draped with curving pastel fabrics. Natural light pours in through grids of small yellow, blue, and rose-colored glass squares set within concrete exterior walls. Habiger told me it's supposed to feel like a "church within a church," intentionally connecting the community and visitors to the indigenous and Catholic communities that have worshiped on the abbey grounds for centuries. The circle recalls the traditional indigenous *kiva*, marking the threshold between the material and spiritual worlds, while the arches celebrate the evolution of Catholic architecture over the centuries. "The building materials are significant, too," Habiger said. "They're ordinary, and inexpensive; but together they create something extraordinary."

Something similar could be said for the Norbertines of Santa Maria de la Vid themselves. Not only is Santa Maria de la Vid the smallest Norbertine abbey in the United States, it's also the youngest, elevated to abbatial status—meaning it's no longer a "priory," which depends on a motherhouse, but a self-sufficient community with financial independence and institutional autonomy—by the worldwide Order of Premonstratensians in 2012. (The whole order is celebrating its nine hundredth anniversary this year.) There are just eleven members in the community: seven solemnly professed, four at various stages of formation. They come from a variety of backgrounds. The "old guard," including Abbot Joel, is from Wisconsin (pillows and blankets stamped with the Green Bay Packers logo fill the community TV room). The others, middle-aged, come from Kerala, India, as well as Michigan, Massachusetts, California, and New York. The four in formation, all in their twenties, are from New Mexico, Kansas, and Nigeria.

For a group of its size, Santa Maria de la Vid has a remarkable impact on the community beyond its walls. In fact, the Norbertines will soon be one of only two male religious orders still serving in the Santa Fe archdiocese. (The Dominicans and the Jesuits, who had been there for nearly two hundred years, recently left; only the Franciscans remain.) Parish ministry, especially in communities of color, remains important: the Norbertines serve as pastors at two nearby churches. The first, St. Augustine, stands on the indigenous reservation of Isleta Pueblo, which was founded by Spanish missionaries in the early 1600s; it's one of the oldest parishes still operating in the United States, and its parish council is largely run by women. The second, St. Edwin, is situated on eleven acres in a working-class Hispanic neighborhood in Albuquerque; it's undergoing extensive renovations and now boasts an outdoor amphitheater, a sports field, and a working farm complete with beehives and a herd of goats.

Other members of Santa Maria de la Vid are engaged in different forms of social work. Br. James Owens, a deacon and a lawyer, is involved in homeless advocacy and fundraising. He also works with Catholic Charities, regularly taking on immigration cases pro bono. But he prefers working in family law, especially divorces: "That's where you get to do the most spiritual accompaniment."

Fr. Robert Campbell, the abbey's prior and director of formation, is chaplain at Albuquerque's Presbyterian Hospital. He's spent much of the past year and a half administering last rites to patients dying of COVID-19. I wondered how he maintains spiritual and emotional equilibrium in the face of so much suffering. "I exercise, I have hobbies—like cooking, or model rocketry," he said with a wry smile. But then he grew serious: "My job, in the hospital and at the abbey, isn't to render judgment. It's to help people have an authentic experience of God. And not just 'good' Catholics—we welcome everyone."

Continuing to welcome others, of course, depends on a steady stream of vocations, something the abbey has admittedly struggled with in recent years. And apart from the general decline in candidates for religious life, Santa Maria de la Vid was dealt an unexpected blow in late May, when Fr. Graham Golden, the community's director of vocations, was killed in an automobile accident just outside the abbey grounds.

Ordained in 2015 and just thirty-five at the time of his death, Fr. Graham was described in an obituary written by Abbot Joel as "an extraordinarily dedicated, talented, and intelligent young priest." That may be an understatement: in addition to serving as director of formation *and* vocations at Santa Maria de la Vid, Fr. Graham was also a pastor at St. Augustine, regional council coordinator for the Catholic Foundation in northern New Mexico, organizer of the annual archdiocesan pilgrimage for vocations, and founder of the annual Art at the Abbey exhibition. His death was a loss not just for his confreres at Santa Maria de la Vid, but also for the entire Catholic community of greater Albuquerque.

"We're grieving, for sure," Br. James Owens told me. "But it's kind of a joyful mourning; we've had to come together to take up the work Graham left behind." Indeed, memories of Fr. Graham surfaced regularly in my interviews and conversations with Norbertines and lay people alike. (I'd met him briefly at a pilgrimage to the border in El Paso, Texas, in 2019, and was struck at the time by his charisma and spiritual depth.) All

seemed to agree that Fr. Graham's most important legacy was his work to transform Santa Maria de la Vid from a Norbertine abbey *in* New Mexico to one *of* New Mexico—in other words, a community that more closely resembles the largely Hispanic population of Albuquerque.

The young men whose vocations Fr. Graham helped nurture bring a markedly different consciousness and sensibility to the abbey, especially concerning culture and race. One of the most outspoken is Br. Alexis Longoria, a second-year novice currently pursuing master's degrees in social work and theology. His studies and life experience have given him a skepticism of fixed social, racial, and geographic categories. "I grew up as a child preacher in the borderlands," he told me. "My parents are from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, but I was born in El Paso, Texas. So am I Mexican, or American?" Alexis began discerning religious life in high school after he converted to Catholicism. Fr. Graham and Santa Maria de la Vid seemed welcoming and down to earth; Albuquerque, close to the border and home to sizable Hispanic and indigenous communities, was also attractive. "But there's racism here in New Mexico, too. Like the myth that Hispanics here are descended from Golden Age Spain—that's just another way of assimilating whiteness."

When I asked Br. Alexis about the state of race relations at the abbey today, he was blunt. "Our community has work to do; in a lot of ways, we need to be challenged." I asked him what that looks like for him. "Systems of racism, white supremacy, privilege, they've all been built up over hundreds of years," he said. "You can't just tear them down or demolish them overnight. You can only chip away, a moment at a time."

The Norbertine community has been open to hearing critiques like those made by Br. Alexis, and takes the call to dismantle exclusionary structures seriously. One of the most innovative initiatives at Santa Maria de la Vid is its oblates program, which enables lay men and women to "enter into a covenant of mutual communion" with the abbey through formal promises that mirror religious vows, permitting them to live the Norbertine charism of *communio* according to their situations in life. There are currently three oblates, two women and one man, all of whom have undergone a rigorous process of formation, wear a modified Norbertine habit on abbey grounds, and share in the community's common life, especially prayer. Louise Nielsen—married, a mother, and pastoral associate at Holy Rosary—was the first oblate at Santa Maria de la Vid. She told me that despite the sexism and diffidence she sometimes encounters in the Church, being an oblate gives her the opportunity to push for change and help ensure that women's voices are heard. Christina Spahn, a former nun and now a celibate Norbertine oblate, agreed. "For many, it can be jarring to see women in a habit chanting right alongside the men during prayer. But this community has always backed us up."

Fr. Geno lifted the sledgehammer and began striking the bell rhythmically, pausing a few seconds between each blow.

Celebrating vespers

JERRY TURBA

In an address to the Latin American Confederation of Religious (CLAR) this past August, Pope Francis warned religious communities to avoid the "temptation to survival." Fretting over "numbers" and "efficiency," or harboring "soul-killing nostalgia" for prior forms of piety and devotion, the pope went on, spells the "siren song of religious life."

It's not hard to see what Francis is talking about. There exists, especially in some conservative quarters of the United States (and in the Norbertine Order itself), the conviction that the vocation crisis can only be solved by a rigid, unapologetic return to the traditional trappings of religious life—habits, elevated liturgy, and the like. Afflicted by the economic anxieties and cultural fluidity of modernity, so the argument goes, young people are longing for structure, order, and certainty, and the changes introduced by the Second Vatican Council have fatally weakened the once-great tradition of religious life in the Church. Francis believes this is exactly the wrong posture. The way forward for religious communities, especially ones with increasingly smaller numbers, is to adopt a flexible style of living and working that is at once "intercultural, inter-congregational, and itinerant." In other words, in keeping with the council's call to *ressourcement*, it means returning to the primitive origins of religious life itself. "To be with Jesus is to be joyful," Francis added. "It has the capacity to give holiness a sense of humor."

Abbot Joel, who's seen his share of change in the Church, seems to embody exactly what Francis is talking about. He became a Norbertine in 1957, at a time when many abbeys were "total institutions"—elaborate, self-enclosed campuses that had relatively little contact with the world around them. Prayer and Mass were, of course, in Latin, and there was little room for flexibility or innovation in ministry. "But the council brought us new energy and creativity, and gave us room to experiment." That didn't mean that new initiatives were always successful. For example, in an effort to serve African-American Catholics, the Norbertines opened St. Moses the Black Priory near Jackson, Mississippi, intending—as at Santa Maria de la Vid—for it to become an abbey. It failed to attract enough vocations, and has since closed. "But what the changes did mean," Abbot Joel said, "was that we Norbertines could be more free to embrace uncertainty, and to rely more closely on God."

At its heart, that's what the Norbertine tradition—and, for that matter, the entire Catholic mystical tradition—has always been about. Few Norbertines at Santa Maria de la Vid knew this as well as Fr. Francis Dorff, OPraem, who died in 2017, yet remains an important spiritual presence at the abbey. Originally from South Philadelphia, Fr. Dorff entered Daylesford Abbey in Paoli, Pennsylvania, then studied in Rome and Paris. (In his autobiography, *The Spiritual Journey of a Misfit*, he recounts his displeasure at having to ask the local bishop for permission to walk around the city without his habit.) He transferred to Santa Maria de la Vid in the 1990s, and lived the rest of his life in a small hermitage on the abbey grounds, spending his time writing, leading retreats, and working with abusive priests in recovery.

One of Fr. Dorff's passions was meditative journaling, in which the writer "lets go" of ego and listens for the unconscious mind. During one of his sessions, he "heard" and wrote down a story that would come to be known as "The Rabbi's Gift." It's since been widely anthologized in collections of Catholic spiritual writing, and appears in Santa Maria de la Vid's *Book of Customs* as the "Community Story." There are now many versions—including a series of paintings on permanent display in the Norbertine Library.

It goes something like this: a group of aging monks in a once-flourishing monastery on the verge of closing are afflicted by sadness; their only source of hope is a solitary rabbi who lives in the woods nearby. One day, the abbot goes out to meet the rabbi, who receives the abbot with an embrace. Together, they converse, then weep over an open Bible in the rabbi's hut. Before the abbot leaves, the rabbi tells him that "the Messiah is among you." Back at the monastery, the monks misinterpret the message: they think it means that one of them is in fact Christ. They begin to act as if that's true, treating each other as Christ, and before long, a spirit of levity and joy returns to the monastery, which begins to attract new vocations.

As it happened, my lodging during my week at Santa Maria de la Vid was in Fr. Dorff's old hermitage. On one of my last nights at the abbey, I made my way over to the church about ten minutes early. I was intending to sit for a while and meditate in silence before evening prayer began. As I arrived near the entrance, I saw Fr. Geno Gries standing next to a large bell nearby. There was a slight breeze, and his white habit, flapping a little, looked almost gold in the setting sun. He had a wide grin on his face, and a large sledgehammer in his hand.

My first thought was that it had something to do with construction on the new spiritual center, and I wondered why he wasn't wearing a vest or hard hat. But that didn't make sense—Fr. Geno, who, like Abbot Joel, is in his eighties, had told me earlier during the week that his life was in the process of "winding down," and that his primary ministry was spiritual direction. I asked him what he was doing. "Oh! I ring the bell for evening prayer when it's my turn to lead it," he said, booming with laughter. "I guess we still do some things the traditional way!"

Fr. Geno lifted the sledgehammer and began striking the bell rhythmically, pausing a few seconds between each blow. The sound didn't travel far—in fact it was the first time I'd noticed the bell all week. Certainly it died before reaching Coors Boulevard, with its rushing traffic. But I'd heard it, and the community had as well. It kept ringing as I took my seat in church, opened my psalter, and watched the other Norbertines arrive for evening prayer.

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Marianist Lay Communities

Pope Francis's call for all of the baptized to be part of the upcoming synodal process has been inspiring to many Catholics, if frustrating for those who feel their bishops could be doing more to get things going. But in bringing forward the voices of the lay faithful, the Holy Spirit hasn't waited for the hierarchy. The Church believes in this inspired renewal so deeply that it has extended specific recognition to the International Associations of the Faithful: "Even a cursory glance at the history of the Church reveals the magnitude of the work performed by these associations at crucial moments in its existence, and the wealth of charisms generated in all ages by lay movements created for the renewal of the Christian life." The International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities is one such organization.

I have never been a parish Catholic as an adult, although the local parish was where I seemed to spend most of my time until the age of eighteen. Living in Corpus Christi, Texas, we often attended daily Mass and first Friday Adoration, as well as Marian rosaries and special events. By the 1980s, I was well versed in the post–Vatican II Church and was even part of our diocesan Tercer Encuentro team (and at age ten, the only kid). In El Paso, where I spent summers before moving there when I was thirteen, I was influenced by a young and brilliant pastor at St. Pius X Catholic community named Arturo Bañuelas. When I spent time at my grandmother's home and we couldn't get to church, we'd watch a televised Mass from the cathedral in San Antonio, celebrated by Fr. Virgilio Elizondo. I would be greatly influenced by these founders of the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS)—yet it wasn't a Catholic Hispanic parish where the Holy Spirit led me.

Instead, I found the Marianists. It began in my senior year of high school with a visit to the campus of St. Mary's University in San Antonio. Within minutes, I knew that this place was calling me. A sophomore named Nancy took me under her wing, bought me lunch, and told me about the residence hall she lived in—a Christian Life Community (CLC) hall. When I returned that fall to begin my freshman year, I joined a CLC, and through weekly meetings grew to know Br. Roger Bau, our Marianist mentor. The following summer, I was asked to participate in a program called "Explore Marianist Life" with the Marianist Sisters. Their limitless energy was inspiring, but I did not have that vocation. Still, I had made friends with the sisters (some of whom are still part of my daily life), and between them, the CLC, and a group of lay Marianists, my Marianist world kept expanding.

Upon graduation, some of us started our own Marianist group, which we thought quite renegade. Little did we know that we were actually doing what lay people living the Marianist charism had been doing for some two hundred years. We were now part of the same tradition that had been gifted by the Holy Spirit in 1800 in Bordeaux, France. Known as the Bordeaux Sodality, this original group of twelve members included a "maker of playing cards, teachers, students, shoemakers, hatters, and salesmen." Today, groups like these, living out that tradition, are gathered loosely within the International Organization of Marianist Lay Communities, whose "members strive to be strong in the faith and persevering in hope; to accept Mary as their Mother, model and teacher." (In the United States, these groups are considered part of the Marianist Lay Communities of North America.)

The Marianist family has been a profound gift for me. I am a Catholic theologian with a contentious relationship to the hierarchy, but even on the days I question my spiritual ties to the Church, the Marianist charism has helped me find a place in Catholicism. The charism includes a concept known as "mixed composition," which dates to the French Revolution, when the persecution and expulsion of priests required lay people to take the lead in Catholic communal life. Fundamental to the idea of mixed composition is that everyone has a place, and that everyone has gifts to bring. Thus, leadership is shared, and no individual member will always be in leadership or maintain complete power. This has allowed many different kinds of communities to form, with baptized and unbaptized coming together to speak with one another. Some might disagree, but I believe this flexibility allows people who have yet to meet all the stringent rules of Catholicism to explore being Church.

The fluidity, smaller size, and highly relational aspects of Marianist lay communities can also help respond to needs more quickly than is possible under the slower moving diocesan model. The Marianist Social Justice Collaborative, which began in 1998 as a way to promote education and action for social justice within the Marianist Family, is one example; another is the Mission of Mary Cooperative, which advocates for and partners in sustainable urban development in Dayton, Ohio. Though these are more organized efforts, they nonetheless highlight the call of every Marianist lay community to be in permanent mission with both gathered and sent. While I will probably continue to question my relationship with the institutional Church, I know that with Mary as a model, the Marianist family will continue to listen to the needs of the world and its people.

