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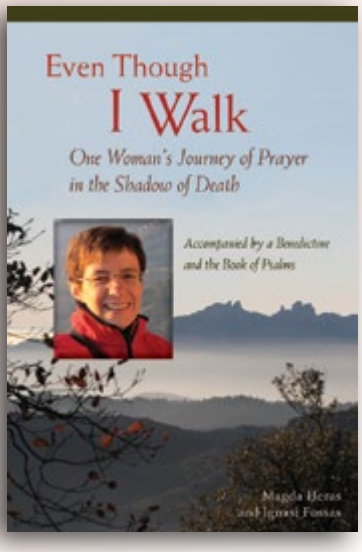

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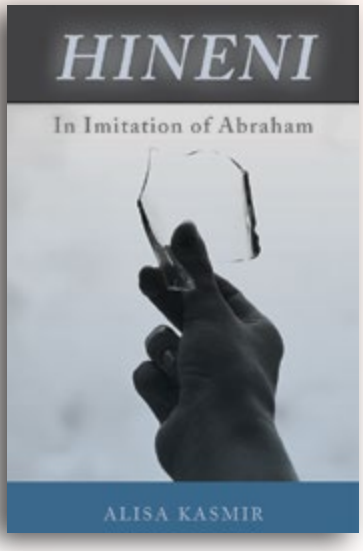

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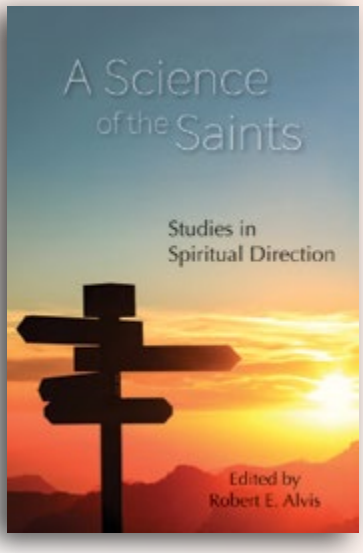

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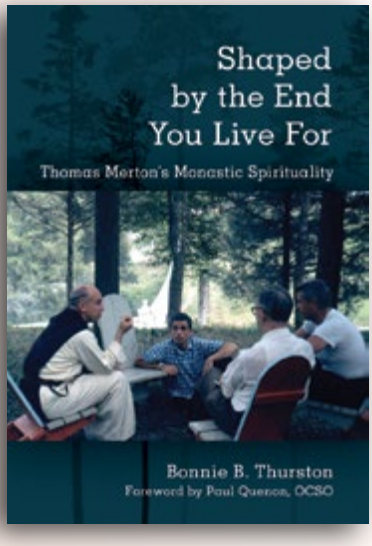

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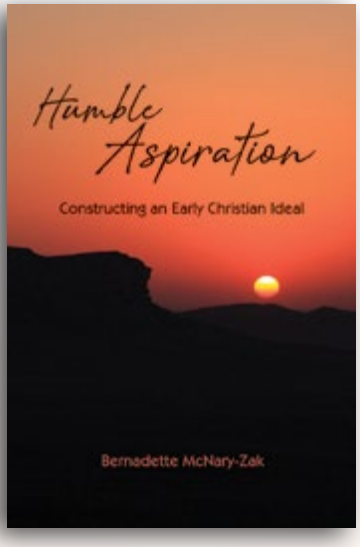

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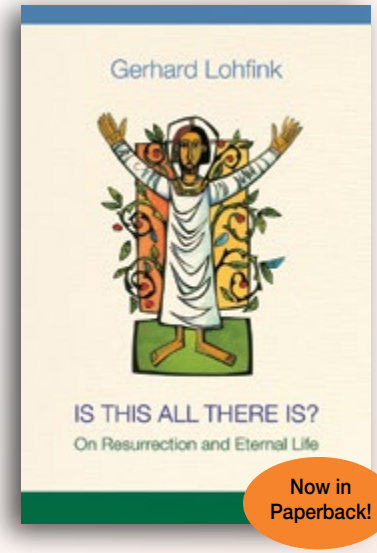

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LETTERS

An exchange about the Eucharist as symbol, progress at seminaries

NO NEED TO BE NERVOUS

This letter is in response to Peter Steinfels's article on belief in the Eucharist and surveys ("More than a Symbol," February). When I began teaching liturgy and sacraments in a major seminary in 1971, I taught the approach to Eucharist by way of the metaphysics of transubstantiation, including matter and form, substance and accidents, etc. Despite an effort of a few years, I was disappointed in the results. Many of the students had little philosophical background and limited capacity for abstract thinking. They memorized words rather than grasping the reality behind the words; it seemed to do little for their faith.

So I started over from the bottom up: an anthropology of meal, then the biblical theology of meals in the Hebrew Bible all the way up to the Last Supper and the dying and rising of Jesus. This was an approach by way of biblical symbolism. It all came together in the statement that the Eucharist is the real symbol of the Body and Blood of Christ—"real" in the constant affirmation of tradition that the Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Christ, and "symbolic" because it is not the gross realism of actually tasting flesh and blood; rather, the bread and wine we taste becomes the symbolic window through which we commune with the Body and Blood of Christ. Three elements: really Christ, through the symbol of bread and wine, into which we enter by faith. Always *mysterium fidei*.

I have shared this simple explanation with many groups over the years. Any mention of "symbol" makes some people nervous, but all worship is a symbolic structure. The scriptures and liturgical year are a symbolic structure. So are all the sacraments. We cannot teach or speak of or enter into any of them without a grasp of symbols.

Here is another supporting approach. Christian initiation is a symbolic structure of going down in the water (the dying of Christ), then coming up out of the water to new life (sharing in the risen life of Jesus) and being anointed with the Holy Spirit. We feel the water on our body, we feel the chrism on our forehead, but then we complete the initiation in receiving the Eucharist, in which the sacramental body enters into our own body. This is the densest and deepest of the sacraments, in which we become what we eat: the Body and Blood of Jesus forming us into the whole Christ.

A weakness of the metaphysical approach was that it ended up in presence, not eating. But perhaps it was useful in ages when people received the grace of the sacrament mainly by seeing the Eucharist and very rarely eating it. And sacraments were reduced to matter and form; all the rest was ceremony. The development of an adequate theology of symbol grasps all the ceremonies of liturgy and gives them full value.

There were many responses from groups to whom I have given this presentation. The ones I liked best were "satisfying" and "comforting."

And by the way, I don't believe in surveys. That would require a leap of faith well beyond the Eucharist.

Fr. Ken Smits
Fond du Lac, Wisc.

PETER STEINFELS REPLIES:

I am grateful for any effort like Fr. Smits's to develop an adequate, understandable explanation of Eucharistic change and belief. He is right: a grasp of symbols is essential to sacramental theology. And an anthropology of meal—and also one of sacrifice—seem like welcome components of a full understanding of

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LETTERS

Eucharist. I hope he has spelled all this out in sufficient detail for his fellow theologians to engage and explore.

But I am not sure how seriously to take Fr. Smits's closing remark. Is it a quip that resonates with all of us bombarded with polls and surveys of drastically varying quality, dizzying frequency, and ephemeral significance—about everything from the prospects of rival Democratic presidential hopefuls to favorite colors among M&Ms?

Or is it a way of dodging the entire thrust of my article, which was, after all, to warn liberal Catholics against reflexively dismissing any evidence (in this instance, surveys) suggesting that Catholics' core belief in the Real Presence might be eroding? My article was hardly oblivious to the limitations of surveys. They are tools like any other. They can be faulty in design or misused in practice. They need to be examined critically, like any other bit of evidence, but not dismissed.

It is amusing that in the preceding paragraph, Fr. Smits writes of the "many responses from groups to whom I have given this presentation." Do informal surveys like his have some value while ones conducted with more rigor and reporting unfavorable responses along with "ones I liked best" are useless?

Finally, I can understand why people are nervous about any mention of symbol. Given contemporary understandings of the word, it would probably be helpful for those using it in reference to the Eucharist to explain what they do not mean.

For example, *God Matters* by the late lamented Herbert McCabe includes several challenging chapters about Eucharistic presence, symbol, and sacramental language. He began, however, by describing the view that the food and drink in the Eucharist are "like a crucifix or a religious painting...symbols that remind us of Christ and form a focus for our faith in him.... To say that Christ is present...is not to say that the food and drink are in themselves in any way different from other food and drink, it is to speak of the role which they play in a particular religious ceremony." He compares this to a bottle of champagne: "When it plays a role in a certain ceremony it becomes a Christmas present." No change has taken place in the champagne, "but it now serves as a symbol of friendship and a focus of our mutual affection. Any Catholic theory of the Eucharist must distinguish itself from such a view."

I suspect that McCabe's clarity about what he was not saying about symbol opened his readers' minds to the creative discussion that followed.

BEYOND THE BYGONE ERA

Michael Higgins's article on how the Canadian Church has responded to the tragedy of clerical sex abuse was refreshing in its clarity and the numerous ways he notes that a more integrated national response by the church in Canada is needed ("Piecemeal Protections," March). By way of contributing to the conversation, allow me to note that at St. Peter's Seminary in London, Ontario, we have three female faculty members (myself included), as well as a female social worker who works with the seminarians on human formation, our librarian, and numerous staff members with whom the seminarians interact regularly. In addition, I recently was an invited guest in an upper-year practical-theology course wherein I shared with the seminarians my experience of boundary violations at the hands of Hod Marshall. It was a difficult, awkward, and painful thing to talk about, but it gave the seminarians in attendance firsthand experience of hearing the testimony of a victim and illustrated how quickly a boundary violation can take place. Although it is true that the seminary building has been refurbished, it would be a mistake to conclude that the culture of teaching and formation in the seminary has retained the status quo of seminaries of bygone eras. My hope is that the formation we are providing will yield good fruit that will last.

Andrea K. Di Giovanni
St. Peter's Seminary
London, Ont.

In the Time of Pandemic

Every day seems like another tipping point in the global coronavirus pandemic, bringing developments we might not have imagined possible just twenty-four hours earlier. March 15, the third Sunday of Lent, saw a wave of unprecedented cancelations of public Masses in Catholic dioceses around the United States. Throughout Europe, churches suspended services voluntarily or were forced by governments to do so. In Rome, after the suspension of Masses and the shuttering of public spaces throughout Italy, Pope Francis live-streamed his Sunday Angelus prayer and early-morning Mass from his residence. He announced that Holy Week and Easter services would be held without a congregation. Later that day, he walked the empty streets to the Church of St. Marcello, where he prayed before a crucifix that was carried through the city in a weeks-long procession to ask God for relief from the Great Plague in 1552. That evening, authorities announced that nearly 25,000 Italians had been infected with coronavirus since February 24, and that about 1,800 had died—368 in just the previous twenty-four hours. Images of Italian health workers collapsing under the strain of treating so many who'd become sick filled news sites and media feeds.

Meanwhile, reports showed that coronavirus infections and deaths around the world were rapidly rising, including here in the United States. But no matter: President Trump began an emergency press conference by celebrating the Federal Reserve's announcement, "on a Sunday no less," that it was slashing interest rates to zero percent. Then he lashed out at the "fake press" for its reporting on a virus-testing web app the administration had vastly oversold, and finally abandoned the rostrum to let Vice President Mike Pence and other officials handle questions about the crisis. ("I don't take responsibility at all," the president had said two days earlier in response to a question about the country's obvious lack of preparedness for a pandemic; this would be a fitting epitaph for his presidency.) By nightfall on March 15, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and other cities were imposing increasingly severe restrictions on public gatherings—closing schools, restaurants, and other businesses, and thus fundamentally changing day-to-day life for millions of people, likely for many weeks to come. Even more serious measures were soon being considered, including wide-scale sheltering-in-place and regional lockdowns.

With the Trump administration having recklessly downplayed the threat for so long, then failing so utterly to implement protocols for testing, tracking, and treatment, the United States faces an exponential jump in cases. Hospitals are in danger of being overwhelmed, and in more dire scenarios, deaths could number in the millions. Society's most vulnerable are, as ever, the more likely to suffer: the elderly, the poor, the homeless, those whose health is already compromised. Within a matter of days the pandemic exposed the inadequacies of our health-care system, the inequities of our economy, the insecurity of employment, and the fragility of financial structures. It has underscored the real dangers of unstable presidential leadership and a dysfunctional administration incapable of devising a coordinated federal response. It may test our understanding of the freedoms we take for granted as Americans. It will likely demand the kind of collective sacrifice not seen since World War II.

It will also challenge, in an elemental way, how we live in society with one another. We are being asked to distance ourselves from our colleagues and friends and neighbors, to limit or avoid basic interactions and stay away from the places where we normally gather. This includes, of course, participation in liturgy and every other kind of religious practice requiring congregation. As Lenten observances and Holy Week services are canceled, we face the prospect of celebrating Easter without the joyous company of others. Yet as Catholics we know we are not truly cut off from one another: our spiritual communion is not compromised by these new and temporary physical constraints. And in the weeks and months to come, we can keep in mind the words that Paul addressed to the Romans, words from the second reading of the third Sunday of Lent, March 15: "We boast in hope of the glory of God. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." That Spirit sustains us through every kind of ordeal, including the one we face now. *March 19, 2020*

The Horror Story in Syria

As Syria enters the tenth year of its civil war, the northwest region of Idlib is in ruins. One of the last remaining rebel holdouts, Idlib has seen as much as a third of its buildings destroyed since December, when Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, supported by Russian air forces and Iranian-backed ground militias, initiated attacks to reclaim the region. In response, Turkey, which supports the rebel militias, demanded that Syria and its allies remove their forces from areas that had been designated as de-escalation zones by the end of February. Syria ignored the ultimatum, and the resulting war-within-a-war has had disastrous consequences: almost a million civilians have been displaced, some for the second or third time since the war began. Many are fleeing to Turkey, hoping to find shelter in Europe. The United Nations Under-Secretary-General has called the situation in Idlib "the biggest humanitarian horror story of the twenty-first century."

On March 5, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to a ceasefire deal, halting what could have turned into direct conflict. The agreement solidifies the territorial gains that the Syrian government has made since December, including access to vital highways—a major loss to both Turkey and the rebels (including Islamist extremist groups with ties to Al-Qaeda). As of this writing, despite small violations on Syria's part, the ceasefire agreement appears to be holding, granting a much-needed reprieve to civilians suffering under Syrian attacks. But the fact remains that Assad is determined to take back Idlib, and when he strikes, Turkey will likely try to stop him.

Why did Turkey, a NATO member with greater military power on the ground in Idlib than either Syria or Russia, agree to such a disproportionate deal? The answer has to do with the migrant crisis on both of Turkey's borders. The worse the humanitarian situation in Syria gets, the more people attempt to cross Turkey's eastern border. Turkey has already taken in 3.7 million refugees, and is feeling the infrastructural burden of such a rapid influx. Meanwhile, on Turkey's western border, refugees from Syria and elsewhere are attempting to cross into Greece and the rest of Europe. Anticipating the flood of refugees from Idlib, Turkey announced on February 28 that it would no longer abide by its 2016 immigration deal with the European Union in which it committed to keeping migrants from entering Europe in exchange for funds to shelter them.

European leaders are right in criticizing Turkey for using suffering people as bargaining chips, perhaps to draw Europe into the Syrian conflict. But Europe is far from blameless. The 2016 deal and others like it have cut the number of migrants entering Europe dramatically, but at the cost of outsourcing the problem to countries with poor human-rights records, where migrants often suffer from starvation, assault, and homelessness. As Turkey lets migrants into Greece, Greece has suspended its asylum process. The European Union has granted emergency aid to Greece to fortify its borders; in the announcement, European Commissioner Ursula von der Leyen called Greece the "shield" of Europe—a telling choice of words.

In a war marked by the use of chemical weapons against civilians and attacks on hospitals, Assad has long made clear that he considers the lives of Syrians expendable. As residents flee a ruined Idlib, the rest of the world is giving them much the same message. Ahmad Yassin Leila, a Syrian man whose infant daughter Iman froze to death as they made for the Turkish border, put it simply: "Nobody cares."

—Regina Munch

Biden, Past & Future

Joseph Biden was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1972 at the age of twenty-nine. Here in 2020, on the likely cusp of his becoming the Democratic presidential nominee, it's hard to imagine him the same age that Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez was when she won her first and only race (so far) in 2018. That each deposed a prohibitively favored, vastly better-funded, and long-serving incumbent—he in the general, she in a primary that in heavily Democratic New York City essentially served as the general—marks another similarity in their political origin stories. But that's pretty much where the similarities end. Democratic affiliation is just an unpleasantly inconvenient function of the two-party system. Ocasio-Cortez practically said as much in a January interview: "Oh God," she is reported to have moaned. "In any other country Joe Biden and I would not be in the same party, but in America, we are."

Ocasio-Cortez, the most prominent office-holding supporter of Bernie Sanders, has already pledged to back Biden against Donald Trump should it come to that, and the hope is she might inspire her boisterously resistant compatriots to do the same. Her promise shouldn't be all that surprising in light of her 2019 endorsement, for Speaker of the House, of another paragon of the Democratic establishment: Nancy Pelosi. Compromise for the sake of unity is a party tradition, and one she's proved willing to embrace.

Of course, "compromise" is a word that has been hung around Biden's neck by the more uncompromising elements of the left, those less acquainted with and more disdainful of the necessities of pragmatic political negotiation. Joining a movement is different from building a broad coalition. That's not to say that Biden should get a free pass

on all the many bargains he's struck. Forty-eight years is a long time to be on the national stage, and the accordingly lengthy record includes bad votes (yea on the Iraq war) and troubling alliances (credit-card and finance companies). At their March 15 debate, perhaps the last debate of the primary campaign, Sanders again took the opportunity to highlight some of these, and more. It's a line of attack that at this point resonates mainly with his own base. For better or worse, most Democratic voters view Biden's actions as ancient history. The present is about unseating Trump, and Biden is seen as the more likely to do it.