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'Companions on the Path'

An interview with Sant'Egidio's Paola Piscitelli & Andrea Bartoli

Paul Elie

Fifty-three years after it was founded in Rome by young Catholics moved by the spirit of Vatican II and the European spirit of 1968, the Community of Sant'Egidio now counts about fifty thousand members in more than seventy countries. But it is still something of a mystery in the United States. This is due in part to the movement's name: originally called simply "the Community," it took the name of the early medieval European monk Sant'Egidio after it was granted use of a seventeenth-century church in Trastevere dedicated to him. It's also due to the sheer variety of the Community's efforts. For some, Sant'Egidio is a leading voice against the death penalty. For others, it's the broker of peace agreements in Mozambique and Burundi late in the twentieth century. Or it's the inheritor of John Paul II's precedent-setting meeting of world religious leaders at Assisi in 1986. Or it's the group that coordinated Pope Francis's breakthrough journeys to Lesbos and the Central African Republic and helped set up the Vatican's first shelter for people who are homeless. Finally, Sant'Egidio's hard-to-define character is due to its limited presence in the United States: informal groups in New York and Washington D.C., at Boston College and the University of Notre Dame, and many "friends" in California. And yet for those of us Americans who have come to know it well, Sant'Egidio is a vital center of our lives as Catholics and a profound source of our confidence in the future of the Church.

Sant'Egidio's two most prominent figures in this country are a married couple who came to the United States three decades ago. Paola Piscitelli coordinates the New York group's Friday-evening prayer service at the Church of the Epiphany, the weekly meal offered to homeless people in Grand Central Station, regular visits to nursing homes, language schools for recent immigrants, and a Christmas Day lunch held at St. Vartan's Armenian Cathedral. Andrea Bartoli, a scholar of international relations, has taught and led programs at Columbia and Seton Hall, served in a dean's role at George Mason University, and now heads the new Sant'Egidio Foundation for Peace and Dialogue. I recently interviewed them in New York.

PAUL ELIE: Most accounts of Sant'Egidio begin with its founding in Rome in 1968 and carry the story forward from there. Let's go in the other direction. What is the Community in the United States now, and what does it mean for you to be a part of it?

PAOLA PISCITELLI: It's a challenge, first of all. Andrea and I grew up in the Community in Rome, and when we came here almost thirty years ago, we didn't have much of a relationship with the United States: we'd met some people from Taizé at Dayton, that's all. So there was the challenge: How are we going to speak about our experience to people here? We faced a Church that was not very friendly to movements, that was very much shaped around the parish, for worse or for better. At first we were perceived as a foreign body: "Are you a cult or something?" I don't know why, because movements have been part of the Church from the very beginning. So here was this "community" that sounded a little funny, and the challenge was: How are we going to fit?

Now I think we are in a beautiful moment for the Community, in a way that is very mysterious. At a time when everything was locked down, the Community blossomed, encountering people who wanted to do something—people uneasy about the lockdown, uneasy about the Church, wanting to be together rather than alone. Some were coming from a parish, some were not, some were not coming from any religious background all…but they found in the Community that moment of unity and commitment or encounter with the poor that they were looking for.

PE: Can you describe the form the Community takes in the United States?

ANDREA BARTOLI: Sant'Egidio is a space of prayer, service, and friendship, and there is a faithfulness to that that comes into the weekly rhythms. Sant'Egidio started serving food to the poor in Grand Central Station twelve years ago, and never missed a Tuesday, not even during the pandemic: everything was closed, and it was the homeless and Sant'Egidio on the street. The prayer service is also very faithful, because it's not only in the parish of Epiphany on Friday, it's also at the Hopkins Center nursing home in Brooklyn on Sunday. Sant'Egidio is with the new Americans from Burkina Faso and elsewhere who learn English from us; it's with the kids from Our Savior in the Bronx, who meet every week for tutoring and counseling. So Sant'Egidio in New York is meeting and doing something every day now. True, it took thirty years before blossoming, but we don't mind.

PP: The Church *is* a long story.

AB: I think it's important to bring the Church back to a structure that speaks to the present—a sense that we are all sharing

Andrea Bartoli and Paola Piscitelli

CAROLYN MONASTRA

the future, and the future is not hopeless. Sant'Egidio is for those who are trying to say, "Okay, the world is a little problematic, but it's good to hope, and it's good to be committed to doing a little something, because we *can* make changes." We can make changes on the death penalty, on refugees. We can teach English to people who could not speak English before. We can visit the elderly in a nursing home. There is so much we can do.

PP: Until recently, we didn't have anybody who was paid. This is a surprise for people: How can you make anything work without people being paid? Whenever you have a structure, you have a paid staff, and in the parish, when you have something you need doing, you look for a staff person.

PE: In 1993, parish life was still strong, the number of priests relatively high, and religious movements were mainly associated with education. Since then the number of priests has halved, the clergy have been discredited by priestly sexual abuse, and the parishes and schools are not central the way they were. In the circumstances, is Sant'Egidio making a different kind of sense to people than it did thirty years ago?

AB: Yes. In this space that is so different, Sant'Egidio is received as a steady point of reference. We invite people to do what the Church has always done: prayer, service with the poor, and friendship, with a centrality to the Gospel as the center of life. It's an old Christian calling, but done by lay people who take their vocations seriously. And vocation is significant. We do feel called, not just that we are just "volunteers."

PE: The service for the victims of gun violence at New York's St. Patrick's Old Cathedral a few years back was like nothing I'd seen in the Church in the United States: the names of victims from all fifty states were read out, along with the circumstance in which they were killed—thus tying the service to the Community's Litany of the Martyrs—in which martyrs from the first century to the present are remembered. Will that be done again?

AB: That started after the president of Sant'Egidio [Marco Impagliazzo in Rome] came to us and said: "Look around, America has a problem with guns and a problem with violence." And it's a beautiful thing; it's what Sant'Egidio can be for America. Because an encounter with another is not only an encounter with a living person; it can be an encounter with a dead person. In this sense, Sant'Egidio has "met" a lot of dead people, Óscar Romero being the first. Romero died in El Salvador in 1980, and then Sant'Egidio took his memory and started doing the Litany of the Martyrs [in its prayer service], remembering Romero on the day of his death. That morphed into the remembering of all of the martyrs—an incredible transformation.

Now the litany for victims of gun violence continues in Washington D.C., at St. Stephen's Church [on Pennsylvania Avenue]—the Kennedy parish. It seemed to us that it would be good for

the prayer service to be a place where the community offers the memory of those who are killed in a particular city that month. So in Washington, every month we keep in memory every person who was killed by guns that month. It's our way of looking at a city differently because we are Christians. The company of Jesus is giving us a different eye, a different heart, a different memory. We pay attention to those killed with guns: we remember their names, remember where they were killed.

PP: The names are very important. In today's prayer [the daily prayer of Sant'Egidio, found in thirteen languages at santegidio.org] there is the passage about Zacchaeus. And Jesus is calling Zacchaeus *by name*. This is our experience of poverty. It's never "the poor." It is a person with a name. "Filomena": Filomena was the first elderly woman we met on the *periferia*, the outskirts of Rome [where the Community did its first work]. She had long hair; she was admitted to a nursing home, and they cut off her hair, and she let herself die. Our weekly "Prayer for the Refugees" remembers the names of people who died seeking refuge. There is a liturgy we just did for the first time at Our Saviour [on Park Avenue, near Grand Central Station]: "remembering our homeless friends who passed away." It is very important that the name doesn't die. It is the name of an encounter.

AB: The service for victims of gun violence is something we hope to replicate everywhere. So imagine this being an invitation. Imagine that after this article appears, someone in Louisville, Kentucky, says: "We would like to do the same! We can do a liturgy for those who have been killed with guns." Sant'Egidio is very "invitational" in that way. The Gospel is always inviting us to something else; there is a movement of the spirit that is telling us, "This is the time to try for more."

PE: Who is the Community in New York now, and how do they find you? One by one?

PP: Yes, one by one, definitely. In New York, we have a group of fifty or sixty people. Some come through the parishes, or they have lost their job, and they want to use their time, or they are retired. These are the people you meet at prayer, and at the Christmas lunch. For me, someone who has lived the Community as my identity, my vocation, these are my brothers and sisters. I call them companions on the path. Some of them are becoming unexpectedly close. So I ask myself: How am I going to communicate this so that it is going to last beyond me? And I tell myself: through the prayers, through the meetings, through the encounters, one by one.

AB: The Christmas lunch: it's bizarre, when you think about it. Why do you want to do Christmas not in your house? Why do you want to be in a Church, and serve the poor, who have nobody? But that's exactly what the Gospel says. And so you look around you and say, why not, once a year, do what the Gospel says? And when you actually do it, then what you discover is that you have not fifty people, not sixty, but hundreds of people, and you don't know who is serving and who is being served.

PE: So much of my own sense of Sant'Egidio comes from its presence in Rome and its work abroad. How important are its efforts and profile internationally to the Community here in the United States? Communion & Liberation, say, has brought American members to its annual meeting in Rimini and bound them into the movement that way.

PP: Ah. That is not our way—we don't have the money. But an effort is made. One woman wanted to go to Rome and see the Community there, so we offered her our air miles. That is the way.

AB: And there are Americans in Rome who went to Lesbos and worked with the refugees there.

PE: Andrea, you're now leading the Sant'Egidio Foundation for Peace and Dialogue. What does that mean for your work as a scholar and dean?

AB: We started the foundation as an American entity, to study more this work that Sant'Egidio has done on peace, because there are not so many places where these things can be done. I still have an academic appointment as a CORE Fellow at Seton Hall. I'm developing a new course on Catholic peace stories, because many people do not have a sense of how Catholics have worked for peace over the centuries. And there is, we believe, a very deep rediscovery of the involvement of Catholics with peace, expressed by John XXIII in *Pacem in terris* and then very beautifully by John Paul II. It was this involvement that Sant'Egidio took on. First there was the Prayer for Peace in Assisi in 1986; then there was the peace agreement for Mozambique in 1992. The prayer came first—the prayer comes first.

Fundamentally, we in Sant'Egidio believe that peacemaking requires the discipline to, as the psalm says, "Seek peace and pursue it." There is a double dimension, both seeking and pursuing. You cannot just seek peace; you really need to go after it. And we believe that the Church needs to rediscover that. At the beginning we would say "prayer, friendship, and service." Now we are saying "prayer, poor, and peace"—the three p's that Pope Francis associated with Sant'Egidio. There is clearly a vocation to peace, and we're trying to better understand what it means to be called to this peace that is not just for you, not just for me, but for everyone.

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The Dominican Sisters of Peace

When Sr. Mary Daniel, OP, entered the Dominican Sisters of St Mary's, New Orleans, in 1958, she thought she knew what the rest of her life would be like: life in a large motherhouse with her sisters and a steady job as a teacher, nurse, or catechist. After the Second Vatican Council, though, everything changed. Religious life underwent sweeping renewal, and Dominican sisters reclaimed their order's charism of itinerant preaching. Sr. Daniel, then middle-aged, traveled to Berkeley to study theology, later becoming pastoral associate of several parishes in Mississippi, where she regularly preached at Eucharist. "What I admire about women entering religious life today," she told me, "is that you know everything will change. And you're entering anyway."

As a second-year novice with the Dominican Sisters of Peace, I'm inspired by Sr. Daniel's willingness not simply to embrace change, but to undergo total transformation. It's no secret that congregations of women religious are dwindling in the United States; in just a few decades, my fellow Catholic sisters and I will number in the hundreds rather than the thousands. We will no longer own extensive properties, nor will we sponsor large institutions like schools or hospitals. In fact, our leaders are currently divesting of such assets, establishing canonical structures to pass governance on to others. Whatever else the future brings, it will doubtless require extensive discernment.

Fortunately, our sisters have a wealth of experience in that department, having ventured into emerging ministries decades before the institutional Church would recognize the need for them. Anticipating the environmental crisis as early as the 1970s, Dominicans opened farms and ecology centers to preach the goodness of creation. Jane Belanger, OP, studied sustainable agriculture and began working in eco-justice ministry, first in Ohio and later in Kansas. Other sisters got involved with populations at the margins of the American economy. Witnessing the poverty and neglect suffered by migrant farmworkers, Janice Thome, OP, and Roserita Weber, OP, learned Spanish so they could accompany the growing Latinx population near the Tyson beef plant in Dodge City, Kansas. These ministries have borne fruit, but now the sisters must face the prospect that there will not be other sisters to succeed them. Letting go and trusting that their work has not been in vain will require deep faith in Christ's promise of resurrection.

Our sisters have acted on the same faith before. In 2009, following a decade of discernment, they chose to let go of their lifelong religious identities and came together to form a new congregation, the Dominican Sisters of Peace. The story that I've heard most often since entering the order, and the one I love the most, is about how we received the name "peace." The sisters voted over two weekends, with half gathered in one place and half in another. Of fifty possible names, including a whole string of Dominican saints, "peace" hardly made the list. However, at the first gathering, an elderly sister addressed the assembly. "What the world needs now more than anything," she said, "is Christ's gift of peace." Her words made a powerful impression. The results of the first vote were kept secret; nevertheless, a similar leaning swept the second gathering. "Peace" was the nearly unanimous selection. After such a powerful movement of the Spirit, the sisters say that God named us "peace." It's an invitation for every sister to ask herself how God is calling her to build and preach peace.

Community is an essential part of that vocation. During my first year in the congregation, I lived in Columbus, Ohio, with sisters from Kansas, Michigan, Louisiana, New York, Massachusetts, China, Cuba, Ireland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. Many were in their seventies and eighties; socialized in such different regional and ethnic cultures, and hailing from different founding congregations, they had learned to navigate sensitive differences and dwell peaceably under one roof. Sharing meals and celebrating Eucharist together fosters their mutual care and respect. For me, their multicultural community remains a sign of hope in a time of division.

Pope Francis has called us to be "a poor Church, for the poor," and I see the strategic planning that our sisters are carrying out today as a model for the wider Church, both in the United States and worldwide. In light of changing demographics, our leaders are right-sizing. Relinquished properties in Louisiana and Massachusetts have been converted into land conservancies; a former motherhouse in Michigan now belongs to the local school district. Our predominantly white sisters are also educating themselves about racism and white supremacy to build a more inclusive community for the future. Committed to nonviolence and peace-building, our congregation has advocated for an end to gun violence, human trafficking, and the death penalty. That's what it means for us to be co-creators of God's just future.

What a rich inheritance, passed on to me by the Dominican sisters who have gone before, itinerant preachers all. Trusting in the Spirit's guidance, they have spent their lives constantly on the move, changing place and custom to meet the emerging needs of the people of God. As I join them on this journey into mystery and ponder the future, I'm encouraged by the thought that our God once chose Israel, "the smallest of peoples," to bring forth a blessing to the nations.

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Silence in the City

Kaya Oakes

Incarnation Monastery in Berkeley and New Camaldoli in Big Sur, California

Sunday Eucharist at the Hermitage

BEDE HEALEY, OSB CAM

I. VIGILS

The genius of the monastic life is its balance. The balance of prayer and work, *ora et labora*, is perhaps monasticism's best-known export into secular society aside from booze-sodden fruitcake, but the more significant balance is between the life of the community and the monk's ability to find solitude. Monks live, pray, and work together, but they also spend much of their time alone, spinning the radio dial of their souls in search of a voice. That voice is God's, and they also hear it communally in the Liturgy of the Hours, and particularly in the Psalms.

The idea of a monastic community has changed over centuries, and that change has only accelerated in recent decades. Today, oblates—lay people who make formal promises, which they call vows, but who live outside of the monastic communities they're vowed to—vastly outnumber monks. As religious communities age and vocations dwindle, as the pandemic still crawls along, and as many people continue to discover the transformative practice of silence and contemplation, the simplicity of monastic practice feels right for the chaos of our time.

Over the past four decades, a tiny community of Camaldolese monks at Incarnation Monastery in Berkeley has attracted hundreds of such oblates from all over the world. To reach the monastery, you drive or walk up, up, up from the flat streets of south Berkeley until you arrive at the top of a hill. There the monastery overlooks the sweep of the Bay Area and its millions of residents. There is no sign outside, no indication that this is a religious community. What looks like any other house in the area offers a place where people can heed Jesus' advice about prayer—to enter our rooms and close the door, where we can meet God in secret. The monastery and its oblate community have been and remain a refuge for

people seeking the balance between solitude and community that monks manage so well.

Camaldolese monks belong to a reformed Benedictine order founded by St. Romuald in the eleventh century, and they have always had both urban and rural monasteries and hermitages. Jaqueline Chew, a Camaldolese oblate, pointed out that the Camaldolese monastery in Rome is near the Colosseum, so monks in formation there live side by side with ordinary Romans and amid the ebb and flow of tourists. But their rural monasteries, closer to the quiet of the natural world, allow the Camaldolese to balance community and solitude in yet another way.

In California, this is epitomized by Incarnation's location, perched in the hills near acres of regional parks, but still very much in a city. The monastery consists of two conjoined houses, one where the monks live, and another with a spectacular view of Oakland, San Francisco, and the bay. This is where the small community chapel is located and where guests can stay—hospitality to the stranger is part of the Camaldolese charism. Their mother monastery, New Camaldoli, is more isolated; it's a few hours south of Berkeley on the rugged coastal landscape of Big Sur. Many oblates discover the Camaldolese community on retreats at Big Sur and later visit Incarnation, or, due to the increasing number of wildfires and crumbling roads around Big Sur that can make it inaccessible by car, some oblates choose to be part of a community that's easier to reach.

The Camaldolese rule of life, followed by both monks and oblates, was passed down from St. Romuald. It is exquisitely simple and, in its entirety, a mere hundred words long.

> Sede in cella quasi in paradiso;
> proice post tergum de memoria totum mundum,
> cautus ad cogitationes, quasi bonus piscator ad pisces.

"Sit in your cell," Romuald said, "as if in paradise. Cast all memory of the world behind you, cautiously watching your thoughts, as a good fisher watches the fish." And because, for monks, the Psalms are the key to everything, Romuald added a kind of warning: "In the Psalms there is one way. Do not abandon it." The Psalms, among the most ancient prayers of the Church, form the backbone of the Liturgy of the Hours followed by Camaldolese monks and oblates. They chant, recite, and practice *lectio divina*—slow, careful reading—living every day with the Psalms until these prayers are engraved on their hearts.

This kind of kenotic, self-emptying prayer is, of course, easier said than done. For many people, the pandemic has exposed our raw human need for companionship to the point that loneliness, depression, and anxiety became a kind of parallel pandemic. But for some people, the pandemic also exposed spiritual and religious longings and an awareness of the need for solitude that is woven into the history of Catholicism, but rarely acknowledged in the average parish.

Like the Catholic Church itself, a monastery's foundation is the life of Christ, which balanced the growth of the Christian community and its notion of *agape* with Jesus' own frequent calls to solitary prayer and retreat. Today, when the U.S. Church in particular can feel anything but stable or steadying, it makes sense that people would seek out places of spiritual refuge.

Fr. Andrew Colnaghi, the chaplain to the Incarnation oblate community, has lived in the United States for nearly half a century, though he still carries a prominent Italian accent. Soft-spoken and dressed in a tracksuit, at first sight he could be any man of a certain age who lives in Berkeley, where Boomers outnumber almost everyone other than UC Berkeley students. But in the chapel, wearing the Camaldolese habit of sweeping white robes, he and the other monks transform into figures out of time.

Colnaghi grew up near Milan, where he worked in a factory with nine thousand employees. There, where workers were called by number and not by name, he became involved in peace and justice work, which led him to conversations with the superior of a nearby Camaldolese community. That superior advised him not to leave his past as an organizer behind, but to bring it with him into the monastic vocation. After "hours and hours talking," Colnaghi entered the order in 1979.

When Colnaghi first arrived at Big Sur, he discovered just how isolating it could truly be. "There's nothing there," he told me. Whenever a storm or fire shuts down the road and the phone lines, the monastery is completely cut off from the world. Young people who sought out the Camaldolese vocation at Big Sur were "very enthusiastic to change, to form" themselves, but very few of them wound up taking vows, many of them finding the extreme isolation too difficult to cope with. But at the same time, more and more lay people were seeking out the monastery for retreats and beginning to form bonds with the monks. The general chapter of the Camaldolese suggested forming a more accessible, less remote sister community somewhere else in California. They decided on the Bay Area and purchased the buildings that now house Incarnation Monastery from

The oblates and monks were, in some ways, better prepared for the pandemic's long stretches of isolation and solitude. But they still wanted and needed to meet in community.

the Holy Cross fathers in 1980. The idea of a life of prayer in an urban context for Camaldolese means, according to Colnaghi, "you don't have to go to the desert; you can go anywhere."

The original vision for Incarnation was that it would be a place where monks in formation could live while studying at the Graduate Theological Union and also serve as a guesthouse for visiting scholars. When I interviewed Colnaghi, the guesthouse had just recently re-opened, and a young Jesuit was making a retreat and busily typing on a laptop on the deck. But Camaldolese vocations in the United States are not what they were in the era of Thomas Merton, when monasteries were practically overflowing. (During a visit to Merton's home monastery of Gethsemani a few years ago, I saw only a couple of men under sixty among the monks.) As vocations slowed, however, lay people who frequented the Big Sur monastery had begun to discern their own idea of a vocation. Among them was a woman who had begun to think of the monks as being like her brothers, an extended family. She knew she couldn't be a monk—she was married, and a woman—but she and the monks began to consider some other ideas.

II. LAUDS

The idea of an oblate is very old. Oblates—in Latin, *oblatus*, meaning someone whose life has been offered—were originally servants, workers, or children vowed by their parents to monasteries. As monastic orders reformed, the role of an oblate became closer to what it is today. Secular oblates are vowed to a specific monastery and promise to follow that order's rule and keep the hours, but they are not required to live in the monastic community.

Oblates are not necessarily Catholic. The Episcopalian writer Kathleen Norris is an oblate of the Benedictine community in Collegeville, Minnesota, and brought monastic life to a wider audience in her book *The Cloister Walk*. A growing number of mainline Protestants, along with some Evangelicals who have discovered contemplative prayer and mysticism, have begun to explore life as an oblate. Colnaghi says oblate candidates should "of course be Christian" due to the Camaldolese emphasis on the Psalms and on following the life of Christ, but the monks have also engaged in dialogue with Buddhist monasteries, which outnumber Catholic ones in the Bay Area.

Pamela Ovalle was the first oblate of Incarnation Monastery. In the 1970s, she began making retreats at the Big Sur monastery when they first opened to women, and she noticed "how difficult it was to go to the Hermitage for two weeks and have this wonderful sort of life of prayer and what have you, and then you'd come back to Berkeley and your whole life turns in another direction." It's understandable that Ovalle felt such whiplash. She spent her career in the corporate world where she was a risk manager for a bank—a career, she says, that made the contemplative prayer she was drawn to challenging.

Ovalle's bonds with the monks at Big Sur and later in Berkeley meant that when conversations began about forming an oblature, she was the first person the monks considered. The process, she observes, was "considerably less formal than now," when oblate candidates must discern for at least a year whether or not to make formal vows to the community. For Ovalle, having a community in Berkeley meant she could have a local community "with whom I could touch base and share the challenges of trying to be in the corporate world and a contemplative at the same time." Looking back, she says she was naïve when she entered the corporate world and later realized the way corporations treated people was "opposed to any sort of Christian values whatsoever."

Finding the balance between her career and her vows as an oblate could be especially difficult. Sometimes, she'd read the Psalms and feel "a major disconnect" between their words and her work. At other times, she'd find herself reading the Liturgy of the Hours on her train commute into San Francisco. One of the Camaldolese monks suggested that she take up the practice of meditating with Buddhists, which he thought might help her with centering herself as she prayed—so, for a time, she'd attend the San Francisco Zen Center after work. But it was the Camaldolese monastic community that gave her "a rootedness you don't find anywhere else."

To this day, Ovalle says, being an oblate and part of the community means she has a refuge when she gathers with them—and when she is alone. "When you gather and you chant, you pray and you have your Eucharist," she says, "you share and you become a family." But from decades of the Camaldolese oblate life she also learned that St. Romuald's advice to "sit in your cell as if in paradise" does not apply only within the monastery. "Sitting in that cell," she says, "is wherever you are. Wherever I am, I have the ability to sit in the cell and be with God."

III. VESPERS

For people drawn to solitude, the average Catholic parish can be the antithesis of what they seek, with coffee and doughnuts being wheeled into the sanctuary right after Communion and constant admonitions to volunteer, participate, donate, mix and mingle. In the early 2000s, Jacqueline Chew, a concert pianist and member of the music faculty at UC Berkeley, found herself "searching for more quiet." Chew had long felt drawn to the contemplative life, but she'd been reading Thérèse of Lisieux and figured the only way to achieve it was by becoming a cloistered nun, which would mean giving up playing concerts. Even at retreats, she says, "if there's a piano there, I'm not able to play it because you have to be quiet." Like many musicians, Chew says "music is the way that God speaks to me and I speak to God," so giving it up seemed out of the question.

She heard about Incarnation Monastery and the Big Sur community at a retreat center where one of the Camaldolese

monks came to speak. As she began attending Incarnation "little by little," she also decided to make a retreat at Big Sur, where she met her first oblate. "I didn't know what that was," Chew says. "So she explained it to me. As soon as I knew that this was an avenue that I could explore, I said, I want to do it. I knew right away." After a year's discernment, Chew took her oblate vows in 2005. When I asked her what about the Camaldolese charism appealed to her, balance came up again. "The balance of solitude and quiet and community," she says, "which is important, is the balance that I'm looking for." On the oblate page of the monastery's website, the importance of silence and solitude is reinforced. For oblates, the monks write, "it is especially important to seek for silence and solitude of the heart, which can be found everywhere if one has learned how to remain in vital contact with the depths."

Even while the Incarnation community had to shut down for in-person services during the pandemic like every other religious community, the oblates and monks were, in some ways, better prepared for the pandemic's long stretches of isolation and solitude. But they still wanted and needed to meet in community. Chew has helped to keep the oblates connected throughout the pandemic. She handles the monastery's email newsletter, which goes out to two hundred and fifty people. Before the pandemic, Incarnation would have "quiet days" four times a year when they would have talks and meals together; "it was really special," Chew says. She would email her friends "don't miss this" invitations, and when the monks found out, they invited her to begin writing the monastery newsletters.

Those newsletters went from monthly to weekly during the pandemic. The current prior, Fr. Bede Healey, was adept with technology according to Chew, and he quickly suggested Zoom check-ins. The community also founded a Zoom book club and moved the practice of *collatio*, a group reflection on the week's Scripture readings, to Zoom. This not only kept the local oblates connected but also enabled oblates from all over the world to get to know the community better. Because people travel from international locations to do retreats at Big Sur, they sometimes also end up visiting the Incarnation community while they're in the Bay Area, where most flights land. For the community in Berkeley, according to Chew, the pandemic-forced shift to meeting online has "really strengthened the relationships" with oblates around the world, "for us to get to know them better and for them to get to know us. The ones who live far away often don't have any oblates near them."

The community has even celebrated new oblates making their vows on Zoom, and people just keep coming, Chew says. The weekly email now includes a recording of the Sunday homily, which adds another layer to keeping people connected to one another. And the Camaldolese balance of solitude and community helped many oblates survive the horror and tragedy of the pandemic. As Chew notes, an oblate understands that "you're alone, you're at home, and you're not going anywhere." For many oblates, as for the Desert Mothers and Fathers and the centuries of monks and oblates who have followed in their wake and lived through plagues, wars, and political chaos, the solitude of the pandemic only strengthened their practice. For oblates, says Chew, being a part of Incarnation means "you're on a journey and you can be as active or as quiet as you want. And it's all accepted."

As I prepared to leave my meeting with Fr. Colnaghi, he handed me a letterpress broadside. Smoke from wildfires around the state hovered in the air, somewhat obscuring the spectacular view, but that smoke also tinted the air a golden color, much like the light you see in Italy, where many centuries ago St. Benedict and St. Romuald first envisioned a life balancing prayer and work, solitude and community. The broadside was etched with St. Romuald's brief rule, which begins with the instructions to sit in the cell and ends with the advice to "empty yourself completely and sit waiting, content with the grace of God." That advice is more challenging than many people realize. But it also has infinite rewards.

Those rewards were clear for my friend Paula, who found Incarnation Monastery near the end of her life. After a recurrence of cancer, she wanted a chance to pray in community, but a change of diocesan leadership and pastors at the big and bustling parish we used to attend together had fractured that community and scattered it across the Bay Area. Paula was solitary by nature and sometimes prickly about socializing; the fact that she could pray at Incarnation without feeling pressured to participate in group activities meant she found the balance she needed there. Paula attended Eucharist there until her body broke down and she could no longer go. Her funeral Mass was held at Incarnation almost four years ago, and the simplicity of the monastic service drew each of us in: just prayer and chant, breath in and breath out.

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The Knights of Peter Claver

In the early twentieth century, many lay Catholics formed fraternal organizations—associations of mutual aid, service, and community—for support in the face of religious and ethnic discrimination. The Knights of Columbus is one such group. But Black Catholics, seeking support amid the injustices of the Jim Crow South, were denied membership in these organizations. And so they formed their own.

The Knights of Peter Claver (KPC) was founded on November 7, 1909, in Mobile, Alabama, by four priests of St. Joseph's Society of the Sacred Heart and three laymen of the Diocese of Mobile. Modeled after the Knights of Columbus, KPC gave Black Catholic men the opportunity to serve God and the Church, to render aid and assistance to the sick and disabled, and to promote community. Over time, the group expanded to include women and children as well.

As a missionary, St. Peter Claver had witnessed the adverse treatment of African slaves in the port of Cartagena, Colombia. Reflecting on the suffering of Christ, Claver and his fellow Jesuits acknowledged the slaves' human dignity by caring for the sick and dying among them. He also baptized many of them into the Catholic faith. He would become known as the Apostle of the Slaves.

Today, the Knights of Peter Claver are active in parishes around the country. In local chapters referred to as councils, courts, or subordinate units, KPC continues the legacy of its patron by serving the marginalized and vulnerable in society. The supreme legislative body is vested in the National Council Board of Directors. Subordinate units are grouped into districts and states throughout the country, with representation on the National Council. KPC is a fairly democratic organization, governed by its charter, constitution, and bylaws in keeping with its objectives.

My own upbringing as a Catholic has been informed by my family's involvement with the Knights of Peter Claver and the Ladies Auxiliary. My father, Gregory Warner Sr., was initiated into the Order in 1981, and has held various positions at local, district, and national levels. As deputy of the Western states, he worked to expand the organization by recruiting new members and creating new units around the district. Later, as the grand knight of Council 220 at Transfiguration Church in Los Angeles, he raised money for scholarships, cooked meals for those who need food on Thanksgiving, and provided funds and services to the parish.