At the age of seventy-seven, Biden can sometimes sound as if he's speaking from the faintest endpoint of an expanding generational divide. His post–Super Tuesday praise of the Sanders voters' "passion," though clearly offered in good faith, struck some as insensitive to the real anxieties of millions of Americans seeking fundamental change. Voters under the age of forty-five heavily favor Sanders; these are not kids in need of parental validation but adults with legitimate, informed concerns about economic structures, healthcare, and the climate. Yet at the same time, it's important to look at Biden's positioning of himself as a transitional figure, a bridge between the Democratic past and future. He seems to know he's not where the party is headed. But ensuring that it at least has the chance to realize some of its increasingly progressive agenda means having a Democrat in the White House—and even more critically, preserving and perhaps building on the gains of the 2018 midterms. Biden has embraced Elizabeth Warren's bankruptcy reform proposals and Sanders's call for free tuition at public colleges. He has promised to select a woman as his running mate. Little of this is likely to satisfy those who want a revolution. But as a string of primaries has shown, they're not the majority of Democrats.

—Dominic Preziosi

The Taliban 'Peace' Deal

A little more than eighteen years after the 9/11 attacks, America's war in Afghanistan has finally ended, bringing our longest conflict to a close and leaving Afghans with the promise of a lasting peace. Or that's what the Trump administration would have you believe. On February 29, it signed a deal with the Taliban that provides for the withdrawal of the remaining 12,000 U.S. military personnel from Afghanistan in just over one year. It also commits the Taliban to future power-sharing negotiations with the democratically elected (though woefully corrupt) Afghan government in Kabul. But the text of the agreement, only four pages long, is conspicuously vague in its details, especially concerning the Taliban's commitment to "violence reduction." This has prompted U.S. lawmakers and commentators on all sides of the political spectrum to question whether the Taliban will actually honor its end of the bargain. We'd be better able to answer this question if the White House would release the two classified "annexes" outlining the U.S. military's verification mechanisms; it won't, so we can't.

But then there's the evidence on the ground. Just days after signing the agreement, the Taliban ("great fighters" who "kill terrorists" and defend American values, according to Trump) resumed deadly attacks on U.S.-backed Afghan government forces. Nor has the Taliban expelled terrorists from the ranks of its leadership: the influential Sirajuddin Haqqani, of the Haqqani Network, a group known for its suicide-bombing campaign, remains at the helm of the Taliban's military.

During Trump's impeachment hearings in the House, former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch spoke of the corrosive effects of this administration's failure to back up its own diplomats. This same disregard for expertise infected its approach to Afghanistan. Over NATO objections, Trump signaled his desire to withdraw from Afghanistan "with or without a deal" early on, thus tying the hands of U.S. negotiator Zalmay Khalilzad. As former U.S. director of national security Susan Rice has argued, Khalilzad's team got the best deal it could. But the administration has now ceded whatever leverage it once had in Afghanistan, limiting U.S. counterterrorism capacities and dishonoring the sacrifices made by U.S. and Afghan forces alike. While not as disastrous as Trump's hasty withdrawal from Syria, the Afghanistan deal essentially grants the Taliban what it has long wanted: the departure of U.S. forces, and the upper hand in Afghan power relations. Just note the glee with which a Taliban spokesman welcomed the agreement a day before the signing ceremony in Doha, Qatar: "It's a defeat of the arrogance of the White House in the face of the White Turban."

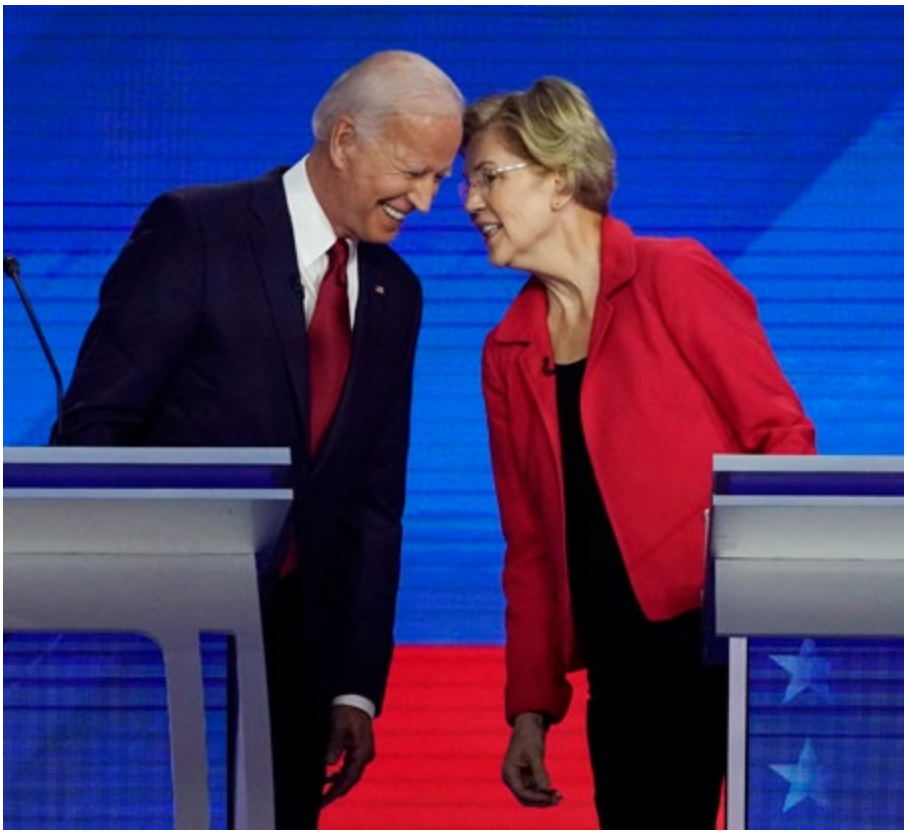
That's not to say that the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan isn't popular here, too. The war cost the United States $2 trillion and claimed 2,400 American lives. It was launched and conducted with more arrogance than planning, as the Afghanistan Papers, a trove of Pentagon documents published by the *Washington Post* in December 2019, revealed. It needed to be brought to an end. But how a war is ended also matters. With so little guaranteeing that the Taliban won't continue business as usual, there's reason to worry that life is going to get much worse for Afghans. As in business, so in foreign policy: Trump cuts and runs, leaving others to deal with the wreckage.

—Griffin Oleynick

MATT MAZEWSKI

Good, but Not Good Enough

Bankruptcy reform doesn't address the underlying cause of debt.



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For two years after college I worked as a research assistant at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, where one of my main responsibilities was to help assemble a report that the Fed releases each quarter on the state of consumer finances in America. There is a graph in that report that shows the fraction of Americans who have recently declared personal bankruptcy, which spikes suddenly in late 2005 and then sharply drops. The first time I saw it I wondered whether I had somehow lived through a rapid economic boom and bust during my freshman year of high school without ever realizing it.

As I soon learned from a coworker, though, the surge and collapse in bankruptcies around that time was essentially artificial, the result of a federal law known as the Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act (BAPCPA) of 2005, which made it more difficult for individuals to get rid of debts in bankruptcy, and which led to a rush of filings just before the new rules went into effect.

Most Americans—or at least those fortunate enough never to have endured or witnessed someone else endure the ordeal of personal bankruptcy—have probably never heard of the BAPCPA. But in a sense it's surprising that the law was not more widely talked about over the past year-and-a-half, when the country endured the ordeal of a Democratic primary campaign in which two candidates were also key players in the story of that law: then-Senator Joe Biden, and then-professor Elizabeth Warren. That the issue never came up at any of the eight primary debates at which the two shared a stage is somewhat astonishing.

The core objective of the law was to restrict who is eligible to declare a so-called "Chapter 7 bankruptcy," which allows for debts to be written off once most of an individual's assets have been sold and the proceeds applied to what they owe, and to steer more people into "Chapter 13 bankruptcy," which allows one to keep more assets in exchange for agreeing to a repayment plan. Creditors generally prefer the latter because it allows them to extract more from debtors over time, which explains why credit-card companies and other lenders had aggressively lobbied for passage of the law, albeit under the banner of "protecting consumers" from purported "abuse" by bad actors who were supposedly filing frivolous bankruptcies despite being perfectly able to repay their debts.

Biden, whose home state of Delaware is the de facto capital of the credit-card industry, voted for BAPCPA despite its being opposed by a majority of his Democratic colleagues in both the Senate and House, including then-Senator Barack Obama, and one independent, then-Representative Bernie Sanders. Harvard Law Professor Elizabeth Warren testified against the bill at a hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee, of which Biden was a member at the time. Warren's academic research had focused on the causes of personal bankruptcy, and she had concluded that, contrary to the financial industry's

narrative about pervasive fraud, one of the major drivers of bankruptcy was in fact unforeseen medical expenses. At that hearing, she got into a testy exchange with Biden, accusing him of trying to "take away the last shred of protection for a family" facing financial distress.

When Biden first announced his 2020 campaign, Warren raised the issue almost immediately. She declared in a statement that "Joe Biden was on the side of the credit-card companies" when BAPCPA was being drafted. In January, she even released one of her vaunted "plans" on the subject, proposing to reverse most of the 2005 law and replace the current dual-track system with a single, streamlined personal bankruptcy procedure.

Yet Warren never mentioned the issue on any of the occasions she faced Biden on the debate stage. It had nothing to do with the moderators not bringing it up; candidates are usually quite capable of talking about whatever they want regardless of what they are asked. Plus, Sanders called out Biden for his support of BAPCPA right away when they debated one-on-one on March 15. It's one of the more notorious votes Biden has taken: Why not challenge him on it when you have the chance?

Current Affairs's Nathan Robinson, among others, has speculated that Warren may have held back from attacking Biden too aggressively in order to preserve her leverage over him should he win the nomination. By holding her fire, she may have missed an opportunity to seriously weaken him, but she may have also kept alive the possibility of becoming his running mate or leading the staffing of his administration. This appeared to be her strategy in 2016 as well, though a leaked Hillary Clinton cabinet shortlist that included a number of corporate bigwigs suggests that it was not a terribly effective one. On the other hand, after Warren ended her campaign, Biden announced his support for her bankruptcy plan. Should we therefore count her long game a success?

I'm not so sure. On some level, the whole issue of bankruptcy reform is a sideshow. I say this as someone who would love to see Warren's plan become law and who thinks Biden was on the wrong side of the debate in 2005. Making the system marginally more friendly to debtors is a morally worthwhile objective, especially because so many people who reach the point of needing to take advantage of it are pushed into their dire circumstances by forces beyond their control.

But making it easier to declare bankruptcy is like stocking a boat with plenty of life preservers while ignoring the leaks in the hull: a better idea than not doing anything, but not as good as dealing with the real problem. And the real problems are many: the high costs of education, childcare, and healthcare; the widespread lack of health insurance; stagnant wages; exorbitant interest rates on consumer loans.

Even taking Biden at his word and assuming that he has now reversed his views on personal bankruptcy, or that he would fight for a plan along the lines of Warren's once in office, we have to wonder whether he would do enough to push for "big structural change" of the sort Warren claimed to be after.

Making it easier to declare bankruptcy is like stocking a boat with plenty of life preservers while ignoring leaks in the hull.

According to his own website, his healthcare plan would leave an estimated 3 percent of Americans uninsured. And as far as I can tell, he has never endorsed efforts to reinvigorate anti-usury law, such as those put forth by Sanders and Rep. Ocasio-Cortez, after state efforts to regulate interest rates on consumer loans were largely gutted by judicial decree several decades ago.

Interestingly enough, Biden himself emphasized the importance of tackling underlying causes at that hearing with Warren in 2005, though probably just as a way of distracting from the topic at hand. "Your problem with the credit-card companies is the usury rates," he said. "It's not about the bankruptcy bill." When Warren countered that the bankruptcy laws shouldn't be tampered with if Congress was unwilling to do anything about the usury laws, Biden paused. "You're very good, professor," he replied. If he becomes president, we will find out whether "good" is good enough.

AUSTEN IVEREIGH

New Wine, New Wineskins

How to read Francis's apostolic exhortation on the Amazon

Jesus spoke of the need for new wine in new wineskins for a reason: sometimes we don't see and hear the new thing happening because we're looking out for the old thing. Nowhere has that been truer than in the reception of Pope Francis's latest apostolic exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*. As the dust begins to settle on the reaction to Pope Francis's response to the Amazon synod, we have only begun to see what his move really consists of, and the future he is opening up: a truly global Catholicism in which lay people assume their responsibility for evangelization, and exercise real authority in a church that is embedded in local, not just Western, clerical culture.

We didn't see it coming because we were conditioned to wait for what has always come before. We were expecting a ruling from the supreme legislator of the Catholic Church on a disputed ecclesial question; we were looking for a *decision*. What we got was a dream, a vision, and a prophecy. What we were waiting for was a solution to a pressing problem—the lack of clergy in the Amazon and therefore of access to the Eucharist. What Francis gave us was an answer to a deeper problem: a response to the agonized cry of the people of region, and God's dream for their fullness of life.

We are used to post-synodal apostolic exhortations that subsume and replace the synod's concluding report. What we got instead was something quite new: a papal response that *complements* the synod report with what has resonated in his discernment. We were expecting an old wineskin to carry the wine we were used to, and when we were given a new wineskin we failed to taste the new wine in it. But it's not too late to look again, and taste.

The pope said he intended neither to duplicate nor to replace the synod final report; *ergo*, what is not replaced is not refused. Nothing in that report, endorsed by two-thirds of the synod, is rejected; indeed, everything in it is affirmed, endorsed, and given papal recognition. Contrary to almost every news

Fr. Alfredo Ferro celebrates Mass in the indigenous community of Nazaret, Colombia, July 14, 2019.

CNS PHOTO / DAVID AGREN

story or reaction to *Querida Amazonia*, the pope did not rule against the possibility of ordaining married men, or of women deacons, or of anything else the synod agreed to propose. Instead, he said something quite astonishing: that the synod final report was the fruit of a collaboration by people "who know better than I and the Roman curia the problems and issues of the Amazon region." And he went on to urge pastors, religious, and lay leaders to "strive to apply" the report in Amazonia, while inviting us all—the whole church—to be enriched and challenged by studying it in its integrity. Because, as we shall see, *Querida Amazonia* is about much more than Amazonia.

Francis prefigured the new thing in *Evangelii gaudium*, when he said he did not think it "advisable for the Pope to take the place of local Bishops in the discernment of every issue which arises in their territory." The pope, in short, *defers to the discernment of the local church*. A Vatican official close to Francis has helped me understand this. "It's a complete reversal," he writes. "Before, the hierarchical scheme needed the validation of the Holy Father, but here the Holy Father places himself in a position of listening to the action of the Spirit in the Synod." It's not easy for people to grasp what is going on, he explains, because it involves a category inversion typical of the Gospel's subversive ways. "Many see in this exhortation a conclusion but it's the opposite: it values all the proposals of the synod and treats them as a point of departure."

The bishops have discerned; the pope respects their discernment; now it is they who must act. Far from reacting with disappointment or fury—as so many American and European progressives have—Catholics in Amazonia saw the exhortation as the pope inviting them to take the initiative. Cardinal Cláudio Hummes, the Amazon synod's *relator* (chair), told journalists that the question of the ordination of married men would now be dealt with directly by the bishops of the region in dialogue with the pope and the Vatican. The bishop of Juína in the Brazilian region of Mato Grosso, Neri José, who spoke to me regularly during the synod, was one of those strongly urging the ordination of married men and women deacons. "He's thrown the ball right back in our court," he told me after reading the exhortation. "Now is the time for courage."

How will the Amazonian church respond? The pope himself points to the doors waiting to be pushed open: in favorably noting the proposal for an Amazonian rite, and for a territorial episcopal council that would allow the bishops of the region to act together across national boundaries. Dom Neri is among those urging his fellow bishops to form this Amazon-specific "strong synodal body" alongside Celam—the transcontinental episcopal conference—to push these proposals forward. "If [Celam] doesn't take the initiative," Dom Neri tells me, "the bishops of the dioceses can seek the competent authority to proceed." In other words, they can apply diocese by diocese for permission from Rome to ordain *viri probati*.

But given that this is a decision that would affect the whole Latin-rite church, most observers believe that the ordination of *viri probati* will be the result of a regional synodal process that creates a new Amazonian rite. "The pope is asking the bishops to come up with concrete proposals," another Vatican official involved with the synod process told me. "He thinks the time wasn't yet ripe for any kind of decision by him: there's too much anxiety, too little clarity. But he expects the bishops to move forward with it." Cardinal Hummes, who heads the trans-Amazonian church network REPAM, says the future "ecclesial organism" for Amazonia "will have an important role in discussions in the Vatican about how to bring about the ordination of married men in areas of scarcity." Mauricio López, the executive secretary of REPAM, sees the exhortation as "an invitation to continue exploring ways and channels which will perhaps lead to relaxing the rule [of celibacy]."

Another door has meanwhile opened to a female diaconate. At the end of the synod, Francis promised to reopen and reconstitute the commission looking into women deacons that ended last year in disagreement. That will now happen, says the official involved with the synod. "But he wants the study to go beyond the diaconate, to incorporate a deeper understanding of ministries in the early church." Because for Francis, to consider the question of ministries only through the lens of the clergy is to get stuck with the old wineskins and to miss the new wine the Spirit is offering.