My father's dedication to KPC inspired my mother, my siblings, and me to follow in his footsteps. One of the things that sets the Knights of Peter Claver apart from many other Catholic fraternal organizations is their focus on participation by the whole family, which the Catechism describes as "the original cell of social life." I have been a member of KPC since I was able to join, right after I received First Communion. I was initiated into the Junior Daughters of Transfiguration Court No. 220 in Los Angeles, California. My brother and I held positions in the Junior Division as junior grand knight and junior grand lady of our parish unit. My sister served as the junior counselor at her parish, and is now the junior directress for the Western States District, responsible for the junior divisions of all units in the district. As a child, I loved being part of a community my parents loved so much. I was excited to be able to "turn out" with the group: everyone comes together to celebrate an event during a Sunday Mass wearing the community's characteristic white outfits, as well as regalia indicating what degree of the order they belong to.

I have also enjoyed the work that I have been able to do within the order. As a junior daughter, I participated in service events like fundraisers to benefit those in need and clothing drives for one of the local women's housing groups. Every year there is a convention that brings together members from around the country for annual meetings and fellowship. As an adult member, I have enjoyed participating in the service projects that the young adults have hosted. One year, we served at an after-school program by helping to clean out the school's basement, paint fences, and organize activities for the kids who attended. Another year, we volunteered to organize the warehouse at Habitat for Humanity in Dallas. I have also served as the cantor and bassist at the convention liturgies, some of which have been televised on EWTN. One of my greatest joys is making music, and it's wonderful to be able to join voices with other musicians in KPC to praise and celebrate our Black Catholic heritage.

In Austin, Texas, where I now live, the Knights provide for the needs of the community with volunteer service and donations to Holy Cross Parish, Meals on Wheels, sickle-cell research, food drives, fan drives, community-service projects, scholarship initiatives, school-supply drives, seminaries, homeless shelters, and blood drives. That's just one city; the Knights of Peter Claver are doing similar work throughout the United States.

The Order has proved to be resilient for over a century now. In the face of racism and hatred in our country, and in the wake of natural disasters—Hurricane Katrina seriously damaged the National Headquarters in New Orleans—we are still standing. Through prayer and the bonds of community, we have continued the work of our patron, caring for those who need care the most, witnessing to the love of Christ.

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‘Don’t Worry, This Is a Catholic House’

Louise Zwick

Casa Juan Diego in Houston, Texas

Our work at Casa Juan Diego in Houston, Texas, changed abruptly during the first months of the pandemic. Because of the lockdowns and emergency restrictions at the U.S.-Mexico border, fewer refugees arrived from Latin America. We were busier than ever, however, providing food to several times the usual number of people and continuing to help undocumented immigrants who were paralyzed or very sick.

Now that has all changed again. Immigrants and refugees are once more flowing into Houston and showing up at Casa Juan Diego.

At the request of U.S. Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE), we recently received a young Nicaraguan man. ICE employees brought him in handcuffs and chains after he was released from detention. When Felipe (not his real name) came into our Catholic Worker House of Hospitality, he was a little shaken. We told him he was welcome, that he did not have to worry, and that this was a Catholic house. “Thank God,” he replied. He told us that he had been with the Franciscans in Central America for four years before he had to leave the order to help support his family because his father was ill. He came to the United States when life became impossible in Nicaragua. As we talked with him in our library, Felipe saw a picture of Padre Pio and spoke of his devotion to him. We gave him the picture. Felipe quickly used our WiFi to call his mother

The mural outside Casa Juan Diego’s main building. Art by Mary Ellen Rouen.

REBECCA DREXEL

on WhatsApp so she would know he was alive. His friend and sponsor in Houston picked him up that day.

Samuel was sleeping outside our front door one morning. We thought he might be a homeless man looking for a safe place to sleep. We discovered, however, that he had horrifying blisters on his feet from walking to Houston from Honduras. He had found his way alone to Casa Juan Diego and asked for help getting to his family in New Jersey.

Six new pregnant women came to take refuge during a single month. None of them had received prenatal care during their difficult journeys, and some of their husbands were still detained by ICE. A few of the women were Haitian but spoke Spanish because they had first tried to make a life for themselves in Chile.

Whole families from various countries in Africa arrived, the husbands often bearing the marks of torture on their bodies. Those seeking asylum were sent to Casa Juan Diego by ICE or by centers on the border. People from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, from the Ivory Coast, from Angola, Mali, and Burkina Faso found each other in joyful reunions. Some people had gotten to know each other on the difficult trip from Brazil or Ecuador, where so many begin their long trek. They had been stuck together in a camp in Panama for months because of closed borders. Venezuelan families also began to arrive.

Our medical clinics have reopened again, providing in-person service to the undocumented. Our houses are full. The Catholic Workers drive people to appointments. Today we have two women with mental-health issues. They and the six pregnant women have many appointments, and the men and women have to check in at Immigration or go to the Intensive Supervision Appearance Program (ISAP) office to have their ankle monitors recharged or replaced if they do not work.

When people arrive, we take them to local pharmacies to be vaccinated against COVID-19. We are sending as many people as possible to stay with any family or friends they may have. We hope not to be overwhelmed, but also to promote family and community reunification.

People who visit Casa Juan Diego often ask how many people we have living in our houses. Sometimes the answer is about a hundred, sometimes less. But it is not just a question of how many live here: to respond as personalists, we cannot just warehouse people. Our guests are more than numbers, our task more than the provision of beds and meals (no mean feat when there are guests from all parts of the world). Each one of them has a personal story that needs to be addressed so that we can help them continue their journey.

Our life was quite different in the spring and summer of 2020. As people in the Houston community began to fall ill with Covid and as restaurants closed, many were unable to work. We were overwhelmed with people coming to Casa Juan Diego to ask for food. The undocumented community knew Casa Juan Diego and felt safe coming here for help. Instead of having people file through the main building to receive food, as we usually do, we had people line up in their cars so that we could load the groceries directly into them. Realizing that our usual Tuesday morning distribution was not enough, we made food available every day except Sunday. On other days people in need of food came to the door, where we had set up socially distanced tables between the Catholic Workers and the lines of people seeking assistance.

Even with these precautions, however, several of the Catholic Workers became ill. When the first one began to show symptoms of Covid, testing was not yet widely available. It seemed like just a cold. Later, when it was possible to get tested, the staff members who became ill quarantined in one of our small houses until they were better, and then returned to work.

We didn't have enough space for all the food coming from the Houston Food Bank. My son, Joachim, and two other Catholic Workers, Will and Leonel, made a new plan for the entrance of our main building. They tore down a wall and had a contractor make new front doors where the pallets of food could enter more easily. We stopped receiving clothing donations and concentrated on preparing and distributing food.

We could not discontinue our service to the sick and injured who cannot receive help from the government. For many years we have been caring for undocumented people with disabilities, at the request of Houston-area hospitals. But our medical-clinic services did undergo a big change: our clinics closed to the public. We could not have people crowded into our waiting rooms; consultations were done by phone, patients were given lab referrals, and refills were provided. People still came in to pick up their medications, which Casa Juan Diego pays for if they cannot. As soon as vaccines became available for health-care workers, Dr. John Butler, our medical director, made them available to us as a community clinic. Our medical and support staff quickly took advantage of this opportunity.

The big freeze that hit Texas this past Valentine's Day took us by surprise. The state's independent electrical grid failed. Our main houses did not lose power, but the smaller houses did. Several staff members had to move from one place to another. We took in men who had been living on the streets and passed out sleeping bags and blankets.

Fortunately, we had planned ahead for the emergencies that often happen in Houston during tropical storms or hurricanes. We had a backup water supply, so when the water pressure in the city became too low, we could carry water to drink or flush toilets. As our women guests helped carry buckets of water up the stairs, one remarked, "This is just the way we did it in Africa." We lost plants in our garden, which usually provides good vegetables and fruit from our trees.

When Hurricanes Eta and Iota devastated Honduras and Guatemala in November 2020, causing the loss of homes and livelihoods, Central Americans living in Houston came and asked us to help send assistance to their families. We began to give each family something to send their relatives, but soon had to stop: hundreds of people were forming lines at Casa Juan Diego begging for help. With our small staff and the already long lines of people coming here for food, we could not continue distributing remittances. But the Houston families who came here for their relatives, poor themselves, discovered our food distribution, which continued as before.

Many of the families trying to cross into the United States today had their lives destroyed by recent hurricanes in Central America. They represent a growing percentage of people around the world uprooted by natural disasters related to climate change. We agree with Pope Francis when he asks us to respond to this crisis: "This is the work the Lord asks now of us, and there is great joy in it."

Dr. John Butler speaks with a patient at the Casa Juan Diego clinic.

REBECCA DREXEL

My late husband, Mark Zwick, used to say that anyone can start a Catholic Worker House. All you need to do is have a building, hang out your shingle, and begin. The challenge then is to live the Gospel, specifically the Works of Mercy described in Matthew 25. Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin have shown us a way to live as personalists according to the radicalism of the Gospel. This way of life is an alternative to the prosperity gospel and all-consuming consumer culture of American capitalism; to militarism and xenophobia; and to the cruel scapegoating of immigrants and refugees.

Casa Juan Diego began in 1980, when refugees from the war in El Salvador began flowing across the border. Mark and I had lived in El Salvador in a poor area with our children a couple of years earlier. Mark rented what he called the ugliest building in Houston, opened a bank account, and got a post office box. We began to receive refugees and started the *Houston Catholic Worker*, a bilingual newspaper. Many of those who first arrived at the house were teenagers and had nowhere to go. Soon the house was filled. With the help of full-time Catholic Workers and volunteers from the Houston community, Casa Juan Diego has received countless people in the forty-one years since it opened.

From the beginning, we have prayed the Divine Office in the mornings and have celebrated weekly Mass. This sustains us as we confront the daily challenges of love in action, which can sometimes be a "harsh and dreadful thing," as Dorothy Day said, quoting Dostoevsky.

There is a tendency among those unacquainted with immigrants or the poor to fear them—to see them as a threat—even as they suffer hunger and uprootedness from everything they know. To hear them disparaged or to know that people have harmed them makes us want to cry out with León Bloy:

> Christ is at the center of all things, He takes all things upon Himself, He hears all things, He suffers all things. It is impossible to strike a human being without striking Him, to humiliate someone without humiliating Him, curse or kill anyone without cursing Him or killing Him, Himself.... I am in communion of impatience with all the mutinous, all the disillusioned, all those who have cried and not been heard, all the damned of the world.... I know all the reasonable things that virtuous people can say to each other to console themselves for the temporal damnation of three quarters of humanity (*The Pilgrim of the Absolute*).

At Casa Juan Diego, we always need more people to help us welcome the poor and the stranger. It helps if you speak Spanish or French. It is humble work and it can be hard, but a week, a month, or a year of volunteering can have an impact on many people.

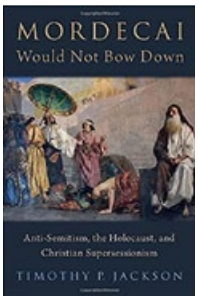
LOUISE ZWICK *is the co-founder of Casa Juan Diego. She is the author, along with her late husband, Mark Zwick, of a book about Casa Juan Diego,* Mercy Without Borders *(Paulist Press, 2010). For more information about this house of hospitality, please visit its website: cjd.org.*

Still Supersessionist?

BRAD EAST

There is no sin found in Christian history either so vile or so ubiquitous as the reflexive repulsion of the Jewish people. That repulsion is twofold. Its theological aspect is the enduring impulse to portray Jews and Judaism as rendered null and void by the coming of Jesus as Messiah, and thus to presume the replacement of Israel by the Church. Its moral aspect, which is also emotional and psychological, is the literal revulsion at the continued, stubborn existence of the Jews as a people and the equally literal rejection of them from the common life of Gentile Christendom. The result, since Christians began assuming political power in the long wake of Constantine's conversion, has been a relentless set of variations on ostracization: ghettoes, pogroms, blood libels, exclusion from civic life, restriction on economic activity, forced conversions, and more. Such transgressions by a powerful majority against a beleaguered minority are born, among other things, of insecurity and resentment: the younger brother, anxious of his status, who slays his elder brother after recognizing that he is second, not first. In this way anti-Judaism, in one form or another, is the original and besetting sin of Gentile Christianity.

The term theologians use for this view is supersessionism. To use anachronistic concepts, supersessionism is the interpretation of salvation history according to which a new and lasting religion called "Christianity" is the divine substitute for a decadent and moribund religion called "Judaism." This notion is widespread in the Christian imagination, past and present, lay and elite. It is also a biblical and theological error, unsupported by canonical texts and unrequired by sacred doctrine. But, above all, it is a moral and civilizational disaster. For the list of wrongs and horrors recounted above is incomplete, terminating as it does in the crime of all crimes: the Shoah.



MORDECAI WOULD NOT BOW DOWN
Anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and Christian Supersessionism

TIMOTHY P. JACKSON
Oxford University Press
$74 | 288 pp.

In his new book, *Mordecai Would Not Bow Down: Anti-Semitism, the Holocaust, and Christian Supersessionism*, Timothy P. Jackson considers the Shoah not just as a moral or political event, but as a theological one. He modifies the perennial question "Why the Jews?" to the more pertinent "Why *always* the Jews?" The book's title is taken from Esther 3:5, which tells of Esther's cousin Mordecai, a Jewish man who would not bow to the Gentile Haman, who in turn plotted the destruction of the Jewish people. Whatever the historicity of that story (retold each year at the festival of Purim), Jackson argues that hatred of the Jews is neither a modern nor a Christian problem alone. It is a human problem. Why is that? Why do Gentiles invariably take offense at the children of Abraham?

Jackson's answer is that the Jewish people stand for something beyond themselves, and the sinful human heart hates it. That something is the God of steadfast love manifest in the Torah—and, he adds, in the rabbi from Galilee, Jesus of Nazareth. In this way "anti-Semitism is fundamentally due to hatred of God and of those whom God loves—especially the frail and defenseless." It follows that "the Nazi attack on the Jews was aimed at God and His Torah, not just a particular ethnicity." Anti-Semitism is therefore a function of Jewish election, what Leonard Cohen calls "the glory of the Jew":

> that he is despised, that he moves in this mirrored exile, covered with mirrors, and as he passes through the communities where he sojourns, he reflects their condition and his condition. To me, his destiny is exile, and his vocation is to be despised.

Does this answer blame the victim? By no means: Jackson insists that seeking to grasp the evil of Nazism and the uniqueness of the Shoah is not to explain either away. On the contrary, he believes that it is a moral and theological dodge to make the Shoah either absurd (devoid of rational agents and recognizable human action) or akin to other genocidal crimes (so that the Jews' identity as Jews is irrelevant to their being targeted by the Nazis). Even more, to avoid understanding the Nazis only ensures that history will repeat itself. For, as Jackson writes, "all of us have an inner Nazi"—that is, a part of ourselves "that resents a supernatural faith that challenges our natural desires and temporal loyalties." We fail the victims and ourselves if we project that resentment onto others—so that "they," unlike "us," are evil incarnate and thus subhuman—instead of confessing our own susceptibility to it.

For Jackson, then, "anti-Semitism is a sin, rather than an illness or a delusion." *Mordecai Would Not Bow Down* is a sustained meditation on this claim, tracing both the sources and the consequences of the seemingly universal and inextirpable sin of anti-Semitism, not least in its Christian guise. And it

Pope Benedict XVI during his visit to Auschwitz

BART PRO/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

is a meditation. As a Gentile Christian, Jackson has taken a certain risk in writing about the Jews, the Shoah, and anti-Semitism. He does so, however, with nuance, sensitivity, courage, and moral clarity. The book is less a series of arguments building on one another than a contemplative spiral, reiterating and ruminating on a set of inseparable phenomena: the evil of Nazism; the horror of the Shoah; the election of the Jews; the anti-Semitism of Christendom; the temptations of schadenfreude; the suffering servanthood of Israel and Jesus. Over and again, the thesis resounds: "If the Jews are tantamount, collectively, to the founding religious conscience of the West, then the Third Reich aimed permanently to silence that conscience." Jackson thereby turns the so-called *Judenfrage* on its head. The Jews are not a quandary, much less a problem for Gentiles to solve. Rather, the Jews are a living question posed by God to Gentile society: Will you—will we—answer the call to holiness by subordinating our instincts and desires, our laws and traditions, to the command of the one God to love our neighbors as ourselves, even to the point of laying down our lives for them? When Hitler answered in the negative, seeking instead "to live without God, beyond good and evil," the Final Solution followed as a matter of course: "To kill the Jews as the people of God."

Hence Jackson's fundamental contention about the Nazis: they, in a demonic expansion of Haman's scheme, combined the racial ("genes") with the religio-cultural ("memes") in a global anti-Semitic project of "expropriation/expulsion, segregation/concentration, and finally annihilation/genocide." Hitler's aim was an abomination, but it was neither random nor irrational nor a matter of race alone. The Jews stood for what the Nazis hated, which means the Jews stood in the Nazis' way. In this respect the Nazis perceived rightly, though that perception should have been an occasion for repentance, not slaughter.

That is a hard word to hear, though a defensible one. Jackson wants to argue more, though. And it is here, in my view, that problems appear in his account. The first problem is an instability in Jackson's presentation of the Jews and Judaism vis-à-vis their various historical enemies. Jackson vacillates between suggesting that Jews in general stand for certain ideas or values and the stronger case that Jews in fact hold certain beliefs or embody certain ideals. As Jackson well knows, however, the actual Jewish victims of Nazism represent a spectrum of religious and moral views: some were observant, others secular; some were Orthodox, others atheist; some were courageous, others naïve, and others still assisted the Nazis for fear of their lives and those of their loved ones. This range of perspectives and behaviors is no indictment. It only tells us they were human. What the Nazis did was wrong not because of the special innocence or virtue of their victims. It was wrong because prejudice and apartheid, dehumanization and torture, persecution and genocide are *malum in se*, no matter the identity or character of the victims.

That does not negate Jackson's intended point, namely, that the Jews were targeted by the Nazis because they were Jews, and their Jewish identity is more (though not less) than an ethnic or biological fact. But this point needs a firmer foundation than the subjective intentions of Nazi leaders or the admirable beliefs or conduct of Jewish victims. Such rooting is best accomplished theologically—that is, by specifying that what sets apart the Jews from the nations is finally nothing subject to empirical or psychological investigation. For what sets apart the Jews is divine election. In Abraham God set his heart on the Jews and chose them alone as his beloved. This choice is irrevocable: no human deed can threaten it, and God will not reverse it.

Toward the end of World War II, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote that "the authentic Jew makes himself a Jew, in the face of all and against all." Just a year or two earlier Anne Frank wrote that "it is God who has made us as we are, but it will be God, too, who will raise us up again." Of the two, we should follow Frank.

The second problem in Jackson's argument arises from the first. Throughout the book Jackson makes Jews and Judaism stand for what he calls "moral monotheism." Moral monotheism teaches that we are all, at least potentially, children of one God; that the principal virtue is love (*'hesed* or *agape*) for God and for neighbor; that self-sacrifice is the culmination of incarnate love; and that God chose the Jews to bring this knowledge, even salvation, to the Gentiles. Accordingly, election is for mission to the nations, God's love for Israel is not exclusive but includes all others equally, and the ostensible scandal of Israel's chosenness is merely a misdirect: God selects a single tribe as a means of bringing tribalism to an end.

None of these claims are indefensible taken alone. Together, however, they constitute a massive abstraction. At times the Jews seem to symbolize nothing so much as what Jackson believes to be right, true, and good. That seems doubtful, to say the least. The irony is that this is exactly the sort of supersessionist temptation Christians have always been liable to: reading the spirit against the letter, Gentiles deign to permit the Jews their oddly carnal beliefs (whoever descends from Abraham belongs to the elect) and customs (circumcision, kosher, Sabbath) so long as they are spiritualized, made legible to Gentile predilections, even universalized so as not to exclude a soul. If this sounds like a late-modern liberal Christian construal of what Judaism ought to be, that's because it is.

The flip side of this account of Judaism is Jackson's equally idiosyncratic construal of Christian faith. He is absolutely right to hold the Church accountable for its centuries of supersessionist and anti-Jewish sermons, treatises, laws, and actions. Yet he goes further. He looks to the New Testament not just as fertile soil for later anti-Jewish distortion but as itself guilty of anti-Semitism. He finds this apostolic anti-Semitism—an oxymoron and anachronism, it should be noted—in St. Luke, St. John, the Apocalypse, parts of St. Matthew, and presumably Hebrews, too. He (rightly) exonerates St. Paul, or at least his undisputed letters. But he even spies ethnic bias (against Gentiles: Mark 7:27) and racial animus (against Jews: John 8:44) on Jesus' own lips. He contrasts this canonical anti-Semitism with a "philo-Semitism inspired by" what he calls "much of the (unredacted) Bible." That is an odd claim to make, because it is Jackson who has redacted so much of the canon, a sort of updated Jeffersonian edition of the New Testament. It is doubly odd because Jackson is unsure about Jesus' divinity, ambivalent about the resurrection of the dead, and insistent that "there is no more reason for a pious Jew to convert to Christianity than for Jesus to be considered a Christian. Jesus' objective was to convert *us* to a robust form of Judaism."

In other words, Jackson imagines a Gospel that is good news not for Jews but only for Gentiles—as if the canonical gospels did not uniformly present Jesus as "sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24), as if the early apostles (Jews to a man) did not, in the beginning, announce the Gospel solely to fellow Jews (Acts 1–7). Indeed they were surprised, even startled, when Gentiles started listening in (see Acts 10–15). Paul himself believed that Jesus was Israel's Messiah and Davidic king, raised from the dead and installed as lord of heaven and earth, through whom deliverance from sin and death come to all who believe: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16). That is why the Petrine mission was to the circumcised, while the Pauline mission was to the uncircumcised (Galatians 2:7–10).

I am at a loss, therefore, when trying to grasp the Jacksonian Gospel. He is right that what the apostles originally proclaimed did not—and what the Church today preaches should not—entail Jewish abandonment of Torah observance. He is right, too, that contemporary evangelization of Jews is a complex topic about which Christians can reasonably disagree and observant Jews have much to say worth heeding. But these are different questions from whether the good news about Jesus is meant for all of humanity, Jew and Gentile alike. Nor is it helpful to stipulate in advance that an affirmative answer is by definition supersessionist, therefore anti-Jewish, therefore anti-Semitic. The women and men who originally followed Jesus and then spread his message to the world were all Jews who believed that message was of immediate relevance both to their kin and to the nations. It isn't just anachronistic to deny them their faith, and so a failure of understanding. It is a failure of charity, because we inadvertently ascribe to them what would have been unthinkable, at the time, as well as self-contradictory, given who they were and what they believed.

Finally, such an interpretation makes Christianity as such the source of, and in no way possessed of resources to combat, the sin of anti-Semitism. For it locates anti-Semitism in the heart of the Gospel. If that is true, then we ought to forsake the faith, rather than snip and cut two-thirds of the New Testament until it meets our standards; better by far to judge it guilty and walk away than to pretend otherwise. There is no doubt that Gentile Christians, underwritten by the long history of Christendom, bear much of the guilt for the path that led to the Final Solution. That is our shame. The question is whether Christianity and anti-Semitism are contingently entangled or logically inseparable. If the latter, the cause is lost: either we reject the Gospel or accept its inevitable repulsion of the Jews. If the former, we are charged with a task: the gradual disentanglement of faith and resentment, grace and anxiety, adoption and fratricide. If that task is possible, under God, then we Gentiles are not without hope.

BRAD EAST *is Assistant Professor of Theology at Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas.*

Fractured Remembrances

MELODY S. GEE

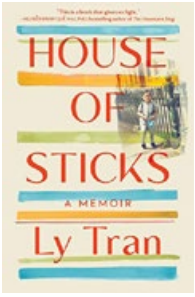
Like all memoirists, Ly Tran accesses her past through hazy and incomplete memories. The first chapter of her debut, *House of Sticks,* opens with Tran being treated for hypothermia in a New York City hospital because her family, recently arrived from Vietnam, has spent their first American winter in an unheated apartment. Three-year-old Tran and her brothers are chasing each other around the hospital room when "someone falls down and [cries], quite possibly me." This scene, and the rest of Tran's book, vividly depicts the challenges of her family's immigration alongside her own developing American identity and independence.

With every story, Tran is transparent about what cannot be fully remembered. Her earliest memories are seen through a scrim of buoyant curiosity and delight, making the family's in-home sweatshop labor feel like a game, and even softening their dire poverty and isolation. But there are other devastating reasons Tran struggles to see the past, one of them quite literal. Her eyesight begins to decline in third grade, a condition that her father dismisses. "No young person should be wearing glasses, and especially not my children," he scoffs when she brings home a note from her school nurse. "Once you put on glasses, you'll be blind forever." In one of many episodes where her father loses himself to paranoia and rage, he beats and berates Tran for daring to ask for glasses. His eruptions, we learn, are rooted in his decade spent as a prisoner in a North Vietnamese reeducation camp. While conveying her father's violence with visceral fear and confusion, Tran's writing is also unfailingly tender toward him. What she wants most is to take away his trauma and its specter, which lives like an extra family member in their tiny Queens apartment.

Around the time she begins losing her eyesight, Tran also begins to dissociate, experiencing a split from herself that haunts the rest of her story. "I started making faces to see if I could find one that squared with who I thought I was, unable to shake the uneasy feeling that I was not the girl I saw in the mirror." The girl in the mirror terrifies Tran with her unrecognizable face and shames her whenever Tran expresses a desire that doesn't serve her family. Tran endures this interior split while navigating external ones that also threaten to divide her from her family: her eyesight continues to deteriorate, yet she must protect her parents from the school's charges that refusing her glasses amounts to child neglect.

Not wanting to anger or betray her mother and father, Tran guards the secret of a sympathetic teacher who buys her glasses and later her eldest brother who, after leaving home, buys her contacts. She keeps many other secrets from her family—her in-school therapy appointments, sexual harassment from customers at their family's nail salon, her psychic break and failing grades in college, falling in love at nineteen with an older man with a six-year-old son. Concealing so much of herself as she navigates her parents' fear and her own desire to make her way in the world, comes at the price of her wholeness, which is already fractured and fragile. As she grows into adulthood, the split between Tran and the girl in the mirror grows sharper and more frightening than ever. "Was the whole of my existence summed up in the reflection that I couldn't recognize as my own? Pressed so close against the glass, I could only see one part of myself at a time, and never the whole. The mirror wasn't broken, but the result was the same."

With tenderness and courage, Tran comes to accept her family as they are,



HOUSE OF STICKS
A Memoir

LY TRAN
Scribner
$27 | 384 pp.

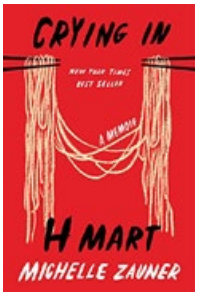
Ly Tran

JOSEPH VIDAL

Michelle Zauner

for all they have endured and inflicted. Forging her identity while fighting to recognize her own face, voice, and desires, is a harrowing and lonely journey, and yet Tran's desire for familial closeness never wavers. In the end, words are what help Tran begin reconciling—with her brothers for leaving home, with her mother for never stopping her father's abuse, and with her father for his terrifying outbursts.

With the help of teachers, therapists, and a loving partner, Tran finds healing in language that makes real her experiences, desires, and interiority, at last animating her whole and real self. She is not only a daughter, sister, or refugee, but all of these, along with American, student, lover, and writer. Out of heartbreaking inherited trauma, Tran discovers joy in new relationships and the grace for one of the most beautiful scenes of parent-child rapprochement I've ever read. Her new eyesight lets Tran see, most importantly, "the voice I'd been unable to access all my life…on the page." Words are strong enough to contain a life's story, holding together all the fractures in remembering and telling.



CRYING IN H MART
A Memoir

MICHELLE ZAUNER
Knopf
$26.95 | 256 pp.

Michelle Zauner is also an immigrant's daughter who must build her identity apart from her Korean mother before she can build it with her. But before they get a chance at an adult relationship, Zauner's mother dies of stomach cancer at the age of fifty-six. Zauner is twenty-five. In her memoir, *Crying in H Mart*, her mother's life, death, and absence forge Zauner's character with her overwhelming attention, demands, beauty, mystery, and abiding care.

The book's titular H Mart, a Korean-owned national grocery chain, is where Zauner goes in search of far more than just provisions. The store is "a beautiful, holy place," where immigrants, international students, interracial families, and grieving daughters come in search of "a piece of home, or a piece of ourselves. We look for a taste of it in the food we order and the ingredients we buy. Then we separate. We bring the haul back to our dorm rooms and suburban kitchens, and we re-create the dish that couldn't be made without our journey."

Offering satisfaction for any craving, H Mart is where Zauner can access both her mother's native language and her love language: "Food was how my mother expressed her love.... I can hardly speak Korean, but in H Mart, it feels like I'm fluent." Despite her descriptions of mouth-watering treats and the store's popping energy, H Mart is a haunted site, a shipwreck where Zauner comes to excavate "the first chapter of the story I want to tell about my mother.... I'm collecting evidence that the Korean half of my identity didn't die when she did."

Zauner's mother will succumb to cancer less than a year after her diagnosis, hardly giving the family time to catch their breath, let alone comprehend their impending loss. With the little time they have left together, Zauner moves back home, desperately hoping her caregiving will bring physical and emotional healing:

> I would radiate joy and positivity and it would cure her. I would wear whatever she wanted, complete every chore without protest. I would learn to cook for her—all the things she loved to eat, and I would single handedly keep her from withering away. I would repay her for all the debts I'd accrued. I would be everything she ever needed. I would make her sorry for ever not wanting me to be there. I would be the perfect daughter.

Food had always connected them, transcending resentments and disappointments. But despite hours of shopping and cooking, the first round of chemotherapy leaves Zauner's mother unable to eat anything. Tension, fear, and old wounds between immigrant mother and her only American daughter make this time of intended closeness fraught, compounded by the ravages of chemo and the intrusive care of well-meaning friends.

Of course, no dish, no matter how delicious or authentic, can save her mother, nor can the most diligent caregiving ease Zauner's guilt. Like Tran, she feels responsible for erasing a parent's pain. Every meal, bath, or sleepless night is meant as atonement for all her transgressions and ingratitude, but also for "the love and care I'd taken for granted for so many years." Seen through the lens of devastating loss, Zauner's entire life looks like a debt, and her mother's dying is the repayment period.

BARBORA MRAZKOVA

The remaining months of her mother's illness are a whirlwind of precipitous decline and unexpected rally, a terribly timed trip to Korea, and the beautifully hurried wedding of Zauner and her partner of two years. The event and its planning are a blur, like a video played back at high speed. The love, too, is heightened and frantic, as Zauner and her fiancé live life in fast-forward to bring her mother the promise of a future she will not inhabit.

After her mother's death, Zauner travels the globe in search of who she will be without her, crashing into her anguish at every turn. "Sometimes my grief feels as though I've been left alone in a room with no doors. Every time I remember that my mother is dead, it feels like I'm colliding with a wall that won't give." The answers she finds renew her relationships with those who remain: her father, her new husband, her family in Korea, her own broken heart.

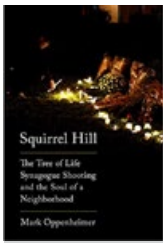
What pierces Zauner most deeply is all the time she and her mother will never have. "What would have been the most fruitful years of understanding were cut violently short, and I was left alone to decipher the secrets of inheritance without its key." But time, Zauner discovers while throwing her grief into making kimchi, can give life as surely as it can slowly take it.