In this regard, Francis may be respecting the discernment of the synod, but he is not confined by it. *Querida Amazonia* expresses his conviction that the Spirit has been calling the church to look at something other than the issue of clerical ministries. The sign of that, to Francis, was the polarization over the *viri probati* issue. He was deeply dismayed at the politicking by curial cardinals Marc Ouellet and Robert Sarah, who attempted to mobilize public opinion against the synod's discernment by claiming in coordinated books—one before, one after the synod—that the issue had long been settled in favor of mandatory, universal celibacy. But he was also upset at the obsessive focus on the issue during the synod by many of the Amazonian bishops, as if simply ordaining more people would somehow resolve the deeper challenges facing the church.

Whenever two church tribes blindly go to war with each other, Francis sees a sign that the bad spirit has prevailed: we have been deceived into a conviction that a tension between two goods—in this case, a celibate and married priesthood—is a contradiction that must be resolved by the defeat of one side by the other.

In such circumstances, the pope says in *Evangelii gaudium*, the appropriate response is not to opt for some wishy-washy compromise, nor for one pole to vanquish the other, but rather to be open to "a resolution which takes place on a higher plane and preserves what is valid and useful on both sides." As he puts it in *Querida Amazonia*, the

The sacraments are part of the means, but the end is the inculturation of the Gospel.

answer lies in "transcending the two approaches and finding other, better ways, perhaps not yet even imagined." Solutions often come in the form of a "greater gift" that God is offering from which "there will pour forth as from an overflowing fountain the answers that contraposition did not allow us to see."

The pope's purpose in *Querida Amazonia* is to offer—passionately, but without dictating or lecturing—some of the answers he sees flowing from that fountain. They are answers that indignant progressives or triumphant conservatives still focused only on the institutional, clerical issue simply fail to see, because they are expecting law and have been given something more like a parable.

Fr. Augusto Zampini Davies, an Argentine official at the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, suggests the analogy. Like Jesus' parables, he says, "if you don't get inside Francis's dreams, they won't change you. But if you do, you are changed." The change Francis is pointing to requires a different way of thinking: not "How do we make sure more communities receive the Eucharist?"—important though that is—but: "How can we have communities of life that care for the poor, that know Christ's nearness? How to ignite the life of the Spirit? *How to incarnate Christ?*"

Fr. Zampini asks me to consider the pope's dreams as biblical dreams that offer warnings, open new horizons, show the paths out of slavery into abundant new life. *Querida Amazonia* is about Amazonia, but it's really about all of us, he says. Replace Amazonia with the United States, or Kenya, or France, and it is just as resonant. "Try it, you'll see it works," he urges. I have. It does.

The first ecology we need, says Francis at the start of the exhortation's third chapter, is to grasp that freedom from slavery means helping the hearts of people to open trustingly to that God who has not just created all that exists but has given Himself to us in Jesus Christ: "The Lord, who first cares for us, teaches us to care for our brothers and sisters, and the environment that he gifts to us each day." There is a created order, full of creatures, because there is a Creator; and we are invited to enter into that truth by contemplating our world, not analyzing it; by loving it, not using it; by uniting ourselves with it, giving ourselves to it.

So our created world—Amazonia, Arizona, Azerbaijan—is the place of our encounter with our Creator, who is not a distant figure but an incarnated savior. Our place is the *locus theologicus* of incarnation and therefore *inculturation*. And in our realization of that truth, our *conversion*, we abandon our colonialism, our corruption, our technocratic illusions of superiority, and our contempt. Instead, we embrace fraternity, open ourselves to dialogue with all (especially the poor), see all that is created as gift, and work for justice and the dignity of all. We nurture and build up culture; we respect ancestral wisdom born of the symbiotic bond of humankind and the natural world; we listen to our elders and hear the dreams of our young; we stand with the people against power-drunk bosses who have no use for poetry and song and memory.

The church, says Francis in one of the most beautiful passages in *Querida Amazonia*, grows through inculturation—by incarnating the Gospel in culture. In nurturing the seeds of the Word the Lord has sown in every people, the Gospel affirms God's action in that people, building up their culture; and at the same time, the church grows, enriched by each inculturation. It becomes a living tradition that is not the worship of ashes but the preservation of fire, to quote Francis quoting Gustav Mahler.

It would be a shame, says Francis, if people received from the church merely a doctrinal code or a moral imperative, and not "the great message of salvation," which is "a God who infinitely loves every man and woman and has revealed this love fully in Jesus Christ, crucified for us and risen in our lives." (Here Francis refers us to chapter four of his earlier exhortation *Christus vivit*, which describes how Christ loves you, is your savior, and is alive).

Chapter Four of *Querida Amazonia* is about the inculturation of the Gospel in the Amazon, but is also about what the incarnation of Christ in any culture looks like. In other words, it is about how the church needs to be present in and to a particular people. And thus the question of ministries—the way in which the church serves a people, becoming a means of encounter with Christ—is also a question of inculturation, and so necessarily raises the question of how the church organizes itself to that end.

This is where Francis gently performs his major move. The church's pastoral presence in the Amazon, he observes, is "precarious" (the English translation, "uneven," lacks the force of the Spanish) "due in part to the vast expanse of territory" and other existential factors: cultural diversity, the isolation of ethnic groups, and so on. The "in part" is significant; for Francis, geography only *partly* accounts for the problem. He calls for "a specific, courageous response" from the church to rise to this challenge, which implies a degree of pusillanimity in its response thus far. He then speaks of the need for greater access to the sacraments but immediately adds: "at the same time, there is a need for ministers who can understand Amazonian sensibilities and culture from within." It is easy to miss the significance of this qualifying sentence, not least because the English translation softens "at the same time" to "also," so it's worth spelling out: the sacraments are part of the means, but the end is the inculturation of the Gospel. The purpose is not the expansion of an institutional presence. What matters is inculturated ministry that performs the Incarnation. That is the *telos*, the

deeper purpose or end that must govern our discernment of the means.

Then comes a key passage in which Francis says that, while a priest has the non-delegable qualification to preside at the Eucharist, this does not make him the highest authority in the community. Religious women and lay leaders can and do run communities, he points out, before going on to note the distinctively lay ecclesial culture of the Amazon, where most Catholic communities have no priest and are run by women. Many of these leaders, he says, promote the encounter with God's Word and growth in holiness through their service, and have spent decades embedded in the life of the communities of the region. He goes on to call for women, in particular, to have their roles publicly recognized and commissioned by bishops, allowing them "to have a real and effective impact on the organization, the most important decisions and the direction of communities."

Much of the action, in these passages, is happening in the footnotes, where Francis observes that more Amazonian priests are sent to Europe and the United States than to serve in the Amazon, and that there is a lack of seminaries for indigenous priests. Who, in this scenario, is inculturating the Gospel? Is it the clergy or the lay leaders, the women, who are really running the show? Is it possible that the real issue here is a hermeneutic one—that the church in the Amazon has focused too much on the clerical institution, and not seen what gifts are already being poured out on the People of God?

If you ask that question again but replace "Amazon" with your own parish or diocese, then you'll get Francis's larger point. But not everyone will: these are new wineskins.

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POETRY

ON A CARDINAL CLIMBING DOWN A MANHOLE TO RESTORE POWER TO 400 HOMELESS PEOPLE

Michael Stalcup

We were almost used
To living in the dark,
To being powerless,

That day you quietly
Pulled the lid off the sky
Of a world below

And snuck down, strange
Inside that stale air,
To flip the switch,

Subverting power structures,
Sparking gasps of joy
In us who could not pay

That suffocating debt,
Your dirtied hands declaring,
"Let there be light."

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MICHAEL W. HIGGINS

A Light Extinguished

Jean Vanier & the betrayal of trust

People around the world are processing the news that the revered spiritual leader Jean Vanier has been found to have sexually and emotionally abused multiple women who came to him for spiritual "accompaniment" over several decades. The revelations sparked a media storm inside and outside Catholicism. Celebrity abusers are front and center in our tremulous time: Bill Cosby, Harvey Weinstein, Jeffrey Epstein, to say nothing of the serial abusers who have haunted the studios of the BBC, the campsites of the Boy Scouts, and the curial cells of Vatican apparatchiks. But there is something even more disturbing about spiritual leaders, as they are the ones we most trust; the ones removed from the hurly-burly, the mad contradictions, that define our flawed humanity. They are beacons in a darkening landscape. And now one light has been extinguished.

Jean Vanier in March 2011

CNS PHOTO / COURTESY JEAN VANIER FOUNDATION

When L'Arche International undertook an investigation into the ministry and behavior of the renegade Dominican friar Thomas Philippe in 2014, they had little idea of the extent of his amorous alliances dressed up as spiritual counseling, his abuse of novice nuns, and his psychological predation. They took the allegations brought forward by victims seriously, secured a canonical inquiry, and in 2015 issued their report. It was damning. Père Thomas broke his vows and demonstrated "a psychological and spiritual hold on these women from whom he demanded silence, because according to him this corresponded to 'special graces' that no one could understand." We had seen this before: the deployment of seductive language, the creation of a private and sacred secrecy, the invocation of special status by priestly intervention.

Vanier of course had a unique and longstanding relationship with Philippe, whom he called a "spiritual father" in describing the mentorship the Dominican had provided since 1950. Their shared pastoral concern for the emotionally and intellectually challenged led to the establishment of L'Arche in France in 1964. When L'Arche International queried Vanier about the allegations against Philippe, he stated that he was unaware of the friar's behavior. That appears not to have been true. L'Arche International, following allegations by two women, in 2016 and 2019, launched an investigation of Vanier to determine the precise relationship between him and Philippe, and to clarify the founding charism and early history of the L'Arche movement, with the express purpose of determining if there were other allegations that needed to be brought to light. The findings of this inquiry were detailed in a report issued on February 22, the conclusions of which have shocked the Catholic world as well as dismayed the large following Vanier had among multitudes regardless of creed or ethnicity.

The collateral damage of these discoveries was immediate and continues to be felt: demoralized assistants and core members of the 152 L'Arche

homes around the world (great care is being taken to explain what has happened to the core members, the intellectually disabled ones, cognizant of potential trauma and agonizing disbelief); the future of various institutes, research bodies, and schools named after Vanier (following discussion with the various stakeholders determining whether the name should be stripped or recontextualized); the removal of his books from publishers' catalogues and the pulping of unsold copies (full disclosure: the publisher of my biography of Vanier, *Logician of the Heart,* will be recycling the remaining copies).

Of greater damage, of course, is the profound feeling of personal betrayal and deep disappointment that a man they trusted—and Vanier made much of trust as the cornerstone of an integrated and meaningful life—was not the person they thought he was. There will be no *santo subito* moment, no groundswell of public acclamation that Vanier was a saint; the luster of holy leadership has been expunged.

How did this happen? Why did an eccentric and narcissistic French cleric hold such sway over Vanier, and indeed members of his family, and for so long, even after he was subject to the canonical sanction of deposition by the Holy Office in 1956, deprived of his right to celebrate the sacraments, engage in spiritual direction, or indeed to preach? Philippe's own order complied and all parties were made aware that he was censured by the authorities because of his "mystical doctrine" *and his conduct.* The Dominican archives establish conclusively that Vanier was made aware of the reasons for Philippe's censure, and yet Vanier persisted in keeping in close contact with him, facilitated his inclusion in various L'Arche homes, and ensured that his spiritual practices were resumed. I asked some Vanier authorities—Mary Frances Coady, author of *Georges and Pauline Vanier: Portrait of a Couple,* and Carolyn Whitney-Brown, editor of *Jean Vanier: Essential Writings*—if they had knowledge of the true nature of Philippe's sanctioning and if they were at least dimly aware of Vanier's conduct. Both emphatically said "no." That was my experience as well.

We all labored under the impression that Philippe's canonical penalty was imposed exclusively on the basis of his esoteric Mariological theories with no hint that there were more serious concerns that occupied both the Vatican authorities and his Dominican superiors. As a consequence of the Vanier report, the Dominicans are opening two investigations—one concerning the order's treatment of Philippe, in light of the fact that he appears to have insinuated his way back into active ministry enabled by Vanier; and one concerning Philippe's brother, Marie-Dominique Philippe, founder of the Community of St. John and recently the subject of a graphic exposé of his immoral and abusive behavior toward members of this community. There appears to be something in the Philippe genes that merits examination.

Throughout the investigation, the team of experts respected the allegations of the women who came forward in both the case of Philippe and of Vanier. They operated on the principle of a "balance of probabilities" rather than "beyond any doubt," recognized the fact that both men were deceased (Philippe in 1993 and Vanier in 2019), but were also able to access hitherto unavailable archival materials, including a hefty correspondence between Philippe and Vanier. In addition, they were able to conduct some interviews with Vanier himself, in one of which he acknowledged a relationship he had in the 1970s, which he believed to be reciprocal.

There is no illegality in any of this; no preying on youth or on the disabled; no calls for compensation. Just a sad but determined effort to cleanse the waters of perception, listen with compassion to the victims, look at the origins of L'Arche in an unblinkered manner, begin the tasks of healing and of telling the truth. Lies and deception, subterfuge and evasion, have compromised the integrity of the mission of L'Arche. But the international body responsible for the inquiry is committed—with a subdued and eloquent dignity, in my opinion—to recovering its purpose and ensuring its survival by demystifying its origins, holding accountable the spiritual father and spiritual son, and redressing the evils committed.

Permit me to conclude with a passage from my soon-to-be-pulped biography that speaks to the enduring good of the Vanier vision, a good that must not be erased from our memory, a good that allows us to see beyond the fractured founder to the deeper truth of our broken humanity:

> Vanier's *spirituality of the wounded* is a spirituality enmeshed in the world of broken bodies, broken minds, broken spirits. Vanier knows to break open Albert Camus's 'plague of cerebration' that poisons our culture, to expose to the open air the fallacies of reason, we must allow 'the wounded' to heal *our wounds* and touch our invisible scars of heart and mind.

L'Arche International, in conducting this investigation, was motivated by nothing less than allowing the wounded to heal our wounds with the light of truth.

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EDITORS NOTE: The March issue of *Commonweal* included Michael Baxter's review of *Jean Vanier: Portrait of a Free Man* by Anne-Sophie Constant. A few days after that issue went to press it was reported that Jean Vanier had sexually abused six women. We regret that the magazine's production schedule did not allow either the editors or the reviewer to take this news into account before the review was published.

JOHN CHRYSSAVGIS

Does the Orthodox Church Do Social Teaching?

Yes, and a new document brings it to the fore.

In January the Ecumenical Patriarchate approved a social document, titled *For the Life of the World*, that formulates guiding principles for the role of the Orthodox Church—and the responsibility of Orthodox Christians—in the modern world. In his letter of endorsement, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew praised the theological commission that drafted the document for having addressed "the complex challenges and problems of today's world, without at the same time overlooking the favorable potential and positive perspectives of contemporary civilization." The document, now available on the website of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, will be published in print this month by Holy Cross Orthodox Press.

For the Life of the World, which runs to about 33,000 words, provides helpful general guidelines for Orthodox Christians struggling to navigate contemporary challenges. It begins with the fundamental contours of an Orthodox Christian worldview and concludes on a prayerful note, with an expression of hope for personal and social transformation. Its approach to critical and controversial issues—including racism, poverty, human rights, bioethics, technology, and climate change—is both rigorous and pastoral. The work of a dozen scholars throughout the world (including *Commonweal* contributor David Bentley Hart), the document is an unmistakably collaborative "achievement," as the Ecumenical Patriarch describes it in his endorsement. It is the tangible result of extensive hierarchical assessment and comprehensive synodal approval. In their preface, the editors describe the project as "a complicated, not to say contentious, undertaking." The aim was to delineate an Orthodox "ethos":

> It is impossible for the Church truly to follow Christ or to make him present to the world if it fails to place this absolute concern for the poor and disadvantaged at the very center of its moral, religious, and spiritual life. The pursuit of social justice and civil equity—provision for the poor and shelter for the homeless, protection for the weak, welcome for the displaced, and assistance for the disabled—is not merely an ethos the Church recommends for the sake of a comfortable conscience, but is a necessary means of salvation, the indispensable path to union with God in Christ; and to fail in these responsibilities is to invite condemnation before the judgment seat of God. (§33)

Notwithstanding its broad scope, the document does not hesitate to offer pointed commentary on controversial topics. For example, it has this to say on inequality:

> Among the most common evils of all human societies—though often brought to an unprecedented level of refinement and precision in modern developed countries—are the gross inequalities of wealth often produced or abetted by regressive policies of taxation and insufficient regulation of fair wages, which favor the interests of those rich enough to influence legislation and secure their wealth against the demands of the general good. (§35)

On the refugee crisis:

> The developed world everywhere knows the presence of refugees and asylum-seekers, many legally admitted but also many others without documentation. They confront the consciences of wealthier nations daily with their sheer vulnerability, indigence, and suffering. This is a global crisis, but also a personal appeal to our faith, to our deepest moral natures, to our most inabrogable responsibilities. (§66)

On science:

> And the Church encourages the faithful to be grateful for—and to accept—the findings of the sciences, even those that might occasionally oblige them to revise their understandings of the history and frame of cosmic reality. The desire for scientific knowledge flows from the same wellspring as faith's longing to enter ever more deeply into the mystery of God. (§71)

For the Life of the World has special significance when viewed against the background of Orthodox history. The Eastern Church has long been wary of—even allergic to—social statements of this kind. At some point in its long Byzantine excursion, Eastern Christianity stopped dealing with questions related to the present and instead focused on the reiteration of formulas from the past. The Eastern Church considered itself well equipped for handling otherworldly or sacred things, whereas the state was entrusted with worldly or secular things. This understanding of a clearly defined role for the church in relation to the clearly designated responsibility of the state inevitably narrowed the Eastern approach to social justice. Issues having to do with politics and policy (especially as they relate to power and corruption), or with economy and science (especially as they relate to poverty and prosperity), were either minimized or dismissively delegated to Western Christianity. In fact, the West excelled in these domains. By contrast, matters of personal maturity and spiritual integrity became the principal interest and mystical investment of Eastern Christianity.