> I had thought fermentation was controlled death. Left alone, a head of cabbage molds and decomposes. It becomes rotten, inedible. But when brined and stored, the course of its decay is altered.... It exists in time and transforms. So it is not quite controlled death, because it enjoys a new life altogether.

We can't see cabbage becoming kimchi, nor our greatest loss becoming a new kind of love. We can only wait with hope in wisdom and practice, trusting that what we bury will be unearthed transcendent and defiantly alive.

MELODY S. GEE *is a freelance writer and editor, and the author of* The Dead in Daylight *and* Each Crumbling House. *She lives in St. Louis, Missouri, with her husband and daughters.*

BOOKS IN BRIEF

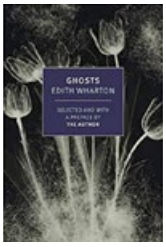


SQUIRREL HILL
The Tree of Life Synagogue Shooting and the Soul of a Neighborhood
MARK OPPENHEIMER
Knopf
$28.95 | 320 pp.

The murder of eleven Jews at Pittsburgh's Tree of Life Synagogue in October 2018 was the deadliest anti-Semitic attack in U.S. history. But Mark Oppenheimer, former *New York Times* religion columnist, focuses less on the gunman and the shooting than on, as the subtitle has it, the soul of the Squirrel Hill neighborhood in which it occurred, drawing from interviews with residents and non-residents, rabbis and historians, high-schoolers and senior citizens. In places recalling Jane Jacobs's observations on the vitality of city life, *Squirrel Hill* also examines the century-old currents of Judaism in Pittsburgh; the range and variety of belief visible in the aftermath of the attack; and the response of a diverse, close-knit community to a tragedy that drew global attention and controversial visits from not only activists and curiosity-seekers but also politicians (Donald Trump) and celebrities (Tom Hanks). (You can find our interview with Mark Oppenheimer on the Commonweal Podcast.)

OVERHEATED
How Capitalism Broke the Planet—and How We Fight Back
KATE ARONOFF
Bold Type Books
$30 | 432 pp.

Climate change, contends journalist Kate Aronoff in *Overheated*, isn't "a market failure or consumer choice problem," and market solutions alone are insufficient. What we need instead is a critical role for the state: regulations informed by science, rather than nonbinding proposals; large-scale government spending to enable an orderly energy transition; and democratic oversight that accounts for the needs of the marginalized, free from the influence of greenwashed fossil-fuel companies. Winning support for these changes, however, requires a vision of what a green future could look like—something more than a wasteland or a techno-utopia for the rich. In *Overheated*, alongside accounts of the hypocrisy and injustice that led to our current crisis, there is also a generous vision of a Green New Deal that upholds human dignity, protects workers and families, and encourages both individual and ecological flourishing.

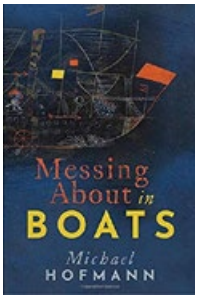


GHOSTS
EDITH WHARTON
NYRB Classics
$16.95 | 288 pp.

Perhaps best known as the gimlet-eyed chronicler of Gilded Age New York aristocracy, Edith Wharton was also a skilled ghost-story writer. One of her last writing projects was assembling *Ghosts*, a collection of haunting short stories that she wrote between 1902 and 1937. Recently republished by NYRB Classics, *Ghosts* includes an introduction by Wharton herself, in which she writes the ability to enjoy such stories had become "almost atrophied in the modern man." This wasn't due to such modern inventions as electricity, she argued: "What the ghost really needs is not echoing passages and hidden doors behind tapestry, but only continuity and silence." Wharton's purpose in gathering these ghost stories was to preserve those silent spaces and to celebrate the opportunities for sending a "cold shiver down one's spine."

Critical Loitering

ANTHONY DOMESTICO



MESSING ABOUT IN BOATS

MICHAEL HOFMANN
Oxford University Press
$38.95 | 128 pp.

In *The Art of Attention*, Donald Revell praises Robert Creeley's poem "Oh Max" by clocking its speed: "It certainly does go fast, and then faster. Velocities, I think, are what prove our poems true. They are the aspiration of words approaching light-speed." If anyone can make words exceed the speed of light, it's the poet, translator, and critic Michael Hofmann. Reading Hofmann, you feel like you're playing a game of catch-up at which you know you'll lose, though the losing is more exhilarating than deflating. Hofmann's mind works faster than your mind; his language is always ahead of you, "tripping over itself, setting off at an angle / into the thickets of vocabulary," to borrow a couple of lines from his poem "Daewoo." (I should say, his *languages* are always ahead of you. Born in Freiburg, Germany, raised in England and Scotland, now teaching at the University of Florida, Hofmann seems to publish a new translation—of Franz Kafka, Alfred Döblin, Gottfried Benn—just about every year.)

Michael Hofmann

One of Hofmann's recent poems, "Broken Nights," opens like this:

> Broken knights.
> —No, not like that.
> Well, no matter.
> Something agreeably
> Tennysonian (is there
> Any other kind?)
> About 'broken knights.'
> Sir Bors and Sir Bedivre.
> In my one-piece pyjamas—
> My it-doesn't-matter suit,
> With necessarily non-matching
> —Matchless, makeless, *makeles*—
> Added top, I pad
> Downstairs to look
> At the green time
> On the digital microwave.
> My watch, you must know,
> Died on my watch
> All at the top, at midnight,
> After a few
> Anguished weeks of macro-
> biotic stakhanovite
> 5-second ticks,
> And I haven't had
> Time, it seems,
> To get it repaired.

PAKO MERA/ALAMY LIVE NEWS

"Broken Nights" charges out of the gate and, with its two- and three-beat units, rushes through fifty lines in a single, skinny stanza. The poem begins with a homophonous mistake. The speaker planned to talk about broken nights—those darkened stumbles to the bathroom during the "weewee hours," as he puts it. But, what the hell, he can make it about broken knights, too. "Well, no matter." It's no big deal to improvise if you can, and Hofmann most certainly can. But this line also suggests that, in the end, poetry is not so much about matter as it is about manner. Or, rather, the manner is the matter. It's the style, not the subject, that makes the poem move.

"Broken Nights" concerns time: the difference between the age of digital microwaves and the age of Sir Bedivre; what it's like to feel short of time and what it's like to feel as if you have time to kill. (Is there a more disheartening experience than waking up, thinking that it's morning, only to realize that it's still the dead of night?) But the matter of time works here only because Hofmann has stylized it, given it a fitting form: "matchless" versus "*makeles*" (Middle English for "without an equal or companion"); Sir Bors's suit of armor becoming the speaker's "it-doesn't-matter" suit, which itself echoes the earlier "Well, no matter." Hofmann moves rapid-fire through different registers and idioms, from the Tennysonian to the stakhanovite, the lyric to the demotic. As he writes of the Italian poet Eugenio Montale in his new book, *Messing About in Boats*, "His poems are like a disbanded Noah's Ark, you see loads of creatures everywhere."

Messing About in Boats is based on Hofmann's Clarendon Lectures, which were delivered at Oxford University in 2018 and 2019. Reading the book—elegant, funny, learned, and very strange—I was reminded of listening to Marilynne Robinson's 2009 Terry Lectures at Yale. Those lectures, which eventually became *Absence of Mind: The Dispelling of Inwardness from the Modern Myth of the Self*, were difficult to follow in person: not because Robinson isn't a good speaker (she is) but because her argument had real ambition and a style that asked to be dwelt with, savored. The best I could do was get a feel for the moves she was making and wait for the book version to arrive.

I don't know how Hofmann's lecture series actually began. But here is how the book opens: "Ship of fools. Death ship, ark, ghost ship, slave ship, clipper, warship. Factory ship, trawler, galley, hulk. Lighter and collier and tug, aircraft carrier and tanker, container ship and banana boat. Dhow, pinnace, trireme, felucca, knar." The catalog goes on and on and on. Hofmann names imagined ships (the *Dawn Treader*, the *Pequod*) and real ships (the *Titanic*, the *Windrush*). He names poems about ships (Pound's *The Cantos*) and novels about ships (Conrad's *Victory*).

Surely, we're meant to think of Book Two of Homer's *Iliad*, where the poet sings of the army that sailed to Troy and, in the process, gives a lesson in ancient Greek geography and political power. What purpose does the catalog serve for Hofmann? To give a sense of spatial and temporal vastness before homing in on the supposedly limited subject matter at hand. "Casting about for a subject," he writes, "I abruptly jibbed and thought: wrong. I want something contained. I don't want to nibble at an elephant, so let me strain at a gnat. Let me write what feels like a lot about a little." So, Hofmann decides upon his subject: four poems about boats from four different periods in four different languages. He starts with Rilke's "Emigrant-Ship, Naples" before moving on—one poem per lecture—to Rimbaud's "The Drunken Ship," Mon-

Hofmann is interested less in offering a synthesizing account of what boats mean in poetry than in poking around in some poems that have boats in them. It's criticism as a kind of loitering.

tale's "Boats on the Marne," and Karen Solie's "The World." A properly gnat-sized theme, at least compared to the elephant-sized theme of "boats in literature." But part of the argument of *Messing About in Boats* is that, once you start messing about in poems—that is, once you start attending to their textures and affiliations and echoes—you end up in a very different place from where you began. Emily Dickinson wrote, "There is no Frigate like a Book / To take us Lands away, / Nor any Coursers like a Page / Of prancing Poetry." Under the direction of a critic as intelligent and daring as Hofmann, criticism can be a good means of transport, too.

As indicated by his book's title, Hofmann is interested less in offering a synthesizing account of what boats mean in poetry than in poking around in some poems that have boats in them. It's criticism as a kind of loitering. He notices things (Rilke's poem opens with the command, "Think") and then speculates on how they work ("The impossible is Rilke's terrain, and the conditional or subjunctive his mood") before moving on to new observations. In his second lecture, Hofmann reads Rimbaud's phantasmagoric poem, which is spoken from the perspective of a boat, and tries to locate "the speaker's absolute centre," "the irreducible thing in it that says 'I.'" "Is it the quasi-coffin, the '*coque de sapin*,' the pine-plank hull in line 18? Is it the '*presque ile*,' the floating island, or the '*bateau perdu*' or the '*carcasse ivre d'eau*'?… Is it the two prayers called out near the end, in the antepenultimate stanza: '*O que ma quille éclate! O que j'aille a la mer!*'…The droll idea of 'going to sea'—almost of going to seed—while at sea." Hofmann considers, it seems in real time, all of these possibilities before landing on a remarkable conclusion: "It reminds one of the idea of le Corbusier that no building is finished until it is standing in ruins. There are perhaps no sober boats." Hofmann's prose is loose-limbed and intoxicated with detail. There are perhaps no entirely sober critics, either—or at least no good ones.

Hofmann doesn't attempt to connect Rilke's poem about desperate emigrants on a ship in Naples to Karen Solie's poem about a luxury ship in which, as he writes, "the resident passenger proprietors have taken a vow not of poverty but of wealth." There's not even much of an attempt to provide "a reading" of each individual poem. Consider the book's title again: *Messing About in Boats*. The critic isn't messing around *by* boats or even *with* them; he's on board, getting his hands dirty in the engine room. Each essay is a master class in close reading, which, like good poetry, must be both patient and restless. Hofmann spends long stretches with micro-level formal effects: Montale's use of what Hofmann dubs the "continental comma, the comma splice, a hitch to different action," rather than the semicolon. But, after dwelling with some small grammatical or stylistic detail, Hofmann will suddenly sail off to other seas. A single paragraph on Rimbaud jumps from the poem's overarching structure to its breaking of traditional French prosody to Robert Lowell holding forth on how Rimbaud "hated meter and syntax" to Kafka's sense of pain as "a currency" to a line from Samuel Beckett. Elizabeth Bishop, the epistolary recipient of Lowell's thoughts on Rimbaud, once claimed that writers of Baroque prose sought "to portray, not a thought, but a mind thinking." That's exactly what Hofmann's criticism offers us.

In a previous essay collection, Hofmann described "the way one reads, which is to question, to cross-refer and compare, to doubt, to go behind the back of words, to tap for hollowness and cracks and deadness. One reads not with a vise or glue, but with a hammer and chisel, or an awl. It's not—or at least not by intention, or not immediately—a consolidating or fortifying activity, but more like looking for safe passage across a frozen river." Whether or not this is how "one" reads, it's definitely how *Hofmann* reads: doubting, tapping, hammering, always looking. No critic working today is better read than Hofmann, and few write with such style and wit.

It's worth reading *Messing About in Boats* just for the parentheticals. Of Rimbaud's agentive bark: "the boat is free, has self-determination, can vote and fight and smoke and drink and marry and leave home. (And the greatest of these is leave home.)" Like Montale, Hofmann uses "the continental comma" to great effect. Here he is on the speaker of Solie's poem: "He is a cruise-ship explainer, conversant with the details from the brochurage, and a whizz at the style, but like Odysseus and Crispin, or Ahab and Nemo, he is a mental voyager as well, the obnoxious coupon-cutter with added extras, the businessman listening to the good angel perched on his right shoulder—on his left there is a chip." In his conclusion, Hofmann admits that he hasn't concluded much. *Well, no matter*: his style of criticism, just like his style of poetry, isn't in the business of conclusions. "The principle of *Messing About in Boats*," he writes, "is the Schengen principle. It is that poems, and an interest in poems, like goods and services and human beings, should be able to travel freely."

ANTHONY DOMESTICO *is Chair of the Literature Department at Purchase College, SUNY, and the author of* Poetry and Theology in the Modernist Period *(Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017). He writes* Commonweal*'s "Bookmarks" column.*

ELEGY FOR OUR 130-YEAR-OLD CATALPA

Paul Mariani

Our dear catalpa, whose angel-headed blossoms
flowered above us without fail each June for over
fifty years, our beloved, stalwart, silent guardian
who watched over this old house like the Lord's
appointed one, lies fallen on the cold hard ground,
toppled with one fell swoop by some madcap
monster microburst that, truth be told, wreaked
havoc over hundreds of homes around the county.

Our friend Michael, neighbor arborist with a wicked
sense of humor, called the collapse of our *Catalpa speciosa*
a "wrenching loss," noting it was—was—the largest
of its kind in all of Massachusetts. Ah, how tall
you were, and proud, and showed so many a sense
of majesty and, yes, quiet comfort, thou, home to God
knows how many woodpeckers, cardinals, and jays, not
to mention honey bees and thieving squirrels and chipmunks.

You, the same proud form our old friend Barry portrayed
with yours truly looking up into your leafy branches,
the same I wrote those poems about from the time our sons
were toddlers, our roughbarked sacred guardian the arborists
came to visit as if on holy ground, surrounded with a heart-
shaped plot of pachysandra woven with laughing hostas and
of course a touch of poison ivy, beneath whose branches
our bird feeder nestled, too-often ransacked by some cunning bear.

And in your dappled shadow: five well-cared-for boxes
(one crushed now), cornucopias of yellow daffodils
and amethyst astilbe and just beyond our red and purple
rhododendrons and burning bush and dogwood we planted
forty years ago when we lost our good dog Sparky.
Gone now, changed, changed utterly as now the tree
morticians piece by piece cart away your broken body.
But not those blossoming late-June-angel-headed memories.

October 2020

PAUL MARIANI *is a poet, biographer, and critic. His most recent books are* Ordinary Time: Poems *(Slant) and* The Mystery of It All: The Vocation of Poetry in the Twilight of Modernity *(Paraclete Press).*

MARCIA PALLY

Babylon & Boogie Street

Leonard Cohen's sixty-year exploration of covenants broken and kept

Since Leonard Cohen's death in 2016, a great many things have been written about the "poet laureate of despair," as the journalist Simon Worrall called him. His every song, every drink, and every affair has been inspected. But while there is a growing literature on Cohen's religious imagery, relatively little has been written about the distinctive way Jesus figures in his work or, more generally, about how that work addresses our relationship with God and with each other. From the beginning of his career to its end, covenant and its breaches were among Cohen's major themes.

A passage from Augustine's *On Christian Belief* could serve as an introduction to Cohen's work: "If you love only what cannot be snatched out of its lover's hand, you undoubtedly remain unbeaten." If one directs one's love to what cannot be "snatched" away—that is, to God—one will suffer neither unfulfilled longing nor loss. Cohen's images of inner disunity and loss—of desires not only unsatisfied but also *unsatisfiable*—illuminate the challenges of human intimacy with God and our fellow creatures, our fears of vulnerability and dependence. Contrary to Augustine's wisdom, Cohen was unable to stay constant to God and so find peace with himself. Nor could he stay constant to the women he loved. This double restlessness was his persistent wound, investigated in more than sixty years of song and poetry that provide an inventory of his soul.

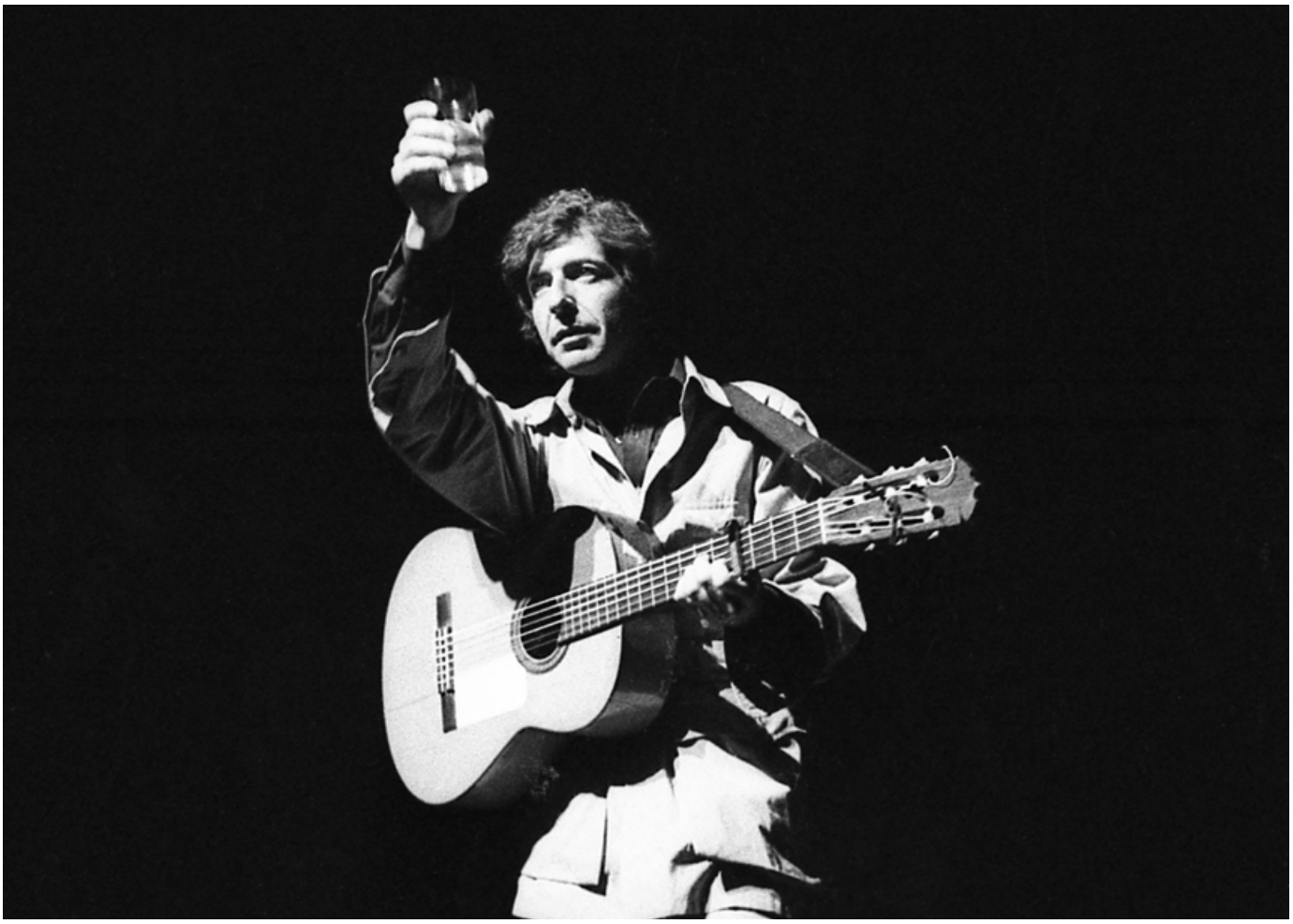
Cohen grew up in what he called the "Catholic city" of Montreal. His Catholic nanny took him with her to church. The power of the Gospel's imagery and its weight in our cultural-emotional repertoire was, in Cohen's view, unavoidable, regardless of one's religious beliefs. "Any guy," Cohen told writer Alan Hustak,

> who says blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek, has got to be a figure of unparalleled generosity and insight and madness. A man who declared himself to stand among the thieves, the prostitutes and the homeless. He was a man of inhuman generosity, a generosity that would overthrow the world if it was embraced.

Jesus captured Cohen's imagination because he lived out the Hebrew Bible covenant as Cohen himself could not. Cohen also studied Buddhism and other wisdom traditions, yet, as he told Stina Lundberg Dabrowski in 1997, his religious views were Judaic: "I was never looking for a new religion. I have a very good religion, which is called Judaism." But Cohen's inquiries into Judaism took him also to Jesus. "As a Jew," philosopher Babette Babich notes, "Cohen reminds us to feel for Christ, not to be a Christian necessarily but to get the point about Christ." Cohen got "the point about Christ"—his lesson of loving and giving for the sake of others—but found it hard to sustain. Cohen ran through commitments like water. "Rinse and repeat, again and again," as Babich put it.

What is this covenant that Cohen was trying to uphold, as he believed Jesus did? If God is the source of all that is, humanity must partake of that source in order to exist. In Genesis, God breathes the breath of life into Adam. "In all things," Aquinas wrote, "God works intimately." But while we are in "intimate" relation with God, we are also radically different from God. We are material; God is immaterial. We are finite; God is infinite. So all creatures are in intimate relation with a God from whom they are radically different.

This is how Cohen wrote about it in "Love Itself" (2001, with Sharon Robinson): "In streams of light I clearly saw / The dust you seldom see / Out of which the nameless makes / A name for one like me." In the Kabbalist tradition of Isaac Luria (1534–1572), sacred vessels that originally contained God's light shattered under God's brilliant power. In the stream of divine luminescence, the song's narrator sees the dust we seldom see, the dust from which God makes us in an act more intimate than any other: creation. Cohen then plays with "name" and "nameless." In Jewish tradition, God is often referred to as The Name, because the Tetragrammaton, YHVH, is unpronounceable. In this lyric, the infinite, incorporeal,



Leonard Cohen, 1970

PHILIPPE GRAS/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

unnameable God creates from dust a finite, material, nameable person. This is how we come to be.

Because the cosmos is created as a network of relations among different beings, not only are we in intimate relation with God (despite the radical differences between God and us) but we are also in necessary relation with one another. We are not separate and complete persons who may choose to enter into relationships. Rather, we *become who we are* through networks of relation with all those, near and far, who have had an impact on our lives. Thus, our flourishing requires that we see, and see *to*, these relations. Thriving means attending to the well-being of the persons and networks that form us. As Cohen puts it in "Please Don't Pass Me By" (1973):

> I brushed up against the man in front of me.
> I felt a cardboard placard on his back....
> It said "Please don't pass me by—
> I am blind, but you can see—
> I've been blinded totally—
> Please don't pass me by."

Passing others by means failing to see them and failing to see *to* them. And that failure precludes flourishing, theirs and our own.

One name for this seeing and seeing to others is "covenant." Because of our relational nature, attending to others in reciprocal commitment is the way we flourish. Princeton theologian Max Stackhouse explains covenant among persons as "an ethical outworking of the divine-human relationship." In a kind of a spiritual Möbius strip, covenantal concern for others builds our covenant with God, even as covenant with God sustains us in giving covenantally to others. Cohen explains it thus: "The Heart beneath is teaching / To the broken Heart above... / Come healing of the Altar / Come healing of the Name" ("Come Healing," *Old Ideas*, 2012, with Patrick Leonard). Covenant is bottom-up as well as top-down. Cohen notes both the healing at the human altar as it reaches "up" to God and the healing that comes from the Name, God, as it reaches "down" to the world.

And yet, we break covenants almost every day. We bolt from the bonds we need, from the covenantal commitments that make us who we are, that allow for peace and thriving. What gets in the way? Everything human. We follow the call of Babylon and Boogie Street, two themes in Cohen's work: the hustle for lucre, self-interest, another (sexual) adventure, and the comfort of intactness, of not being dependent on another—not even on God. Biographer Sylvie Sim-

mons describes two of Cohen's "favorite things" as "no strings" and "an escape clause" from commitment.

But who made human nature to be this way? God. And there is the nub of Cohen's theodicy, his argument with God about the suffering in his creation. We are created for covenantal commitment, yet we are also made to be able to breach it. But Jesus, who was also fully human, subject to the same temptations as Cohen and the rest of us, did not breach his covenant. Cohen returned to Jesus often in his work to make this point: despite our fears and covenantal breaches, we may yet choose covenantal commitment to God and to other persons.

This, despite the fact that Cohen knew himself to be a habitual breaker of covenants, a man always disappointing himself and others. With women, he was the kind of guy who finds even serial monogamy constraining. He feared being entrapped, by women or by God. In "Lover Lover Lover" (1974) Cohen wrote: "I [God] locked you in this body / I meant it as a kind of trial." The same God who made us for committed love also locks us in bodies whose urgent desires betray them. What kind of rigged "trial" is that? What kind of God?

Still, Cohen understood his frustration to be his own failing, and he kept returning to this God throughout his life. Rage and reconciliation, rinse and repeat. In his last song collection he wrote, "I've seen you change the water into wine / I've seen you change it back to water too / I sit at your table every night / I try but I just don't get high with you." Yet in the same collection, Cohen ends the title song, "You Want It Darker," with a declaration to God: "*Hineni*," the Hebrew vow of commitment, "Here, I am; I am here for you."

Cohen's despair at human inconstancy was directed not only at himself but at all of us—covenant breachers every one. Among his most potent jeremiads is "Israel," where he writes,

> Israel, and you who call yourself Israel, the Church that calls itself Israel.... To every people the land is given on condition. Perceived or not, there is a Covenant, beyond the constitution, beyond sovereign guarantee, beyond the nation's sweetest dreams of itself. The Covenant is broken, the condition is dishonored, have you not noticed that the world has been taken away? You have no place, you will wander through yourselves from generation to generation without a thread.

The covenant is for "every people," and every people has broken it. So we wander "through" ourselves, in a world filled with other wanderers, all of us disconnected from one another. We no longer struggle to live with God; we think we've won a modern, "sovereign" independence from the transcendent and no longer tolerate the marks of bondedness.

What is God's response? Grief, but not foreclosure. God holds the door open. This, like covenantal giving, is also the point about Jesus. In "Avalanche" (1971), Cohen writes that God, in the body of Jesus, steps into the avalanche of human life. He is rejected, abandoned, yet hopes for humanity's return. "You say you've gone away from me / But I can feel you when you breathe... / It is your turn, beloved / It is your flesh that I wear." Having assumed human flesh to be with humanity, to love and secure us, God still hopes for our return to covenant.

Cohen was especially moved by Jesus' love for humanity even in the midst of betrayal. This brings together Cohen's two "points" about Jesus: his lesson of covenantal love and his lesson of what befalls us when we betray such love. Among other horrors, we crucify God. Jesus, Cohen wrote, "was nailed to a human predicament, summoning the heart to comprehend its own suffering by dissolving itself in a radical confession of hospitality"—a hospitality that extended to his persecutors. Jesus forgave. We can learn from that, but we often don't. As Doron Cohen (no relation) quoted Leonard as saying in 2001:

> Into the heart of every Christian, Christ comes, and Christ goes. When, by his Grace, the landscape of the heart becomes vast and deep and limitless, then Christ makes His abode in that graceful heart, and His Will prevails. The experience is recognized as Peace. In the absence of this experience much activity arises, divisions of every sort.

These divisions are our slavery in Egypt, our exile in Babylon, our Boogie Street, and our cross. By breaching commitment, we sadden the God of Israel and Jesus, who nevertheless shows us grace. In "The Window" (1979), Cohen writes, "Why do you stand by the window / Abandoned to beauty and pride / The thorn of the night in your bosom / The spear of the age in your side?" Why, Jesus, do you bother to stand at the window, exposed to all, while humanity in every age abandons you to beauty and pride? How, why, do you love us, we who betray you? Cohen asked that question throughout his six decades of writing.

He knew there could be no real flourishing until we commit ourselves to others in a way that echoes, however imperfectly, Jesus' love. Cohen caught moments of it in his life, lost it, missed it, and sought it again. At the age of seventy-eight, he wrote of Jesus' love-amid-crucifixion as what restores humanity: "The splinters that you carry / The cross you left behind / Come healing of the body / Come healing of the mind" ("Come Healing," 2012, with Patrick Leonard). It is from the splinters of the cross "left behind" for us that our self-inflicted wounds of body and mind are healed.

In the refrain of "The Window," Cohen seeks his "chosen" love, he who was once human ("matter") and now is grace (holy "ghost"). Cohen asks that this love "gentle this soul" from the suffering we cause ourselves.

> Oh chosen love, Oh frozen love
> Oh tangle of matter and ghost
> Oh darling of angels, demons and saints
> And the whole broken-hearted host
> Gentle this soul.

On the fifth anniversary of his death, we may hope that this prayer was answered.

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THE POET RETIRES TO PLATO'S REPUBLIC

Drew Calvert

It's easier here, more sensical.
One's equity can accrue.
Plus, my condo's got a great view
of the military parades.
What more is there to say?
Having tired of all that scavenging,
those nocturne-documentaries,
the plights and fizzles, the rigmaroles,
I gave it up. I mean, what's the point?
Does the fly escape the ointment?
Does the troubadour win his coin
if he's brooding at the bottom
of wells? Why ring rung
bells? If all poetry is prayer—
hell, toss the nibbled pen
and fire off the signal flare.
Thoosh! I am done with Art.
No more weekly scrimmage
between Apollo and Dionysus.
No more dawn escapades.
No more tracing the bat-screech
of noumena to its jaded cave.
Only music, not the words.
And don't write on my grave.

DREW CALVERT *is a writer based in Claremont, California.*

NICOLE-ANN LOBO

Cloud, Steam, and Soot

'Turner's Modern World' at the Kimbell Art Museum

The Fighting Temeraire is one of the eighteenth century's most recognizable paintings. It depicts the lithe, fading frame of the *H.M.S. Temeraire*, a naval ship that served England during the Napoleonic Wars, gliding across the still waters of the Thames. Wisps of periwinkle and cornflower dot the murky surface on which the *Temeraire* is towed ("to her last berth to be broken up," as the painting's subtitle indicates) by a squat steam tugboat, whose dark smokestack spits into an otherwise-ethereal sky. In the distance, sunlight, enrobed by clouds, reflects off the river. The painting has an elegiac quality: this, it suggests, is the end of an era.