It wasn't always this way. The Eastern church once had a bold voice on social justice. A cursory reading of fourth-century writers like Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom reveals the prominence of the social dimension of the Gospel both in their thinking and their ministry. Certainly Basil the Great strenuously disapproved of retreat from the world. Any eschatology that encouraged escapism from one's time and place was denounced as heretical and hazardous. Over time, however, an emphasis in the Christian East on *monasticism* (as the silent withdrawal into the heart) and *mysticism* (as the spiritual enchantment of the heavenly) provided a justification for disengagement from the world, with various important consequences for Orthodoxy's ecclesiology, liturgy, and ethos. Even the conventional safety-valve of Orthodox Christian ethics—the relationship between spiritual elder (almost exclusively male) and spiritual disciple—is frequently a way of evading concern for universal principles and surrendering to the personal discretion of an individual.

More recently, Orthodoxy's social doctrine has been further reduced to an emphasis on nationalism as the means of survival in times of persecution and oppression. During such periods, the church instinctively turned inward, identifying with the early martyrs and focusing on the mere preservation of the faith at the expense of evangelization. Yet another reason Orthodox Christianity has either abandoned or failed to develop a clear social vision is the tendency to denounce or dismiss anything that resembles Western Christianity.

In 2000, the Church of Moscow published "The Basis of the Social Concept," an admirable though rudimentary effort to outline the social principles of the Orthodox Church in Russia after an extended period of state suppression. The overall approach of that document was critical of "the world," regarding it as a threat to be defied and defeated. Such a defensive posture may survive and even thrive under conditions of confessional isolation, but it doesn't fare as well in a more ecumenical context.

In contrast, it was at least partly the encounter with other traditions and cultures, other branches of Christianity and even other religions, that inspired the worldwide Orthodox Churches to convene the Holy and Great Council in Crete in 2016. Meeting together for the first time in almost a millennium, Orthodox patriarchs and hierarchs—together with a handful of consultants—issued a formal decree as well as an encyclical message on "the role of the Orthodox Church in the contemporary world." The new document complements the work of the Council and can be understood as part of the process of its reception.

For the Life of the World is the fruit of an unprecedented collaboration between the official Orthodox hierarchy and lay Orthodox scholars and theologians. The Orthodox Church could still do much more to involve and inform the laity on matters related to doctrine and polity—a hardened nucleus of clericalism persists in Orthodox Christianity—but this project is a mark of important progress. The fact that Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew commissioned and endorsed such a forward-looking document demonstrates a welcome and refreshing shift in mentality for a church that has often been more comfortable keeping its attention fixed on the past. It is the work of a religious tradition that will no longer settle for mere survival.

TRETYAKOV GALLERY

Saints Paraskevi, Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, and Basil the Great

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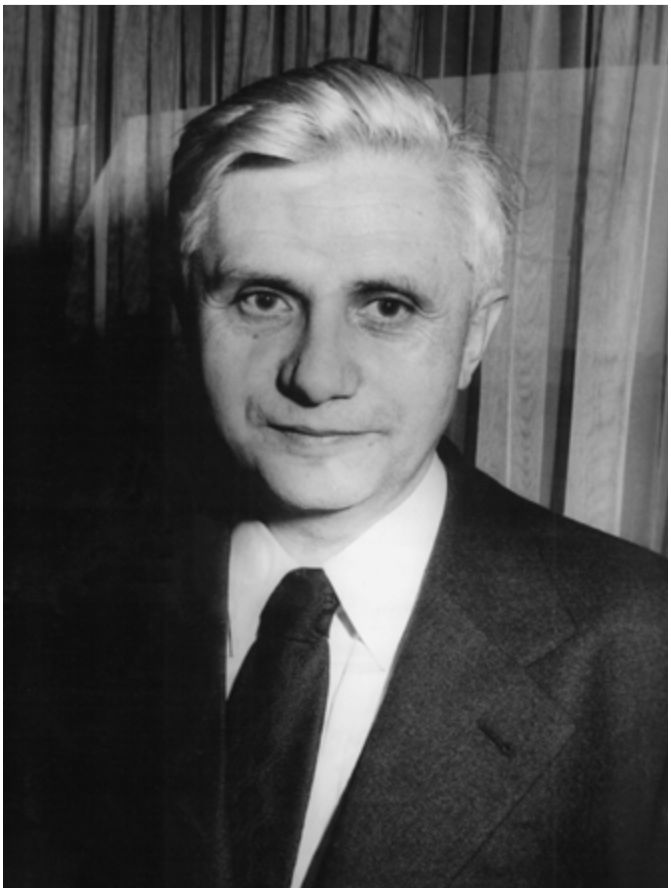
ROBERT P. IMBELLI

Benedict & Vatican II

A response to Massimo Faggioli



Joseph Ratzinger in 1977

DPA PICTURE ALLIANCE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

In the February issue of *Commonweal*, Massimo Faggioli criticized Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI for his collaboration with Cardinal Robert Sarah on a book titled *From the Depths of Our Hearts*, which argues that there is an intimate link between the priesthood and celibacy. The scriptural, theological, and pastoral positions espoused by each man can, of course, be challenged and debated. Faggioli himself laments the absence of reference to the documents of Vatican II. One could, by way of counterargument, contend that Benedict, at least, is attempting to develop and deepen the claims of Vatican II's "Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests" (*Presbyterorum ordinis*, no. 16) which states that "celibacy is in very many ways appropriate to the priesthood" ("*multimodam convenientiam*"), because it makes priests "more equipped" (*aptiores*) to exercise "fatherhood in Christ" (*paternitatem in Christo*).

But Faggioli's indictment of Benedict is much broader than a disagreement about the reasons for clerical celibacy. For Faggioli, Benedict's intervention on this topic is but the latest example of his abandonment of both the letter and spirit of the Second Vatican Council. In Faggioli's reading, Ratzinger's theological and pastoral career has been nothing less than a decades-long "repudiation of Vatican II." To be sure, Faggioli makes this accusation with a certain sadness, acknowledging that "Ratzinger was one of the most important theologians of Vatican II." But, for Faggioli, that only makes Benedict's subsequent betrayal of the progressive camp all the more tragic.

Faggioli's article is rather imprecise as to when the pope emeritus is supposed to have turned his back on the council. Faggioli vaguely identifies "a pattern of theological drift" that may even stretch back to "August 1965"—before the last session of the council! Without saying so explicitly, he implies that Ratzinger's defection may have been occasioned by the conciliar debate over the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et spes*). He does not mention that Karl Rahner and Hans Küng, among other theologians, joined Ratzinger in expressing misgivings about some elements of the draft text of that document.

Faggioli also mentions the student riots of 1968 as an influence on Ratzinger's "distancing himself from the council," noting that, in the wake of those riots, Ratzinger moved from Tübingen to the "quieter" precincts of Regensburg in Bavaria. But the connection between Ratzinger's commitment to the council and his academic location is left obscure; readers are asked to infer that no one who left Tübingen for Regensburg could have much good to say about Vatican II.

In a quite remarkable manoeuver Faggioli seeks to distance Benedict not only from the council, but even from his predecessor John Paul II. Little attention is paid to the intimate collabora-

tion between the two men, which lasted for almost twenty-five years. One of the most important fruits of that collaboration was the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, whose purpose was to set forth the church's two-millennium tradition, *including* the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.

Only when Faggioli arrives at Benedict's own pontificate does he become somewhat more specific, appealing, for example, to Benedict's well-known address to the Curia in December 2005 and to his farewell address to the clergy of Rome in February 2013. Purportedly, both addresses demonstrate "his disappointments with the council." I cannot stress sufficiently that *neither* address supports this claim.

In the address to the Curia, Benedict's focus was not on the council per se, but rather upon its reception. Here, in his discussion of how the council has been interpreted, he introduced the contrast between a "hermeneutics of reform in continuity" and one of "discontinuity." Again, one may legitimately question the adequacy of such an analysis; but it is evident that, in Benedict's view, where the former interpretation has governed the council's reception it has resulted in "new life and new fruit" for the church. Significantly, he does not express the slightest regret about the council itself. Indeed, in this address his last word on the council is one of appreciation: "today we can look with gratitude at the Second Vatican Council: if we interpret and implement it guided by a right hermeneutic, it can be and can become increasingly powerful for the ever necessary renewal of the Church."

In his last meeting with the clergy of Rome, Benedict reminisced about his own participation in the council and offered a whole-hearted endorsement of its aims and accomplishments. Rather than expressing "disappointment" with the council, Benedict praised it for its focus on the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the vernacular in the liturgy, enhanced use of Scripture, active participation of all in liturgical worship, episcopal collegiality, and the church as People of God. He twice characterized *Gaudium et spes* as a "great document" and linked it approvingly to two other key documents of the council: those on religious liberty and world religions. Only at the end of his address did Benedict briefly criticize erroneous readings of the council. The rest of his lengthy reflection warmly celebrates both the council's inspiration and its achievement.

Faggioli does not mention the homily preached by Benedict XVI in St. Peter's Square on October 11, 2012, to mark the opening of "The Year of Faith." Perhaps even more significantly, that homily commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. In Benedict's eyes the liturgy offered an invitation "to enter more deeply into the spiritual movement which characterized Vatican II, to make it ours and to develop it according to its true meaning. And its true meaning was and remains faith in Christ, the apostolic faith, animated by the inner desire to communicate Christ to individuals and all people, in the church's pilgrimage along the pathways of history."

In his homily Benedict reiterated the conviction shared by his predecessors, Paul VI and John Paul II, that the council had set in motion a new evangelization, a "yearning to announce Christ again to contemporary man." But Benedict also asserted that commitment to this mission "needs to be built on a concrete and precise basis, and this basis is the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the place where it found expression. This is why I have often insisted on the need to return, as it were, to the 'letter' of the council—that is to its texts—also to draw from them its authentic spirit, and why I have repeated that the true legacy of Vatican II is to be found in them." Faggioli's real disagreement with Benedict, then, may lie not so much in the latter's supposed "repudiation" of the council as in his rejection of Faggioli's own preferred "trajectory" for the postconciliar church. To identify that trajectory with the council itself is to confuse the issue.

Let me close, then, by returning to the question of Benedict's alleged "disappointment" with the council. I think the real issue is his concern that the true substance and significance of the council has been misunderstood and therefore diminished in various quarters of the church. Not by the students of 1968, but, in particular, by members of the professoriate. In the young Joseph Ratzinger's biting words: "They changed wine into water and called it 'aggiornamento.'" And the wine in question is the very essence of the faith, clearly and repeatedly professed by the council: Jesus Christ.

Faggioli does commend the young Ratzinger's commentary on the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei verbum*. He says this commentary offers "a dynamic, fecund view of theological truth." But the older Benedict never swayed from the younger Ratzinger's commitment to *Dei verbum* and its confession of God's eternal Word made flesh. Almost fifty years after the council, *Dei verbum* inspired Benedict's remarkable pastoral-theological achievement: his trilogy *Jesus of Nazareth*, whose goal is to foster "a personal relationship with Jesus." This Jesus is, in the teaching of *Dei verbum*, "both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation."

The lasting legacy of Benedict XVI is his discernment that all the documents of the council—whether they address revelation or liturgy, the identity of the church or its mission in the modern world—are Christologically structured, saturated by the revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ. Benedict's creative fidelity to the council is nowhere so evident as in his insistence, in and out of season, that the living person of Christ is the Truth upon whose foundation the church stands, and without whom it falls into infidelity. The ultimate calling of the People of God is therefore to realize its true identity and achieve its full stature as the very Body of Christ.

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The American Parish Today

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The photographs throughout, taken by Bill McCullough, feature the Day of Discipleship at St. Joseph's Church in Amarillo, Texas, March 8, 2020. St Joseph's pastor, Fr. Hector Madrigal, is the subject of this issue's interview.

All illustrations by David Sankey.

A few years ago *Commonweal* published a special issue on parishes in the United States. We sent out correspondents and had them report back on what they encountered on an "ordinary Sunday" at their parish—what the liturgy was like, what they made of the preaching, how the art and architecture of the building influenced (or didn't) the experience. These dispatches provided an interesting, eclectic account of what it meant to worship in different parishes in different parts of the United States. At the same time, such an approach was unable to take the full measure of the changes remaking the U.S. Catholic Church—most of all the significant changes in demographics and geography, set against the backdrop of declining vocations and broader trends in religious disaffiliation—and what they meant for local communities of Catholics.

This time we wanted to try something different, looking at the state of the parish more broadly. Just what does "parish" mean for U.S. Catholics today? Early on, we began speaking with Susan Bigelow Reynolds, assistant professor of Catholic studies at Emory's Candler School of Theology, whose essay, "Waystations for a Pilgrim Church," is one of those featured in this special issue. She expressed something that helped us arrive at our guiding theme: though canon law describes parishes as "stable communities of the faithful," we live in *unstable* times, an age of migration and movement. So we asked a number of authors to consider this theme, from a variety of perspectives.

Reynolds does so by recounting the changes that have occurred in four parishes that have marked her life, folding those stories into broader trends, from the rise of Latinx Catholics to the shifting geography of the U.S. church. Brett Hoover focuses on the increasingly common phenomenon of shared parishes, examining how distinct racial, cultural, and linguistic communities can flourish as they negotiate how to use the same parish facilities and be served by the same clergy. And Griffin Oleynick explores the organizing and activism taking place beyond traditional parish structures—the grassroots efforts to fight with and for marginalized groups, especially immigrants, and the ways such work can generate a vitality and purpose from which many parishes could stand to learn.

We also wanted to offer deeper insights into particular aspects of parish life and give practical suggestions for how to make parishes more welcoming, just, and Spirit-filled. So we commissioned a series of shorter, more focused articles: Natalia Imperatori-Lee on preaching, Mollie Wilson O'Reilly on making Mass child friendly, Jason Steidl on LGBTQ ministry, Tia Noelle Pratt on African-American Catholics, and Madeline Jarrett on how parishes can be made more accessible for disabled people. We also interviewed Fr. Hector Madrigal of St. Joseph's Church in Amarillo, Texas (photos of which are featured throughout), about the practical and pastoral aspects of ministering to a mix of communities under one roof.

What all of these contributions share is humility and hope. They approach the changes happening in the American church as the occasion to learn again what it means to love our neighbors, and as a chance to give up comfort and complacency for a Catholic faith that embraces what God is doing in our midst. The sense of loss and mourning that accompanies the death of a church forged in a different time is acknowledged. But what comes through again and again is a sense of possibility, of resurrection and renewal—that the U.S. church is not so much in decline as undergoing a profound transition, a reality we can and should joyfully embrace.

—The Editors

Way Stations for a Pilgrim Church

Susan Bigelow Reynolds

Parishes give us a way of thinking about the holiness of the church. What do they tell us today?

Some people mark out eras in their lives by the places they've lived or the jobs they've held. I measure mine in parishes.

I grew up in a Catholic parish south of Denver that sat on a hill and faced the front range of the Rocky Mountains. The church was the apotheosis of post–Vatican II architecture, rounded and dark and a little odd. The walls were built of brown brick, the kind that clung to your clothes like Velcro if you leaned against them. Olive-green and burnt-orange carpet blanketed the floors, and ruddy tile gave the narthex a smoldery, numinous glow. The western-facing wall was made of plate-glass windows. As a kid, I spent most of Sunday Mass transfixed by rose-colored rays of sunlight shooting through the clouds onto the snowy face of Mt. Evans, a view that lent an organic logic to the sacraments: God, too, could be both grand and intimate, both transcendent and earthy.

Holiness has a fundamentally local character.

Every summer, my parents shuttled my siblings and me off to visit our great-aunts in Streator, Illinois, a small, rural town ninety miles south of Chicago where my mother's side of the family had lived for generations. Once there, we melded into life at their parish, St. Stephen's. The church was the oldest Slovak parish in the United States, a distinction my Slovak-American family wore with pride. My siblings and I spent our summer breaks helping our aunts and the other ladies of the Altar and Rosary Society run the parish rummage sale, sell *rozek*, and lead the rosary at the local Catholic nursing home. At St. Stephen's, the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council were still being received in the 1990s. Mass-goers still knelt at the extant altar rail to receive the Eucharist on the tongue, a practice as foreign as it was enchanting to a nine-year-old future Millennial. St. Stephen's was like an immersion trip into the Catholic past, into a world of ethnic religious enclaves that otherwise only existed for me in old family photos.

After college, I moved to Brownsville, Texas, to teach middle school with a Catholic postgraduate service program. My local parish, San Felipe de Jesus, sat in the heart of the colonia of Cameron Park, known as much for its one-time designation as the poorest place in the United States as for its tradition of social organizing. Most parishioners were Mexican immigrants, documented and undocumented alike. Many lived on both sides of the border, regularly traversing the international bridge between Brownsville and neighboring Matamoros to shop or go to the dentist or visit loved ones. At San Felipe, the porosity of the Rio Grande Valley borderlands was manifested liturgically. Prayers, processions, and *posadas* regularly flowed onto the streets, blurring the boundary between church and everyday life.

Later, I moved to Boston for graduate school. Two thousand miles north of the Rio Grande Valley, I found myself worshipping in a different sort of borderland: St. Mary of the Angels, a small parish in Roxbury that served a tightly knit, multiethnic, multilingual community composed primarily of African-American, Afro-Caribbean, Latinx, and Irish-American Catholics. At the 9 a.m. English-language Mass, the affective high point of the liturgy was the Sign of Peace. As the choir sang "This Little Light of Mine," worshippers would spill out of their pews to embrace one another. Elderly Jamaican women kissed the cheeks of white thirty-somethings, while gregarious toddlers (including my own) darted down the aisles to collect as many hugs as time would allow. To the dismay of newly arrived priests, exchanges of "Peace be with you" were usually accompanied by "How's the baby?" or "Will you be at the meeting later?" Eventually the music would taper off and people would wipe the tears from their eyes and take deep breaths and slowly recede into their

While cultural diversity is transforming the church, stark asymmetries of power persist. White Catholics continue to act as parish gatekeepers, even where they are in the minority.

pews. It remains the only parish I've ever belonged to where everyone knew everyone else by name and noticed if you were gone.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law describes parishes as stable communities of the faithful. In their own ways, each of these far-flung parishes was just that, or seemed to be at the time. They were *places*—rooted and untransferable, woven recognizably into the fabric of their neighborhoods and geographies. Entering into the lives of these communities taught me that holiness has a fundamentally local character. They were holy because they were there, ordinary and unspectacular, each its own peculiar embodiment of the Communion of Saints.

My lifelong enchantment with the eccentricities of Catholic parishes prefigured my eventual vocation: I became a theologian. As a graduate student, I worked with Hosffman Ospino on the National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry. The work I do now is in what I call lived ecclesiology. Through ethnographic research in parish communities, I examine how lay people use ritual to negotiate cultural difference and experiences of suffering. This work relies on the conviction that attending to the messy particularities of parish life helps us read the unfolding story of the church, not just sociologically but also theologically. The parish is a *locus ecclesiologicus*—a space for deep reflection about the meaning and mission of the church in a changing context.

Today, the story that U.S. parishes tell is one of displacement on a massive scale. Parish closures and consolidations are reshaping territorial boundaries, throwing once-disparate communities together, scattering others, and leaving many in affected dioceses feeling pastorally abandoned and spiritually homeless. Meanwhile, the borderlines within parishes are also being reconfigured. As the church becomes increasingly diverse, cultural communities coalesce and coexist in "shared parishes." In rarer cases, they establish personal parishes, akin to but much less common than the national and ethnic parishes of the past—a pastoral strategy most common among Asian-American Catholics.

Shifting, too, are boundaries of belief, affiliation, and practice. An increasing number of U.S. Catholics locate themselves on the peripheries of the church. Disagreement with church teachings, dissatisfaction with the role of women and the treatment of LGBTQ persons, and disillusionment wrought by the sex-abuse crisis have caused many to reevaluate their relationship to the institutional church and, in turn, to their parishes. Such displacements are harder to quantify—statistics on Catholic disaffiliation tell only part of the story—but they are supremely evident to anyone who has spent time in Catholic communities recently. In a particular way, the relentless tide of abuse revelations has exposed the fragility of authority, the deceptiveness of charisma, the insufficiency of Catholics' formation on issues of sexuality, and the dark consequences of patriarchy and secrecy. The crisis has forced lay people, many for the first time, to wrestle in a sustained way with the reality of the church's sinfulness and the limits of their own power. Some have chosen to leave altogether. Together, these transformations are upending perceptions of the parish's storied stability. Parishes today are spaces of ambiguity, uncertainty, and change—unstable communities of the faithful.

At the macro level, the geographical center of gravity in the U.S. church is shifting under our feet. Dioceses throughout the upper Midwest and Northeast are closing, merging, and clustering parishes in an attempt to maintain viability in the face of declining Mass attendance, worsening clergy shortages, and a surfeit of aging church buildings too costly to repair. In New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago—once urban centers of U.S. Catholic life—two decades of restructuring efforts have shuttered or consolidated hundreds of parishes and Catholic schools.

Meanwhile, in the South and West, parishes are overflowing more quickly than they can be built. America's largest parish is in Charlotte, North Carolina—historically one of the least Catholic regions in the nation. Nearby, in the Archdiocese of Atlanta, the Catholic population increased by 259 percent between 2000 and 2010, in part due to immigration. Two years ago, I moved to Atlanta to teach at Candler School of Theology, the United Methodist seminary and theological school at Emory University. In 2018, Candler inaugurated a program in Catholic Studies, a response to the explosive growth of Catholics in the region and the paucity of institutions here dedicated to forming them for ministry. In Atlanta, half of the archdiocese is Latinx. Black Catholic students are a defining presence at Candler. In other words, this is a region that looks a lot like the church itself.

Geographical transformation has coincided with sweeping demographic change. In the 1980s, the landmark Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life offered a comprehensive portrait of U.S. parish practice two decades after Vatican II. Unparalleled in its scope at the time, the results of the study definitively shaped collective understand-

ings of what was happening on the ground in U.S. Catholicism for decades to come. But excluded from the study were Spanish-speaking and other non-English-speaking parishes and parishioners. Unsurprisingly, the picture that emerged was of a church that was normatively white, largely assimilated, and primarily English-speaking. That wasn't fully the case then, and it's even less the case now. People of color—Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, and others—make up more than half of U.S. Catholics born since Vatican II. Latinos alone account for 71 percent of the U.S. Catholic population's growth since 1960. Today, they compose about 38 percent of U.S. Catholics, and well over half of Catholics under the age of forty.

Immigration is a driving force behind this diversification. As of 2012, nearly 80 percent of Catholics belonged to a parish that was home to recent immigrants. Between 1980 and 2014, according to CARA (the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate), the number of U.S. Catholics born outside the country nearly quadrupled. And a Pew survey showed that more than a quarter of all Catholic adults in the United States are first-generation immigrants, and another 15 percent are second-generation. The majority are from Mexico, though Catholics from elsewhere in Latin America, the Philippines, Vietnam, South Korea, China, and sub-Saharan Africa are also strongly represented in the pews.

Yet comparing this sweeping demographic transformation with parish-level realities also reveals some startling inequities. Though Latinos account for most of the growth in the church and often constitute a numerical majority in parishes, ministerial and liturgical resources, paid personnel, pastoral attention, and decision-making authority are disproportionately concentrated among white Catholics. Almost four in ten U.S. Catholics identify as Hispanic or Latinx, but only 3 percent of priests are, and only about a quarter of parishes regularly celebrate Mass in Spanish or offer some form of Hispanic ministry. Just over half of U.S. Catholics are white, but according to the National Congregations Study, over 80 percent of Mass-goers attend a parish with a white pastor, while 71 percent of parishes offer Mass in English only. Despite the steady rise in culturally diverse parishes, the majority still remain economically, racially, and ethnically segregated. In a recent essay, public policy scholar Mary Jo Bane sums it up starkly: "The Catholic parish landscape is essentially made up of rich white parishes and poor Latino parishes."

These pastoral disparities are reflected in the attitudes of the people in the pews. In a recent CARA survey of parishioners who belonged to culturally diverse parishes, white respondents showed abysmally low levels of support for the prospect of greater diversity in their parishes. Their support for welcoming immigrants, non-English speakers, and certain communities of color into their parishes was also markedly lower than it was among Latino, Asian, Black, Native American, and multi-racial respondents. Unsurprisingly, white parishioners were also less likely than their non-white counterparts to feel like outsiders at their parishes or to perceive intercultural tension there. While cultural diversity is indeed transforming the church, stark asymmetries of power persist. White Catholics continue to act as gatekeepers in parishes, even where they are in the minority.

Not one of the parishes I grew up in looks the way it did when I sat in its pews. Each is a sign of the times.

When I arrived at St. Mary of the Angels in Boston, it had been almost a decade since the "Spotlight" reports threw open the windows on clergy abuse there, and seven years since the archdiocese announced the sweeping closures of almost one-fifth of its parishes. Both of these crises ravaged Boston Catholics' trust in the hierarchy. The result was a city full of spiritual refugees—lifelong Catholics driven from their institutional homes by betrayal and their parochial homes by closure. St. Mary of the Angels—having only narrowly avoided closure itself—became a landing place for many of them. Inclusive and unpretentious and relentlessly lay-led, it was the kind of parish you ended up at if you were searching for a place to belong. This sort of openness to change required that the parish hold its identity loosely—and change it did, again and again.

In 2015, parishioners at San Felipe de Jesus in Brownsville began welcoming a new community to Mass: more than a hundred unaccompanied child migrants, most from Central America, who were being housed in nearby facilities. Every Sunday, parishioners reserved a section of pews for the children—a powerful symbol of acceptance. Throughout the Valley today, empty pews bear evidence of the terror visited upon border communities by the Trump administration's aggressive immigration policies. Parish leaders there report that many undocumented parishioners are afraid to leave their homes to attend Mass. Communities

The worst thing we could do for parish life in this moment would be to conflate change with "crisis," sharpen our apologetics, and flatten ambiguities.

like San Felipe de Jesus continue to be centers of accompaniment, solidarity, and advocacy.

In 2010, my family's beloved Slovak parish was merged with the town's other remaining parishes as the Catholic population declined. During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, the Slovak, Irish, Polish, and German immigrants who settled in Streator each built and sustained their own churches. Times have changed. Culturally shared parishes have supplanted national parishes as the primary model for integrating new immigrants into parish life. Today, Streator's single parish owes much of its survival to the town's growing Latinx community. Masses are now celebrated in English and Spanish, and a vibrant painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe hangs alongside the vintage, European-style statues of the Holy Family.

What about my childhood parish? It tells the other part of the American parish story. Once located on the far, airy edge of metro Denver development, it now sits in the heart of suburbia, enveloped by the tendrils of a nearby retail superplex. A decade ago, the church underwent a lavish renovation aimed, ostensibly, at shoring up visible signs of its Catholic identity with an increasingly wealthy and more self-consciously conservative community. Glossy marble replaced the dark wood and groovy carpet. Stained glass now filters the mountain view. My mother, still a parishioner, has never heard the abuse crisis mentioned there—it's almost as if it never occurred. Despite the prevalence of Spanish-speaking Catholics in the area, all of its seven weekend Masses are still in English. Like many predominately white suburban parishes, it has largely opted out of the work of responding to cultural diversity, despite its geographic location. It is hard not to feel as though the community has braced itself against the tides of change by retreating into the security of a supposed timelessness and placelessness.

What good is the parish within this landscape of change? Some have argued that the parish has reached the end of its viability as a model of local ecclesial community. Ecclesial movements, campus ministries, and even online communities have supplanted parishes as primary *loci* of religious participation, social belonging, and connection to the universal church for many Catholics. As the U.S. Catholic population increases while the number of parishes and priests declines, parishes themselves are becoming larger, some unmanageably so. Here in the Atlanta area, thousands of Latinx Catholics are served in massive, pan-cultural missions. Arrangements like these begin to feel like dioceses unto themselves, so diffuse that hope for anything approximating genuine community lies in the cultivation of smaller and more intimate subgroups. The parish structure as we know it originated with the Council of Trent as a way to clarify the task of ministry within the geographical expanse of a diocese. Perhaps, some suggest, the challenges of ministry in the present era simply demand a new solution.

Others take the opposite view, pushing for a radical recommitment to the territorial parish. The spiritual placelessness and social homophily of postmodernity has made the parish's appeal less clear. Theologian Vincent Miller has argued that on an ecclesial level, the deterritorialization wrought by globalization has threatened "the church's ability to be present in and to any particular place." For him, this trend is manifested most clearly in the prevalence of "parish shopping." Instead of gathering with the proverbial here-comes-everybody of one's neighborhood, people now seek out parishes that suit particular preferences: better music, more competent homilies, a greater emphasis on social justice, a more traditional liturgical style, a better generational fit. As believers sacrifice local diversity for the comfort of like-minded enclaves, Miller suggests, they "lose the habits of cohabiting with people who are different from them," in some way undermining the very catholicity of the church. As an antidote to this, he urges resisting the temptation to parish shop, instead grounding ecclesial belonging in our local communities—however imperfect they may be. In an age of extreme polarization, resisting the urge to self-sort can be countercultural.

But while parish shopping is typically denounced like some kind of national epidemic, a closer look reveals a different picture. According to CARA, more than half of African-American parishioners, and nearly half of Hispanic and Asian-American Mass-goers, bypass their territorial parishes to attend Mass elsewhere. At St. Mary of the Angels in Boston, the Spanish-language Mass had become a spiritual haven for Dominican and Puerto Rican Catholics living well beyond the surrounding neighborhood. One woman, a recent immigrant from the Dominican Republic, had been attending Mass closer to her home when a friend invited her to St. Mary's. She described the sense of welcome and relief that washed over her when she arrived. "I felt like I was at home because others treated me very well," she recalled. "I felt like I was in my parish in Santo Domingo." Seen in this light, parish shopping suddenly appears to be less about the

triumph of consumerism over the virtue of local belonging and more about the longing for a basic level of inclusion—a yearning for home.

Yet Miller's call to take more seriously the relationship between place and ecclesial life stands. For a long time, the sort of holiness that parish life disclosed was a factor of its ability to bind people to place and, in some subtle way, to reveal the incarnational sacredness of the local and particular. Today, the boundaries of parish life are shifting: across the country, within communities, within ourselves. In an age of migration and profound change, parishes still offer us a way to think about holiness—that is, if we are willing to listen to the voices of those most responsible for the transformation and continued vitality of parish life. Latinx theologians and scholars of religion—Arturo Bañuelas, Neomi De Anda, Allen Figueroa Deck, Virgilio Elizondo, Nichole Flores, Roberto Goizueta, Justo González, Cecilia González-Andrieu, Natalia Imperatori-Lee, Daisy Machado, Carmen Nanko-Fernández, Leo Guardado, Hosffman Ospino, Nancy Pineda-Madrid, Fernando Segovia, and many, many others—have spent decades calling the church to recognize the revelatory status of margins and borders and the salvific power of solidarity across boundaries of many kinds. It's time to pay attention.

The worst thing we could do for parish life in this moment would be to conflate change with "crisis," sharpen our apologetics, and flatten ambiguities in a desperate attempt to keep anybody else from leaving. (Spoiler: it won't work.) Reality is inviting us instead to embrace the transitions happening all around us. The stability of the parish relies on a paradox: while territorially grounded, parishes also facilitate a kind of transitory belonging. While they differ in many ways, the consistency of certain things—the structure and flow of liturgical ritual, for example—means that they offer a chance at home in any place. They are like way stations for a pilgrim church—beckoning us across borders, ready to receive us on the other side.

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NATALIA M. IMPERATORI-LEE

Teaching & Preaching

What's often missing from our homilies

Theologians are the worst people to sit next to at Mass. I know, because I am one, and so is my husband. The temptation to over-analyze the liturgy—and to armchair-quarterback the homily in particular—is difficult to resist. I've heard homilies that went on too long, relied on inappropriate imagery (hello, gory World War II stories at the children's Mass), or failed to take the community into account. I've been at parishes where week in and week out the homilist grieves the availability of pornography. I've sat through more sports-metaphor-dependent homilies than I ever needed to. But complaining about bad preaching is easy, especially since, as a lay woman, I am barred from giving a "homily" in a liturgical setting.

About twenty years ago, when I was a grad student at Notre Dame, one of my professors was lamenting lay students' relative ignorance of Scripture as compared to his own grad-school cohort. A fellow lay student noted that priests have to engage Scripture daily and weekly in preparation for Sunday Mass. This, over a lifetime, brings an intimacy with scriptural texts that lay people have to foster, if we can, on our own time. The professor, himself a diocesan priest, had never thought about it that way. Barring lay people from preaching deprives us of an opportunity to cultivate a closeness to Scripture that could benefit the whole church.

Over the past few years, I have been asked on several occasions to offer scriptural reflections in a variety of liturgical settings. These opportunities have given me a chance to reflect with empathy on the difficult task of regular preparation of homilies. The struggle is real: I read and reread Scripture, searching for an "in" or a hook; I look at exegetical essays and commentaries; I pray. It takes me weeks to get somewhere with a reading. I'm pained by how harshly I've judged the men who have been doing this on a weekly basis for a good portion of their lives. While I regularly deliver public lectures, preaching is a different skill.

Still, the classroom offers lessons that translate well to the pulpit. Both the classroom and the church bring together a community to serve a greater purpose. Both ask speakers and listeners to attend to the other. And both are spaces of learning. Most Catholics don't have an opportunity to study theology after they are catechized, so the main way they access theological thinking is through weekly Mass. This doesn't mean that homilies should be theological treatises. It means that homilies, like classroom lectures, require preparation—but also humility and love.

When I started teaching, I thought my role was to be a font of information about Catholicism for my students. After all, I had studied a *lot* of theology and could, if not "set them straight" on what they should know and think, at least nudge them in the right direction. But that was a fool's errand. Teaching, I came to realize, is as much about learning from students as it is about imparting knowledge. You can have the perfect lesson plan, the perfect lecture, the ideal set of group activities, and the whole thing could flop. Or something can happen on campus that requires you to scrap your plan and start from scratch. As much as I stress coming to class "prepared" as a task for students and professors alike, part of the preparation involves cultivating a willingness to reach the objective in a way other than what you had envisioned. Professors—and preachers—should strive to be nimble.

One Sunday I was at a Spanish Mass at a Midwestern parish that was packed with families, most of whom had small children. There were babies in every row, it seemed. The presider, who was not a native Spanish speaker, launched into a homily about the evils of abortion. I looked around and thought, "Read the room." He could have made the same point far better by acknowledging how the Holy Spirit was palpable in the cries and coos and chaos of families doing their best to worship together. Instead, he delivered a political diatribe.