The Fighting Temeraire is one of the paintings in "Turner's Modern World," which opened in the Tate Britain museum in London last year and is now on view at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, until February 6, 2022. The exhibition explores the artist Joseph Mallord William Turner's relationship to early nineteenth-century Britain's changing landscape, as the country underwent political reforms, an expanding empire, foreign wars, and the dawn of industrialization. The show features works from the painter's whole career, starting in the 1790s and continuing to Turner's iconic steam-

J.M.W. Turner, *The Slave Ship*, 1840

power paintings of the 1840s. Throughout, the viewer gets a sense of Turner's social intuition. He cared deeply about humans' relationship with their changing environments, and the psychological and class toll of both catastrophe and development. (The last work on display was painted just four years before Marx wrote his *Communist Manifesto*.)

Turner was born in 1775 to a lower-middle-class family in London, where he would live all his life. After being recognized as a child prodigy, he studied at the Royal Academy of Arts, and exhibited his first work there at the age of fifteen. He worked as an architectural draftsman at the same time, and many of his early pieces were architectural sketches. To Turner, architecture was memory, and he was intent on capturing a shifting moment in Britain's changing present. The art historian Simon Schama describes Turner as a transitional figure entranced by the tension between the uncertain industrialism of Britain arriving and the romantic grandeur of Britain past. In truth, Britain's imperial past is neither as grand nor as past as some narratives tend to suggest. (I saw this show in London, just five days after a deportation flight of thirteen men who came to the UK from Jamaica as children.) In light of Britain's post-Brexit political disarray, with British nationalists clinging to cherry-picked events in world history as proof of the nation's former glory, Turner seems not just transitional but prophetic.

IAN DAGNALL COMPUTING/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

Each of the exhibition's eight rooms reveals a different facet of the artist's creative output. In "War and Peace," theatrical history paintings document major battles. In "Modern Thought," humble sketches of crumbling ruins alternate with paintings of new architectural feats. The "Home Front" features images of quintessentially British landscapes, like the view of *London from Greenwich Park*, featuring livestock, neoclassical buildings, and the shimmering Thames.

Disaster paintings make up the first part of Turner's oeuvre: these monumental images express the artist's fascination with spectacle. Yet amid the drama of cannon fire and naval wreckage, Turner also depicts quiet moments of heroism—as in *The Battle of Trafalgar*, where emergency rafts show men comforting one another. We see one man using all his might to pull another aboard against a backdrop of billowing sails and torrential seas.

Understated acts of human compassion are dwarfed, however, by Turner's emphasis on the tragedy of war. In *The Field of Waterloo*, piles of bodies—British, Prussian, and French—lie under a black sky with an electric moon. Women, some with children, traverse the battleground with torches, searching for fathers and husbands. Turner, who visited the site two years after the battle, took inspiration from Byron's verse on Waterloo: "Friend, foe, in one red burial blent."

Other works document both advances in machinery and the plight of laborers, suggesting a longing for simpler times. In *Ploughing up Turnips, near Slough*, a rustic, sepia painting of the Arcadian English countryside, a man repairs a broken plough while a woman bends over to pick turnips. Turner appears to sympathize with the unromantic struggle of their labor, anticipating the social realism of later artists like Gustave Courbet.

In his personal life, Turner was private and reclusive, known for a mercurial temperament and eccentric mannerisms. He resented not having been knighted by Queen Victoria, and later withdrew contact from nearly everyone except his father. Though he received great professional acclaim, he remained an enigma in the public eye—known for stunts like rowing his boat out into the Thames to avoid being counted as present at any property during the census.

Though Turner's work is steeped in a tradition of British nationalism, there is something universal to it—a sense of watchful uncertainty as the world approaches a new junction. His art evinces both wistful nostalgia and horror at the human capacity for tragedy, but Turner also left room for traces of hope. His interest in the conditions of contemporary life was ambivalent rather than pessimistic, but his fascination with the ephemerality of nature and the hubris of human efforts to attain permanence can appear almost moralizing.

This quality is most apparent in Turner's close attention to the changing environment and to the impact of industrialization on the human psyche. His most unsettling works register an era of upheaval born of social and technological developments. They bring to mind Walter Benjamin's "angel of history": "The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward." In Turner's steam paintings, where billowing smokestacks pollute watery skies, progress appears as nothing short of an unshakeable storm. The works serve as visual logs of the begin-

J.M.W. Turner, *Rain, Steam, and Speed*, 1844

ning of the "Anthropocene" (or what some call the "Capitalocene"—since it is really capitalism, rather than the human race as such, that is behind so much ecological degradation). In Turner's time, Britain was the leading emitter of carbon dioxide. In his paintings we see steamboats chug across rivers blackened with soot trails. In dusk paintings, explosive hues of orange and brilliant reds reflect off glistening waters. These are sometimes read as odes to Britain's great natural beauty, but Turner, who was fascinated by scientific discoveries, might have known that the exceptional brilliance of the sunsets he witnessed was caused by the refraction of sunlight through pollution particles.

Turner's paintings were of great interest to the critic John Ruskin, who memorialized the artist's prescience in his book *Modern Painters*. On my walk to the Tate Britain to see the Turner exhibition, I passed Finsbury Circus, where Ruskin delivered a series of apocalyptic lectures later published as "The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century." Clouds that "bore traces of iniquity" and winds infected by "bitterness and malice" dotted the skyline of modern life. But neither Turner nor Ruskin lost a sense of optimism in the power of the individual to resist all that iniquity and malice. At the end of his lecture series, Ruskin reminded his audience, "Whether you can affect the signs of the sky or not, you can the signs of the times. Whether you can bring the *sun* back or not, you can assuredly bring back your own cheerfulness, and your own honesty.... And all *that* it would be extremely well to do, even though the day *were* coming when the sun should be as darkness, and the moon as blood."

Admittedly, certain of Turner's contemporaries—for example, William Blake—offered much more overt political critiques than he did. Turner was a thoughtful observer of a changing moment, liberal and humane, but he was never really an activist. Nor was he faultless: he invested in a Jamaican cattle ranch worked by slaves in 1805. But as this exhibition progresses, a clear political message emerges from all the fog and soot. By the 1840s, Turner's work was explicitly critiquing the barbarity of indentured labor. Take *The Slave Ship*, for example. At first glance, the painting possesses qualities similar to other Turner sunsets: fiery skies, angry light casting upon tumultuous waters as a ship's mast dots the horizon. But on closer inspection, one finds Black hands protruding from the rocky sea, and the grisly horror of sharks devouring bodies cast overboard. Turner painted this picture only a few years after Britain had abolished the slave trade. When it was exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1840, its political message would have been unmissable: it forced a privileged class of viewers to reckon with their country's bloody legacy.

As I stood, near the end of the show, looking at one of Turner's later paintings, *Rain, Steam, and Speed*, I felt the dizziness of a violent summer storm, along with the headlong rush of the train cutting through it. But there is another, often-overlooked dimension to this painting: the open third-class carriages at the front of the train have left the poorest passengers most vulnerable to the elements. All of us must grapple with the legacies of slavery and imperialism, with increasingly dystopian technologies and the terrifying onslaught of climate change, but we don't all feel the effects of these things equally. When the storm clouds of modern life break, some are always more exposed than others. This may not be the first thing you see in this painting, but it is nevertheless there to be seen if you look carefully. As so often in Turner's work, the natural world shouts for the viewer's attention while the social whispers its secret.

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ON EARTH…

Susan Delaney Spear

Blessed be the lettuce pickers
the wards and waifs
the overweight and underfed
the unnamed
the average
the slandered

Blessed be the misunderstood
the latch-key kids
the shy
the shunned, the uncool
the stone-cold sober
the street sweepers

Blessed be the night shift
the unfriended
those who try
the drivers and delivery boys
the widows
the utterly forgiving

Blessed be the utterly forgiven
the bussers
the barren
the gunned down
the onlys and the singles
those who try again

Blessed be the addicts
the true believers
the doubters
the kind
the blue-sky dreamers
the down-and-outers

Blessed be the last leaf on the tree
the parched and hollow
the seed sowers
the ardent seekers
those in second place
the commuters on the city bus

Blessed be the here and now
Blessed be the there and then
Your kingdom come, O Lord. When?

SUSAN DELANEY SPEAR *is the author of the poetry collection* Beyond All Bearing *and co-author of* Learning the Secrets of English Verse, *a creative writing poetry text forthcoming from Springer, Int.*

They Were Here

DANIEL WALDEN

I remember, or think I remember, what it was like to take a plastic, black permanent marker in my hand and, after a glance over my shoulder to assure myself that I wasn't being watched, touch it to the plastered wall of the cast dressing room and quickly write my name: one more name among many, a small witness to my short presence in that theater and the work I had done there. That wall, that dressing room, that entire theatrical space is gone, demolished this past summer shortly after graduation exercises at the high school that housed it. This is much to the good: the building looked like a military-supply shack built in hostile territory, all bare sheet metal on the outside walls. Now there is a new performing-arts center elsewhere on the school grounds, and though I have not seen it, I am sure that it boasts better acoustics, more welcoming performance spaces, more versatile lighting, and all the accoutrements that a wealthy and arts-conscious private-school budget could buy.

The first students to enjoy the new building began with blank walls and were doubtless enjoined not to write on them. Perhaps they even listened for a year or two: it's hard to work up the courage to make the first mark. And even after someone or a group of someones made the first inscription—as they certainly have—people and productions will have to keep adding names until the space no longer feels so starkly empty, and then someday, somebody will walk in and see the names on the walls and will both know and feel how many people were in that place before them.

Inscriptions are a special kind of monument because of the inseparability of text from material context: they're written *on* something, *by* someone, *for* some purpose. Graffiti, in turn, is a special kind of inscription: made for personal rather than official reasons, on some kind of public wall but without the official sanction of the public-facing body that owns or oversees the building. The act of writing graffiti can be a small rebellion against the impersonal design of, say, school institutions—a sign that people passing through *did* matter, that their presence made a difference. Even when that difference is nothing more than people's names on walls, the sheer accumulation of names thickens a place and sets it aside, renders it *sacred* in the oldest sense. Their having been here and having left the sign of their presence makes the difference. *They were here, just as you are here.*

Suzanne Farrell, *Ballerinas Backstage Never Stand Still*, 2011

AF ARCHIVE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

The communion of saints is an old doctrine, and often misunderstood. Both those who practice veneration of saints and those who do not tend to emphasize the saints whose names and stories are widely known: St. George and his dragon, St. Catherine and her wheel, and the many scholars and mystics whom we know through their writings. To be sure, it is much for the better that we know their lives and their voices and have their examples before us: the Catholic Church has long commended "friendship with the saints" as a way to holiness. But, fallen as we are, our knowledge of them can easily become plagued by misapprehension and perverted by idolatry. Thus St. George becomes a hero of English nationalism, St. Maria Goretti takes up as a youth-conference chastity speaker, and St. Thomas Aquinas boorishly patrols the boundaries of orthodoxy. And this is the trouble: lives that can be "read" can be misread, and if we are persuaded by the testimony of history, they will be.

We are fortunate, however, to have at our disposal the resources of a theological tradition to which the problem of such misreading is neither new nor difficult, and the corrective it offers has always been apophasis, the refusal of speaking in order to avoid falsehood and nonsense. But where do we find the apophatic view of the communion of saints? Precisely at the point where our knowledge ends. The Church has always taught that its list of canonized saints is not exhaustive: the number of the blessed is unknown and unknowable. Not having the names of this host or biographies that we might misuse, we cannot make them other than what they are: Christians in whom God's work is fully realized, who have passed through death into the abundance of life. All we know is that they once were here like us, and that God has done for them what he might do for us. In approaching the saints through our ignorance, we can better see the futility of our attempts to repurpose them. They do not lend sanctity to our works and causes because sanctity is not theirs to lend; it is theirs precisely because they have no cause but God's own.

A lack of names, a lack of biography, orients us more clearly toward what makes a person a saint: not the particular acts of a life but the work of God in those acts. In this light, what the known saints can and do give us is presence, or rather the signs thereof. We know of God's presence in our lives, but through the presence of the saints we can have tangible experience of God's shaping and permeation of a whole lifetime. Though the Catholic fascination with relics has at times metastasized into a grotesque trade in human remains, we continue to venerate these signs of holy life. Relics of the first and second class—that is, the body and the habitual possessions of a holy person—are the stuff of life, the physical remains or means of life by which God did something strange and mighty in the world. They are signs of presence, sensory proof of a person who lived as we did, who ate and drank as we did, who sinned and repented as we might do. Our communion with them is for us the sight of a possibility: their past becomes a sign of our future.

We need such signs. The kids who flocked to that high school theater dressing room with its thick embellishment of nominals came there because, more often than not, they were the sorts of kids who had trouble seeing themselves in the people held up by the school and by the broader culture as exemplars of success. They were often LGBT kids and neurodivergent kids, kids dealing with difficult mental-health issues or trouble at home or who just needed a place where it was alright to be a little bit strange. Kids in that position cannot rely on the prevailing social imagination to present them with a future, which they are old enough to need but not yet old enough to be able to see for themselves. But in that dressing room that contained our own private roll of honor, they—we—were given proof of our futures. The thing that so many young social oddballs, queer and otherwise, had to find and construct—when, as Eve Tushnet writes, they were "seeking precedents…to figure out what kind of possibilities [their] futures might hold"—was simply there in front of our eyes. Who these people were I did not know, but in my ignorance every name was a possible future, a way forward that led to a place about which I could know nothing except that it was *real*, and its reality was attested by the reality of the person who, I knew, had taken out a pen or a marker and written their name in the place where I was standing.

It is, I think, the unknown reality of our ultimate destination that makes proper sense of the variegated lives of the saints. None of us can say what our final future means: the guarantees we have been given of bodily resurrection and sharing in the fullness of divine life are in many ways greater mysteries than mute silence would have been. But the firm *reality* of this future, a reality that, because it partakes more directly of divine life, lies beyond the horizon of our present imaginations, works backward and lends gravity and meaning to our peregrinations. That future is one toward which the relics, records, and miracles of the saints point: such things are evidence for us that God was at work in their lives, bearing them along, *pace* Fitzgerald, ceaselessly toward the fullness of their future in him.

This is part of what Herbert McCabe means when he writes that "Christians, in a sense, look at the present from the perspective of the future." A future whose reality is known to us by faith and whose direction is partly mapped by the saints who came before us is a vantage point through which we see how much our lives really *do* matter. The tokens of presence left behind, like a graffiti tableau of names, make their lives mean something for us: their lives have made a difference simply because they were here, and our own lives, too, make a difference *simply by our being here*. In seeing that God works in our lives even now, we come to know that being borne by grace to our unknown destination *already* means something, though we will not yet know what until we get there. Our future need not be visible, need not bear the world's stamp of approval, for it to be real.

DANIEL WALDEN *is a writer and classicist. He spends his time thinking about Homeric philology, Catholic socialism, musical theater, and the Michigan Wolverines.*

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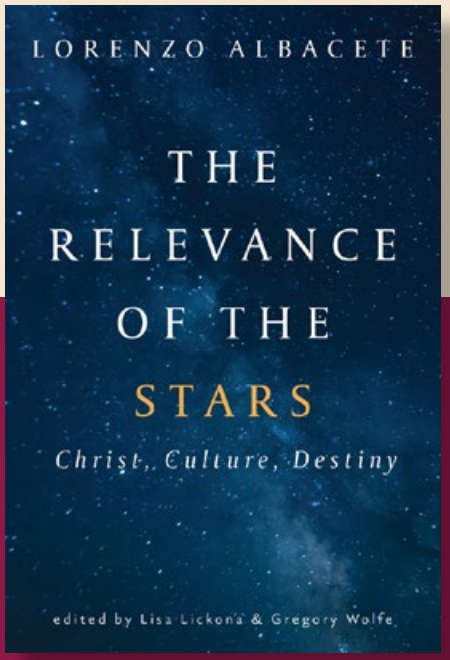

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