Like professors, preachers should also practice humility. In any endeavor seeking an understanding of God, we have no choice but to recognize our finitude, our inability to fully grasp the incomprehensible mystery, much less communicate it to another. This might seem daunting, but it is truly freeing. We cannot say all that needs to be said; we must trust in the Holy Spirit to move between our words and the hearts of those who listen. But humility is more than a posture. We must take actions that show our humility before God and one another.

One way preachers can practice this kind of humility is by inviting lay people to reflect on Scripture at Mass. A preponderance of evidence indicates that college students learn best from diverse faculty. Having faculty from different racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds improves learning outcomes for white and nonwhite students in measurable ways. Learning from those who are different from ourselves expands the list of texts we understand as canonical. It also brings fresh perspectives to canonical texts to which we've grown accustomed. This can be true when it comes to Scripture as well. Lay people, including vowed religious, provide perspectives on Scripture that include parts of life that may remain hidden to the clergy. The difficulties of community living, the challenges of child rearing, the pressures of work-life balance, the annoyances of cooking or living with a spouse—all these experiences bring richness to our prayer lives, and can do the same for the church's public prayer, the liturgy. After all, the scriptures weren't written by clerics alone. We shouldn't leave clerics alone to reflect on them every Sunday. Sharing the pulpit with the congregation builds community, engages marginalized voices, and has the potential to energize faith.

The final and most important touchpoint between the classroom and the pulpit is the importance of love. Teaching is an act of love; no professor who has contempt for their students is a successful professor. It may seem a cliché to say that I love my students, but I do. I love their insight and their potential, I love the adults they are becoming, I love their questions and their ability to see through me. I love their self-consciousness and their lack of self-awareness, their passion and their ambivalence. I sincerely want them to experience joy and peace, to experience the God of love.

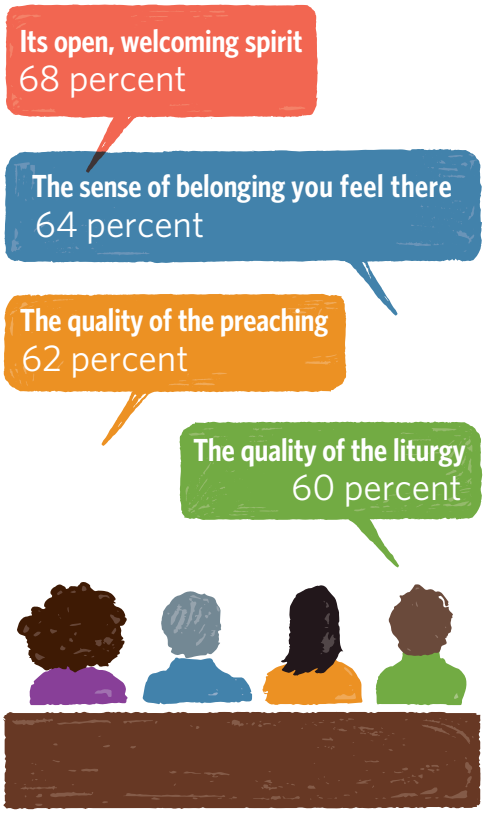
We shouldn't leave clerics alone to reflect on the scriptures every Sunday.

This must also be true of preachers. A cleric who looks down on the laity cannot be a good preacher, because contempt is the opposite of love. Like teaching, preaching is an act of love, an attempt to break open God's word in a life-giving way. Only when we approach these tasks with careful preparation, profound humility, and surpassing love can we hope to invite God to speak to God's people through the preacher's words.

Or at least make it less likely that I'll be annoying to sit beside at Mass.

NATALIA M. IMPERATORI-LEE *is Professor of Religious Studies at Manhattan College in the Bronx.*

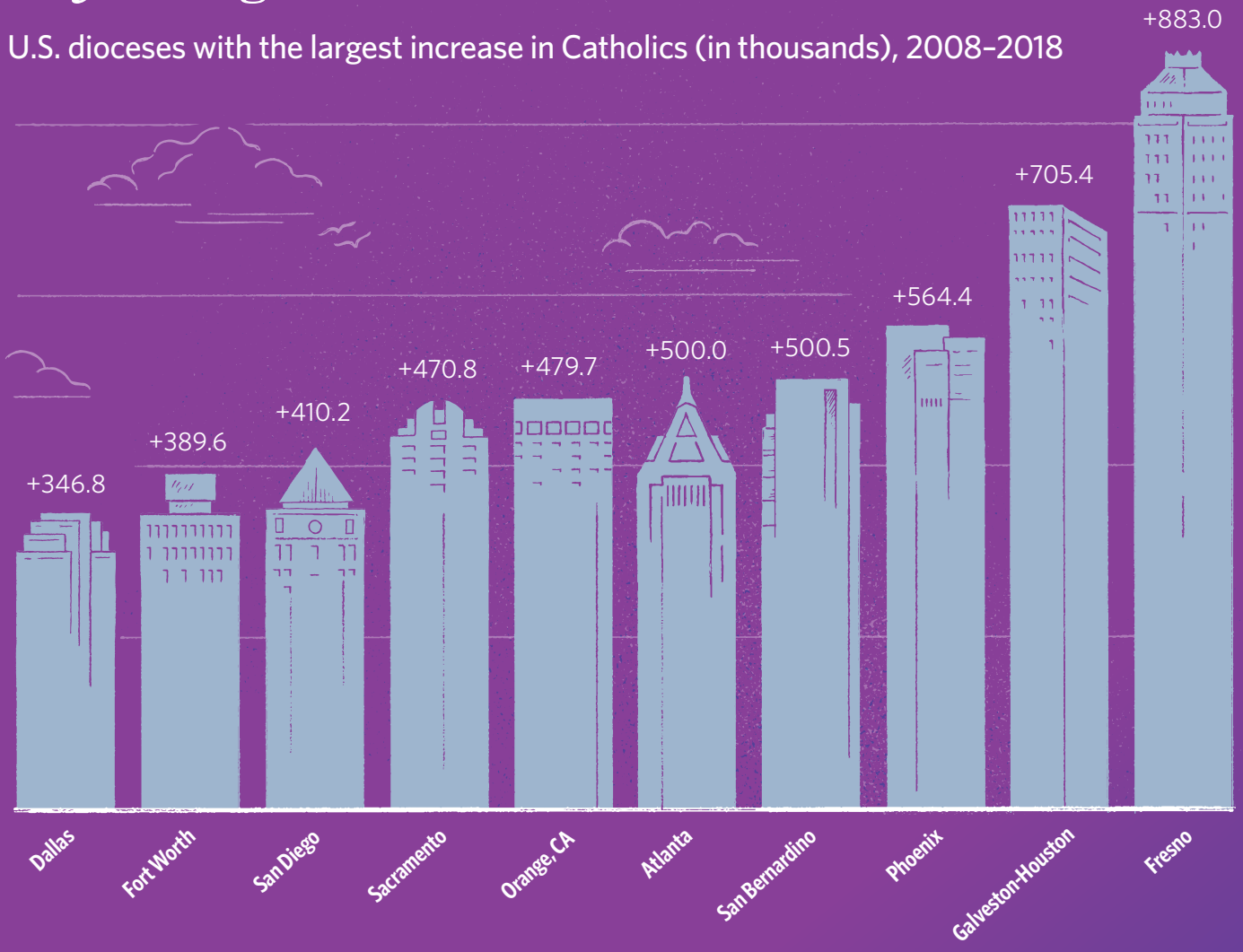
Elements that Attract Parishioners to a Parish



SOURCE:
Zech et al., *Catholic Parishes of the 21st Century* (Oxford University Press)

City Living

U.S. dioceses with the largest increase in Catholics (in thousands), 2008–2018



U.S. dioceses with the largest decrease in Catholics (in thousands), 2008–2018

SOURCE:
CARA (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate)

The Church Today

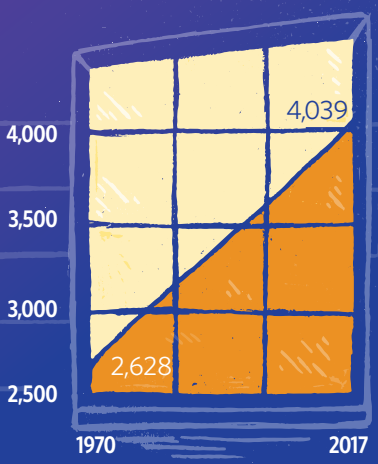
Race/ethnicity of U.S. Catholics

- **White:** 52.2 percent
- **Hispanic/Latinx (1st generation):** 18 percent
- **Hispanic/Latinx (2nd generation):** 12.8 percent
- **Hispanic/Latinx (3rd generation and higher):** 9.4 percent
- **Asian/Native American/ Other:** 4.6 percent
- **Black/ African American:** 3 percent

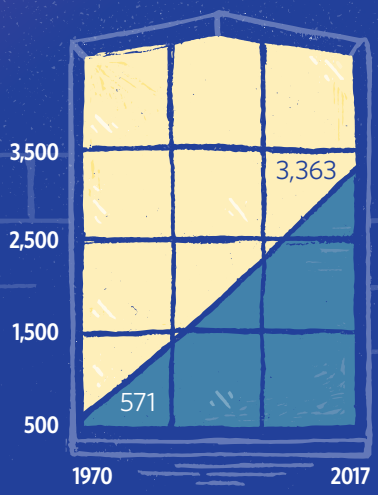
SOURCE:
V National Encuentro Research Team

Decades of Change

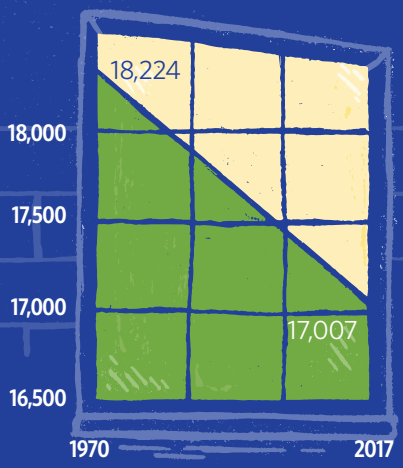
Average Catholic population per parish



Number of parishes without a resident priest pastor



Number of parishes in the U.S.



SOURCE:
CARA (Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate)

Look Who's Here

Brett C. Hoover

Joy and strain in shared parish life

When my parents left their hometown in central Indiana in 1966, theirs was the "German" parish, though about the only thing really German about it was the heritage of many of the parishioners. I never knew that parish—St. Joseph, a large, gray neo-Gothic edifice on Market Street downtown. My parents were married there a couple of years after my mother converted to Catholicism. Then they moved to California, where I was born. Decades later, in my thirties, I began to visit my extended family in Indiana more frequently. St. Joseph's was now All Saints, a single combined parish for the entire town. Latin American and Southeast Asian immigrants had moved in to work at the pork-processing plant, and there was a Spanish Mass. By my last visit, a good number of the congregants even at the English Mass were Hispanic.

The town I grew up in lies in suburban Orange County, south of Los Angeles. As a child I rode my bike among the endless subdivisions, and almost everyone I encountered was white. By the late 1970s, however, refugees from Southeast Asia and other immigrants began settling in the area, and our parish offered a late-afternoon Vietnamese Mass, so remote from the rest of the life of the parish that we hardly knew it was there. In the mid-80s, I went off to college, and by the time I moved back to California decades later, my home parish had not only a Vietnamese Mass but a Spanish Mass as well. My mother found herself helping to organize a multilingual, multicultural Thanksgiving Day Mass.

In both cases, local demographic change had turned our hometown parishes into *shared parishes*, each with two or more distinct cultural, racial, or ethnic groups whose regular worship and ministries were separate, but who used the same parish facilities and were served by the same clergy leadership. Perhaps most Mass-going Catholics in the United States today have at least visited a shared parish on vacation. But at the same time, very little specific data about them has emerged. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) found in 2013 that fewer than one-third of U.S. parishes had Mass in a language other than English (in four-fifths of those cases, the Mass was in Spanish). In 2014, Boston College's National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry reported that just over half of the parishioners at parishes with Hispanic ministry were not Hispanic, and that on average half or more of the Masses at such parishes took place in a language other than Spanish. Over the past decade or so, my students and I have studied various dioceses around the United States and calculated the percentage of parishes with Mass in more than one language. Dioceses in "gateway" cities and states where immigrants have been arriving for decades showed a majority of parishes with multilingual Mass schedules—in the most immigrant-rich dioceses, it was usually a supermajority and as high as 75 percent (Los Angeles) or 81 percent (Miami). Across the Midwest and South, where demographic transformations began in earnest in the 1990s, the percentage lay somewhere between 15 and 45 percent.

Shared parishes were almost never the result of a pastoral plan but rather an ad hoc response to demographic change. They constitute a kind of "middle way" between parishes that simply refuse to accommodate newcomers (or will only do so if the newcomers adapt English-language Masses and Euro-American Catholic customs) and those parishes that, de jure or de facto, devote their entire communal life to a particular racial, ethnic, or language group. A few shared parishes remain breathtaking in their diversity, such as St. Camillus in a Maryland suburb of Washington D.C., where Mass is held in English, French, and Spanish, and distinct ministries exist for Mexican, Central American, Francophone African, Haitian, Bangali, and African-American Catholics. Here in Los Angeles, I have personally visited and researched an inner-city African-American and Hispanic parish, a historically Mexican parish gentrified into multicultural affluence (but retaining a Spanish Mass), and a suburban parish with English-speaking Mexican Americans, Filipinos, and Spanish-speaking Mexican and Central American immigrants. The most common kind of shared parish, however, remains the combination of a Euro-American English-speaking community and a Spanish-speaking community of Latin American descent.

Shared parishes juxtapose unity and difference, sometimes emphasizing one side and sometimes the other. The best such parishes balance the two effectively, providing safe space for different groups to worship and minister in their own way, but also joining those groups together in certain activities—liturgy, parish maintenance, festivals, committees—that offer an experience of the parish as a common project. Some native-born Americans object to the preservation of safe space for difference in shared parishes, insisting that Spanish Masses or Simbang Gabi celebrations just foreground the racial or ethnic differences that otherwise people would take little notice of, and that such displays delay necessary assimilation. In truth, people always take note of differences, even if they do not speak of them, and such differences remain very strongly felt by immigrants bewildered by the customs of their new country. In areas with a long history of immigration, a different kind of resistance emerges, where people of all groups tend to assume that regular contact has already made them interculturally competent enough—they have little more to learn from one another. Probably the deepest resistance to the unity-in-diversity model in shared parishes comes from patterns of avoidance. We tolerate one another well, but there are few or no opportunities to encounter one another as human beings and as equals.

Theologian Susan Reynolds speaks of shared parishes as "borderlands," and they often do bring out the tensions, encounters, hybrid identities, and absurdities that we associate with lands near national boundaries. Regarding tensions, there are the angry battles over parish-room space, between-Mass confusion over the parking lot, and the occasional prejudicial complaints about "the Mexicans" (or, on the other side, "the white people") uttered with disdain. An English-speaking Mexican American woman married to a white man spoke of how other whites would vociferously complain about "the Mexicans," seemingly unaware that she was also Mexican.

On a more positive note, shared parishes also engender a lot of "code-switching," where people naturally adjust their behavior depending on whom they're speaking with. A Puerto Rican refers to the same priest by his first name in English settings, but always as "Padre" in Spanish. Then there are

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Culture clash emerges in daily misunderstanding—perplexity at why white people don't shake hands with everyone when they enter a room (as in Latin American custom), why Mexicans double park on major feast days, and why African-American liturgies are so long.

the beautiful and rich encounters that may occur. People deliver the peace in their neighbor's unfamiliar language at a bilingual Mass, surprising their pew mates; older Euro-Americans fawn over the young children of their immigrant parish-council colleagues; people from multiple cultures pray the rosary in different languages at the same time in matched rhythm; and people sing the bilingual parts of the Mass without hesitation and in unity.

There are also absurdities, sometimes exasperating, other times humorous. A middle-schooler tells me after Mass how he was scolded by an adult for speaking Spanish (at recess!) to another child who had just arrived from Mexico. A couple with steadfast anti-immigrant views declare their love for the afternoon bilingual Mass. Celebrating Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12, there are ebullient calls and responses of "Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe" (long live the Virgin of Guadalupe), and "Viva Mexico," but then the Mexican priest eyes our modest group of visiting Anglos and cries out, "Viva Estados Unidos" (long live the United States), a cry so unexpected for the occasion that the whole congregation begins to laugh, we visitors included.

In my experience and research, there are four big challenges in shared parish life. First, the language barrier figures prominently, even in areas where bilingualism is common. People grow nervous not knowing how to speak with one another, or they commit offense unintentionally. Even where translation is readily available, it has its politics. Translating secretaries soften up blunt complaints for their monolingual priest (often to his chagrin). Language barriers lead to culture clash, as when communities accustomed to avoiding mention of death find themselves face-to-face with the skeletons and candied skulls of the Day of the Dead (*Día de los Muertos)*. Second, culture clash emerges in daily misunderstanding—perplexity at why white people do not shake hands with everyone when they enter a room (as in Latin American custom), why Mexicans double park on major feast days, and why African-American liturgies are so long—but it also manifests itself in misinterpretation of different approaches to key parish activities such as fundraising, popular devotions, and the emotional tone of the liturgy.

The third and most difficult challenge to confront in shared parishes has to do with the way the larger U.S. society seeps into parish life. We suppose and celebrate the equality of all Christians in our common baptism and one faith, but we live in an unequal society where injustice persists. How do we maintain equality at the parish when at local workplaces all the bosses are from one cultural group and all the workers are from another? How does one exclude from parish life the unconscious biases and half-conscious stereotypes that appear on the streets or in the stores? How do we keep the differences embedded in societal structures out of the structures of the parish? The answer, of course, is that we rarely can. Affluent people of one group struggle to separate out their parish interactions with another group from interactions with the same people who serve as their gardeners and housekeepers. Because of educational advantages or longtime presence in the parish, parish professional staff (parish associates, directors of religious education, music directors, youth ministers) often come from dominant groups, even sometimes when the volunteer-led immigrant choirs or youth groups are far larger than their own. Middle-class Euro-American volunteers think nothing of using parish resources (reasoning that they give on Sunday), while working-class Hispanic parishioners host fundraising events for every penny they spend.

These inequalities between cultural, racial, and ethnic communities pose significant challenges. When I give workshops, people do not want to talk about power dynamics in the parish. To speak of inequality or injustice in the parish itself brings long simmering resentments out into the open, provokes fears of being branded as racist, and sparks worry that conflict will consume the community. Addressing inequalities raises thorny questions about who should work for the parish, about accurate representation on parish committees or at multicultural liturgies, about who gets to use which rooms, when, and why. Many immigrants come from places where rules are never equitably enforced and fairness is hobbled by corruption, while native-born Americans often assume that fairness and equitably enforced rules will settle everything. We can struggle to see how fairness may not translate to justice, that equal opportunities may be technically available but not truly accessible, and that people born in the United States have a kind of home-field advantage when it comes to interpreting and following the rules. At one parish I studied, the African-American lay leadership insisted that members of the Hispanic immigrant community attend monthly liturgy meetings so that everyone had a voice and was on the same page, but the translation offered at the meetings was so poor that the Hispanics could not meaningfully participate. The situation looked fair but was actually unjust.

Finally, there is the grief that comes with change. Fr. Stephen Dudek, a priest of the Diocese of Grand Rapids who writes and presents frequently on shared parish life, calls shared parishes "crucibles of grief." Immigrants struggle with all they have left behind—family, culture, language, home. (I once visited the father of an undocumented immigrant in Mexico; when I brought back a photo of him, his daughter wept at how much he had aged.) People in receiving communities see their hometowns transformed by different languages, restaurants, social media, stores, and music. In places where immigration is a relatively new phenomenon, the emotional whiplash can feel particularly acute. Age differences between communities exacerbate the issue, as when, for example, an aging white or African-American community finds itself paired with a young Hispanic or Asian community. At the same time, grief in the face of change is such a common human experience that everyone can relate. Once clued in, we recognize emotions that may at first shock us—anger, longing, sadness, depression—as part of a process of letting go. Recognition that everyone grieves what they have lost can engender more sensitivity, perhaps especially to elders who find themselves dealing with multiple experiences of loss near the end of their lives.

People often ask me to offer them a packaged program or set of bullet points on how to successfully navigate shared parish life, but nothing can replace the long, sometimes challenging, ultimately joyful process of communities getting to know one another and learning to cooperate. I will say that time helps a great deal. A shared parish I attended in New York City, and another my wife attended in Chicago, had juggled two language communities for decades, and most parishioners were unbothered by cultural differences. They continually committed themselves to cooperation across the communities, and they genuinely wanted a parish of equal partners, even if the larger societal dynamics kept getting in the way. I would also argue that having a priest-pastor (or a lay parish-life director) with a vision of equal partnership goes a long way. One pastor I know worked hard to confuse people as to which community was his favorite. He would also intervene if any pastoral leader began to speak of one group's needs as more important than those of others.

All Catholic unity is communion, that is, unity amidst difference.

As Catholics, however, we cannot and should not expect our often-overburdened priests to always come to the rescue in a context like this. These days there are far more shared parishes than there are clergy who are prepared to work interculturally, who have language skills, or who know how to express a vision of unity in difference. Our long hangover from the centralized uniformity of nineteenth-century Catholicism leads us to subtly expect that everyone will ultimately express their Catholic faith in the same way, and somehow be officially sanctioned by Rome. Such uniformity was always more an ideal than a reality, even in the heyday of medieval nostalgia, common Catholic culture, and Bing Crosby in a collar. Today's diverse parishes require genuine acceptance of many distinct Catholic practices, tones, and styles, finding our unity in the things we truly hold in common—core beliefs like our faith in the Eucharist; sacramentality; patron saints; common prayers like the rosary; and shared pastoral leaders like our pastors, bishops, and Pope Francis. I recognize this puts us at odds with some of the ideological fervor of our times, where differences are poison and often exaggerated. The tenor of our times requires, however, that whatever our legitimate political differences, we must not speak of our immigrant brothers and sisters in Christ as if they were some sort of plague rather than people. If we can speak hatefully without any compunction, then we have lost our moral compass as a people.

In some specific aspects of shared parish life, we have come a long way; in others, wisdom and exper-

tise has only begun to emerge. Preparing a proper multilingual or multicultural liturgy is now easier than ever; the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions has a thoughtful guidebook to show us the way. Less clear is the way forward on stewardship. Long-resident cultures sometimes lament the low collections in working-class immigrant communities. But one has to calculate expenses longtime residents may not have, such as sending money (remittances) home, as well as the cultural customs around giving in the country of origin (almost never state-sponsored, despite what people think). I would argue that the primary problem with stewardship in shared parishes is not that immigrant communities do not give; rather, it is the odious comparisons between long-established, stable communities and poorer immigrant communities. They will always make newcomers look rather unjustly like freeloaders.

The proper language and cultural idiom for faith formation still stymies us. The answer will be different for different communities, but many shared parishes thus far have emphasized either English to push people along toward assimilation (usually imitating the public-education system), or an immigrant language to facilitate the preservation of cultures. Both have their limitations. Monolingual English risks dividing families, especially in places where immigrant parents have insufficient time or resources to learn English properly. Monolingual Spanish, Vietnamese, or Korean programs keep families united, but they can compartmentalize faith as an aspect of one's culture of origin and not a matter for everyday life, much of which is lived in English. Parishes that develop some kind of bilingual program, admittedly harder to pull off, have often found a sweet spot that prepares children to pray both with their families and with their peers in the larger society. Again, there is no sure solution for every parish.

I began this essay with an account of the changes in the parishes of my parents' hometown and my own. Even in those two stories, one can see some reliably recurring patterns in shared parish life, such as the way newcomer communities emerge in response to unforeseen local pastoral needs, and how such communities are only gradually integrated into the center of parish life. Like all parishes, however, shared parishes are a product of their unique local environment. Our incarnational theology celebrates this rather than finding it a problem. All Catholic unity is communion, that is, unity amidst difference, rooted in the three-persons-but-one-God of the Holy Trinity, present as much within a family as within a parish as within the global church. That unity in difference unfolds in history, which means that the way we live our common faith constantly adjusts to a changing world. Thus, I would be foolish to say too much with certainty about shared-parish life moving forward. Instead, I look to the perfect communion that we will find only in the "eschatological parish," that is, the Reign of God. In the meantime, we do the best with what we have, struggling and celebrating.

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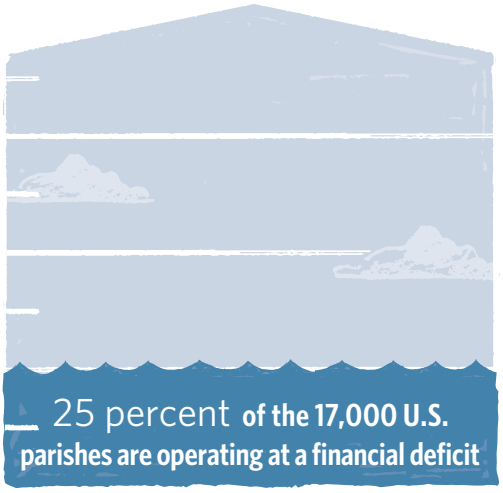
MADELINE JARRETT

All Are Welcome?

Parishes must be accessible for disabled Catholics.



SOURCE: Zech et al., *Catholic Parishes of the 21st Century* (Oxford University Press)

About two years ago I attended the closing Mass for the Master of Divinity program at Boston College, held in St. Ignatius, the campus church. It's traditional for the community to invite graduating students up to the altar after the liturgy ends. As each graduate ascends to the altar, she is given a lit candle to hold as a symbol of the light she will bring to the world through her ministry. It's intended to be a beautiful, proud, and sacred moment, but for me it felt very different.

I have a neurological condition called Charcot-Marie-Tooth (CMT) disease. Among other effects, CMT significantly impairs my balance and my ability to confidently ascend a set of stairs without a railing.

At my graduation Mass, I was confronted with exactly that: a railing-less altar. Instead of being able to take in the beauty of the moment, or consider with gratitude all the opportunities my education had gifted me, I was consumed with anxiety at the thought of climbing up and down those three altar stairs.

It wasn't the first time I'd experienced this. I've been a fairly regular Mass-goer my entire life, but I am not a trained Eucharistic minister, nor have I ever been an altar server or a lector. The reason for this is painfully straightforward: the vast majority of Catholic altars are not accessible to me. Where there are accommodations, they often have their own problems. Take St. Ignatius. Technically, it does have a ramp. To use it at my graduation Mass, however, I would have had to exit the sanctuary, navigate a hidden hallway, and emerge from the side of the altar. That would have required me to interrupt my experience of the liturgy and temporarily exit the company of the community and the sacred space in which it was gathered, missing part of the ceremony and visibly lagging behind my fellow graduates.

But as many disabled churchgoers can attest, navigating altars is not the only problem. Often the challenges begin before even entering the church, at the front steps. If they are successfully managed, a number of other challenges await inside. These include finding accessible seats *in* the congregation (not just behind it), and locating an accessible bathroom, which usually requires a functioning elevator. It is not uncommon to come across elevators that have "Broken, Do Not Use" signs hanging with an accumulation of months or even years of dust.

There's no denying that creating fully accessible church facilities is often a massive undertaking. Doing so takes significant amounts of money, and updating older buildings can be particularly expensive. There are aesthetic concerns, too, as some find a ramp that juts into the sacred space, or a railing in the middle of the altar steps, distracting. But accessibility issues are also a matter of Catholic identity, and one of the most fundamental elements of that identity is our sacramental worldview—the belief that the material world can mediate God's grace to us. Catholic churches are often beautiful reflections of this sacramental worldview, overflowing with visible symbols of God's presence. The ornate sacred art, gleaming glass windows, and floral adornments are all meant to communicate the past and present story of God on earth.

Taking ourselves seriously as a sacramental people means that we cannot overlook the fact that a lack of accessibility mars this sacramental claim; inaccessible structures communicate unjust and damaging messages that not all are welcome. To take a previous example, inaccessible altar stairs imply that only certain kinds of bodies are worthy of accessing that sacred space. The church is often referred to as the Body of Christ, and the Body of Christ is meant to be the sacrament of God to the world. But what kind of sacrament are we if we limit the types of bodies that can access our sacred spaces and our liturgies?

Accessibility issues confront parishes with difficult questions, not all of which can be answered in the immediate future. Overhauling buildings requires long-term budgeting and strategic architectural planning—a difficult task for parishes that are already squeezed for funds. But there are smaller-scale, concrete steps with which parishes can begin. For example, parishes may consider reaching out to disabled members of their community about how accessible they find the parish. Leaders should intentionally seek out information about the lived realities of individuals who use wheelchairs or other assistive devices. Social-justice committees or parish councils might organize fundraisers to install ramps or railings at the entrance of the church and at the front of the altar, or to finally fix that broken elevator. Communities might also organize educational events or invite speakers with disabilities to share their experiences with the parish. When possible, parishes should invite marginalized members of the community into the heart of their sacred spaces and liturgical celebrations.

One of the most fundamental elements of Catholic identity is our sacramental worldview—the belief that the material world can mediate God's grace to us.

The effort to make sacred spaces accessible is not a peripheral issue; it is an issue at the core of our Catholic identity. What's presented to us in our sacred spaces and especially at the altar—the Word of God, the sacraments, and the people mediating those to everyone gathered in worship—inform the entirety of our lives as People of God. Our work as Catholics is energized by what happens in these spaces and flows out of them as we strive to bring about the Reign of God. Parish communities should look at the altar next time Mass is held. Please notice: What kinds of bodies are on that altar? And perhaps more importantly, what kinds aren't?

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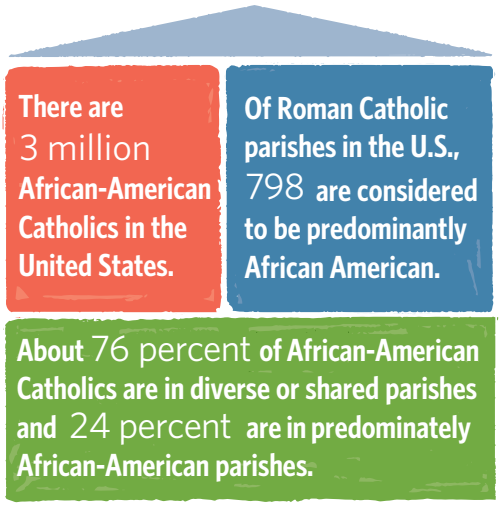
TIA NOELLE PRATT

Authentically Black, Truly Catholic

Liturgy & identity in African-American parish life



SOURCES:

The Catholic Church: By the Numbers, USCCB Office of Media Relations (2012); *CARA Report, Black Catholics in the United States* (August 2019, updated January 2020)

What is a parish? That's a question I posed in a book review a couple of years ago for the journal *American Catholic Studies*, and I went on to suggest three possibilities: it's "a semi-autonomous organization," "an administrative unit," or "a community of believers." As a sociologist of religion and a practicing Catholic, I still grapple with the question. But it's precisely by contemplating the topic as scholars, members of the faithful, or both, that we may work our way to an answer.

In that spirit, I have for twenty years been examining systemic racism in the Catholic Church, and how that racism impacts African-American Catholic identity. A key to the way I study this is by looking at liturgy as a form of identity work, which means I spend a lot of time at parishes. A sociological understanding of parishes is essential in our current climate because it allows us to see them—and the dioceses of which they are a part—as an element of the broader social structure. Because of the church closings and parish consolidations that have swept through historically Catholic strongholds like Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, and Chicago, it is vital that we understand parishes as organizational structures both on their own and in the more general diocesan sense. Doing so allows us to appreciate the multifaceted impact on the community when those organizations change. Changes to the Catholic landscape in recent decades have removed schools and churches from neighborhoods. Institutions that were once anchors of the local community no longer exist, while the buildings that once housed them are empty, demolished, or repurposed. Consequently, it is more difficult for those still living in the affected neighborhoods—especially those who don't have access to cars or reliable public transportation—to participate in parish life. This disproportionately impacts racial minorities, low-income residents, and the elderly. As a result, groups that deeply depend on their parishes have been losing them at a precipitous rate.

Catholicism in the United States has been robustly studied by scholars across a multitude of disciplines, and now parishes and parish life are beginning to get some long-overdue scholarly attention. Yet Black Catholics and the complexities around Black Catholic parishes are still not sufficiently studied. This is especially problematic given

that the major shifts in the parish landscape are found primarily in urban areas, and those are the areas with the strongest Black Catholic presence.

I am currently working on a book about systemic racism and identity in the African-American Catholic experience. One of the topics I explore is how African-American Catholics use the liturgy to incorporate the dual heritages of Roman Catholicism and the African-American religious experience to create a cohesive ethno-religious identity. I've identified three liturgical styles—traditionalist, spirited, and Gospel—that describe different ways Black Catholics use liturgy to, as I have previously written, "actively produce Black Catholic parish culture." All three styles use music, preaching, and church aesthetics to integrate the dual heritages.

The traditionalist liturgy style is rooted in the dominant model of U.S. Catholicism, bearing close ties to the style perpetuated by Catholics of European ancestry; it is, therefore, the most common. Its key features include short homilies and a heavy reliance on the missalette for hymns. At Black parishes, it is most often found at Masses dominated by senior citizens who do not care to stray from the liturgical style they have experienced most of their lives. Thus, it's most likely to be found at Saturday vigils and early on Sunday morning. Next, there is the spirited liturgy style, which is just that: a bit more spirited than the traditionalist style without being wholly divorced from it. That liveliness is expressed principally through slightly longer homilies with a more animated preaching style, as well as through songs that are found in the *Lead Me, Guide Me* hymnal that are more likely to invoke African-American culture than the songs found at traditionalist-style Masses. Finally, the Gospel liturgy style invokes a kind of worship that is closely associated with the denominations of the Black Church. It uses preaching, music, and church aesthetics to tangibly call on African-American history and lived experience in order to interweave them with Roman Catholicism.

I've observed numerous manifestations of these three styles of liturgy. There was the parish in Philadelphia that during the month of December had an Advent wreath right next to the Kwanzaa kinara. There was the parish in Harlem where the pastor deftly used the call-and-response technique closely associated with the denominations of the Black Church to deliver a homily on "Who does God's will?" and expertly connected the Gospel reading with the lived experiences of parishioners. There was another parish in Philadelphia where a baptism concluded with the litany of the saints. What made this unabashedly Catholic ritual notable is that the litany began with the usual call of Mary, St. Joseph, St. John the Baptist, and the apostles, but it then seamlessly moved into Black saints such as Sts. Perpetua and Felicity, St. Josephine Bakhita, and St. Martin de Porres, and those closely associated with the Black community, like St. Peter Claver. It occurred to me listening to the litany that I'd never heard one specifically directed at the Black community. It was a litany that celebrated *Blackness* within Catholicism. This was a new experience for me, but it shouldn't have been. After all, Perpetua, Felicity, Josephine Bakhita, Martin de Porres, and many others aren't just Black folks' saints: they're the saints of the universal church. These saints and Catholic Blackness can and should be celebrated in all parishes. To be clear, I'm not inviting cultural appropriation. Rather, I'm calling for a celebration of Blackness that moves the needle away from systemic racism and toward racial justice.

Perpetua, Felicity, Josephine Bakhita, Martin de Porres, and many others aren't just Black folks' saints: they're the saints of the universal church.

Ultimately, my work is about breaking down the myth that there are no Black Catholics, or at least that there aren't enough to merit inclusion in the conversation about American parish life. Black people were practicing Catholicism in North America hundreds of years before the United States was founded. In 1984, the Black Bishops of the United States published the pastoral letter *What We Have Seen and Heard*. To date, it is the only pastoral letter written by the Black Bishops. In the letter, the bishops called on Black Catholics to be "authentically Black and truly Catholic." What my research demonstrates is that there is no one, rote way to do this. All three of the liturgical styles discussed here meet the needs of those who utilize them. What matters is that African-American Catholics have the freedom to *establish and practice* an ethno-religious identity, and have their practice of it be *recognized* as authentically Black—and truly Catholic.

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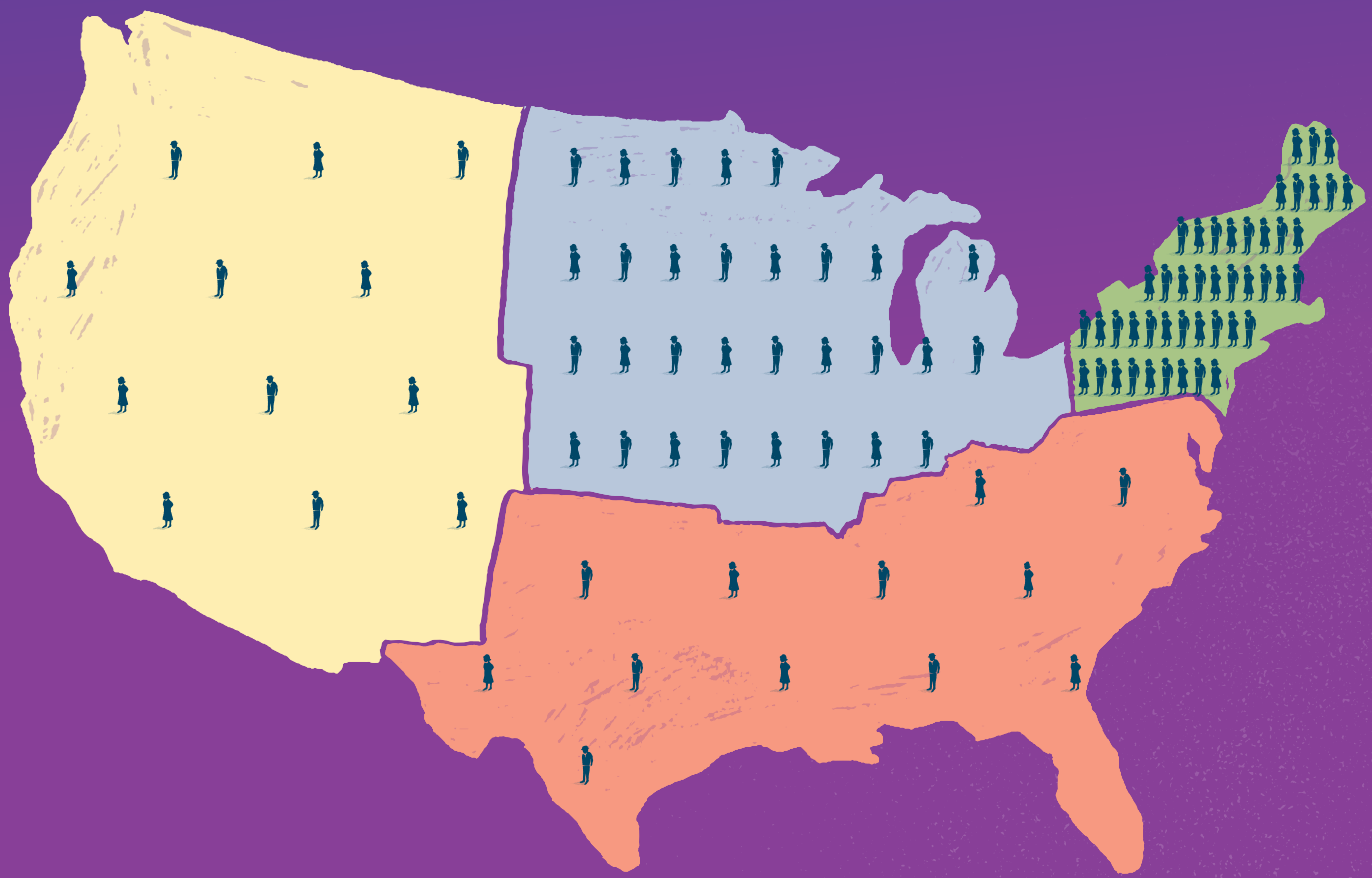
Where They Were & Where They Went



1950

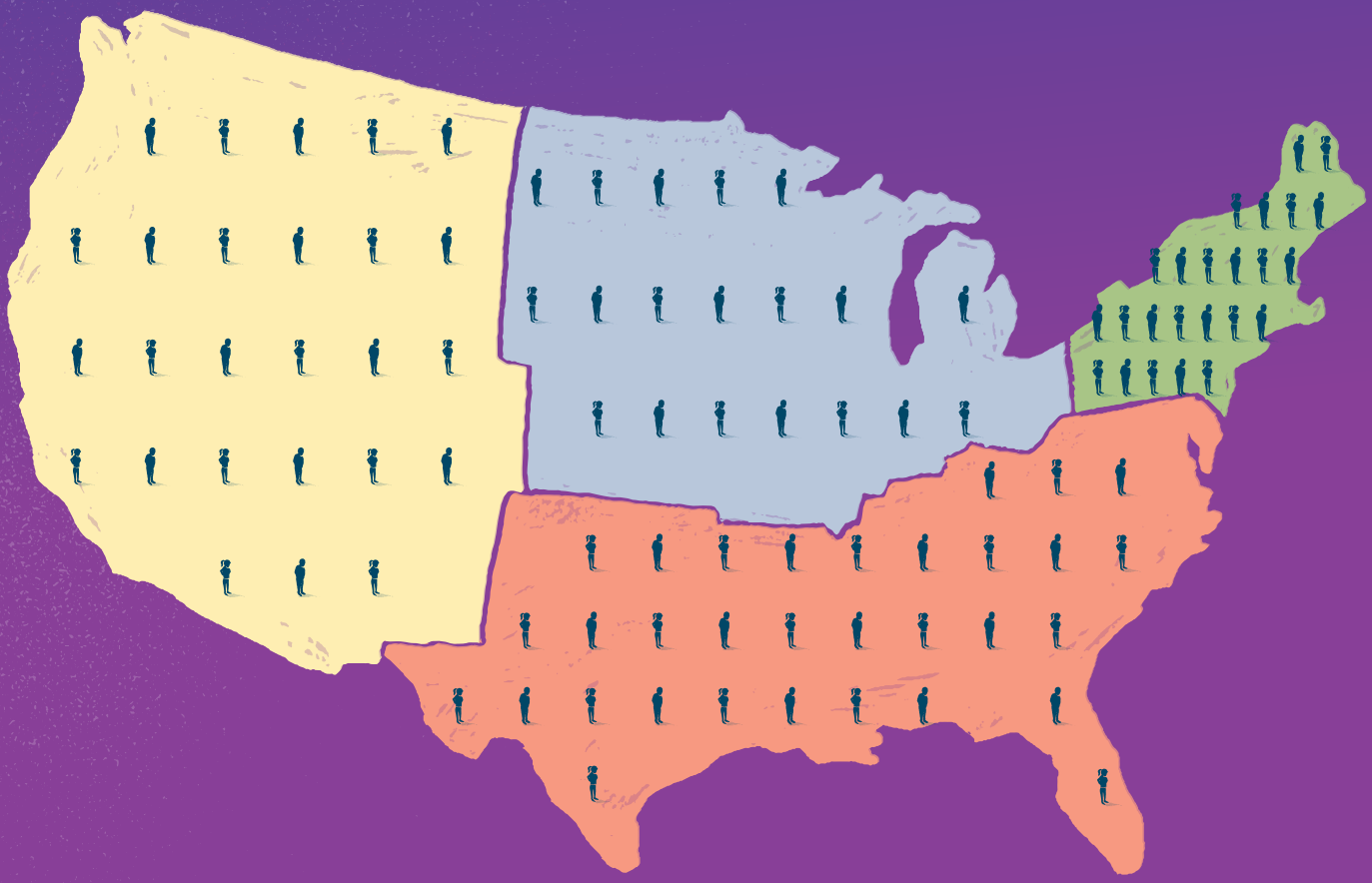
Northeast: 46 percent

Midwest: 30 percent

South: 12 percent

West: 12 percent

Regional distribution of U.S. Catholics (as a percentage of total U.S. Catholic population)



2017

Northeast: 24 percent

Midwest: 19 percent

South: 32 percent

West: 26 percent

SOURCE:
CARA

Modeling Change

Griffin Oleynick

Can extra-parochial groups help guide the evolution of parishes?

It was about five minutes before six on a Tuesday evening, and members of the Coalition for Spiritual and Public Leadership's (CSPL) Immigration Committee were trickling into the conference room. Some were arriving straight from work, and helped themselves to plates of rice and beans and cups of cantaloupe juice before taking their seats. Others had been there all day, filling up whiteboards and firing off emails. They'd come from all over Chicago, some reaching the coalition's suburban Maywood office from as far away as the South Side. After a short prayer in English and Spanish, they quickly got down to business.

There was a lot to cover in the fifty minutes allotted by the agenda. Most pressing was the upcoming pilgrimage to El Paso, Texas, where the group had helped plan a teach-in and was co-organizing a border action to help asylum seekers legally enter the United States. Just six weeks earlier Patrick Crusius, a young man inspired by white-nationalist ideology and armed with a semi-automatic rifle, had driven more than 650 miles from the Dallas area to a Walmart in El Paso in order to "kill Mexicans." He'd murdered twenty-two people and injured twenty-four more. Galvanized by the massacre, the coalition had decided to take action, not only to publicly protest the racist immigration policies of the Trump administration, but also to show solidarity with Latinx communities in the borderlands. Among the dead, after all, were people just like them.

There was some concern over turnout, logistics, and safety, but meeting facilitator Sue Ross, a middle-aged former business manager with short curly hair and tortoise-shell glasses, kept things moving. After about ten minutes she tabled the pilgrimage discussion and switched to reporting on the progress of the census initiative. Maywood, with a 95 percent non-white population, had been systematically undercounted by more than 30 percent in the 2010 census, resulting in the loss of several million dollars in federal funding. Outreach to local parishes, soup kitchens, and shelters, along with a push to provide internet access to the elderly, would help residents register themselves and thus force the 2020 census-takers to include them.

Next came the community-benefits report. Anely Jaime, jostling her small child in her lap and speaking mostly in Spanish, explained that a local bank had agreed to partner with CSPL to develop a course in financial literacy. For many new immigrants, it would be their first opportunity to learn how to build credit and obtain small loans. "*Es un granito de arena*," she explained: a grain of sand, not much, but nevertheless essential, since limited access to credit is one of the chief obstacles that keep her neighbors, especially the undocumented ones, from establishing stable lives.

The gathering concluded with announcements and a prayer, just as any parish-council meeting would. There was to be a workshop on Catholic Social Teaching, racism, and oppression in the U.S. prison and immigration-detention systems the next evening. The prayer, offered by Sumbul Siddiqui, a medical student at Loyola University Chicago and a DACA recipient, was in Arabic. She prayed for peace, the success of the upcoming pilgrimage, and humane immigration reform. Afterwards, a few hung around to chat and eat a second plate of food. But most headed straight home; they'd have to wake up early the next morning for work.

Even as the room emptied, though, the energy remained palpable. I felt as if I'd experienced the kind of vitality, the sense of shared purpose and community, that many Catholics say they yearn for in traditional parish life, but somehow can't seem to find. These disaffected and disaffiliated, especially younger Catholics skeptical of the institutional church, are not necessarily unfaithful; they're not just "insufficiently devout." They may simply feel they're not getting what they need to live authentic Christian lives, or at least more fulfilling ones. If a parish doesn't provide a robust sense of community, or vital social-justice ministries, or meaningful spiritual formation—or, most importantly, real recognition and empowerment—is it surprising they may look for them outside traditional structures, including beyond the walls of a church building?

These are some of the needs that CSPL is meeting. It is not aiming to subvert or supplant the traditional parish; indeed, there are ministries—like religious education, liturgy, and the sacraments—that as a lay-led group it simply cannot perform. But in an era of intense social reorganization and geographic disruption, when U.S. Catholics are both more diverse and less rooted in a single place, the coalitional model adopted by CSPL and similar groups—emphasizing bottom-up leadership, demographic inclusivity, and a distinctly spiritual approach to political and community engagement—may suggest a kind of prototype for an evolving, post-parochial church.

Just under three years old, CSPL combines the methods of traditional grassroots community organizing—pioneered by Christian Base Communities in Latin America and Saul Alinksy's Industrial Areas Foundation in Chicago—with the beliefs and principles of Catholic social teaching, theology, and spirituality. Structured as an independent nonprofit organization and funded by a combination of dues-paying members and donations, it's an emerging alliance that links a range of partners—parishes, schools, hospitals, universities, unions, cooperatives, and other community and faith-based associations—across the entire Chicagoland area.

CSPL's mission is to overcome "systemic racial, social, economic, and environmental injustice by building power that is rooted in the vision of the Gospel of Jesus Christ." In concrete terms, that

CSPL infuses traditional methods of community organizing—which often begins with political and power analysis—with Catholic spirituality. Instead of a purely secular "clarification of thought," CSPL engages in spiritual discernment.

means identifying individuals—especially women and people of color—with the capacity for leadership, and then training them to enter strategically into political and public life.

Appropriately, CSPL itself evolved out of a parish in Maywood, St. Eulalia's. Founded in 1927, the parish and its parochial school originally served affluent white Catholics who had left Chicago for the elegant new suburbs west of the city. Starting in the 1940s, though, and continuing into the '60s, Maywood's demographics shifted drastically.

By 1967 the town had become majority African American, and the tensions of the civil-rights era had spread from the city to the suburbs. But under the charismatic leadership of a new pastor, Fr. William Quinn, St. Eulalia's welcomed Maywood's black population, integrating and becoming known not just in Chicago but around the country as a social-justice hub. Quinn, an expert on the Latin American church, had attended two sessions of the Second Vatican Council, marched with Martin Luther King Jr., and advised Cesar Chavez. Fr. Andrew Greeley, a well-known liberal Catholic commentator (and frequent *Commonweal* contributor), considered him a mentor.

Quinn died in 2004, but inspired by his legacy, St. Eulalia's built a community center in his name. It opened in the former parochial school building in 2011, consolidating and expanding the parish's various social-justice ministries: a soup kitchen and food pantry, youth tutoring and mentoring programs, outreach to the elderly, a computer lab and classrooms for job training, and English and Spanish language lessons for new immigrants, especially Maywood's rapidly growing Mexican-American population.

It was there, in 2017, that CSPL's founding members first met and got to talking. They'd all been involved in organizing and justice work, but wanted to bring their commitments to spiritual *and* public life to push for social change. The key, they realized, would be to ground their activism in prayer and theology. This approach would have the potential not only to galvanize and transcend the divisiveness often found in activist circles; it could also energize and transform a stalled, divided Catholic Church that seemed more focused on parsing doctrine and preserving institutional power than in building community.

Over a home-cooked meal of tamales and flautas, I talked with CSPL training committee chair and board secretary Joana Arellano and her husband, CSPL executive director Michael Okińczyc-Cruz. The couple live in a modest apartment in Pilsen, a traditionally working-class but now rapidly gentrifying Chicago neighborhood just southwest of the Loop. We were joined by three other members of the CSPL board: John DeCostanza, a campus minister at nearby Dominican University; Kathleen Maas-Weigert, a professor of sociology at Loyola University Chicago; and Gabriel Lara, CSPL's full-time economic justice organizer.

We talked about how CSPL's work brings Catholic spirituality, and the church's mission to care for the poor and marginalized, more forcefully into public life. Lara, originally from Guanajuato, Mexico, explained that he'd once studied for the priesthood but then discerned a call to lay life, afterwards working as a lay minister in a parish in the United States. He valued his time in the seminary, which also left him with a call to service and helped lead him to cofound CSPL.

Arellano had a similar experience. "I wanted to find a way of exercising my power that was also grounded in my faith," she said. "Growing up as a first-generation Latina in Chicago, I experienced racism and sexism all too frequently. But my mom—a member of UNITE-HERE Local 1 and one of the baddest lunch ladies in Chicago—taught me how to overcome it, not just through organizing, but also through prayer and contemplation." Arellano explained that as a child she'd witnessed her mother participate in marches and demonstrations for the rights of workers and immigrants. "Her Catholic faith was central to who she was: a contemplative activist, and a *prophetic mystic*. Injustice is like a broken tapestry—our task is to stitch the People of God back together."

But how? Again and again, our conversation turned to the necessity (and difficulty) of building power at the margins of society. Racism, xenophobia, income inequality, and other forms of oppression aren't easily overcome. But there's a method for it, and for CSPL, it starts with listening to people on the ground. You can't accurately gauge the needs and aspirations of members of marginalized groups and communities just by hosting big town-hall-style meetings or rallies. What about those who don't speak up? And social media can be useful in getting the word out, but it can't substitute for actual dialogue. That's why intimate person-to-person meetings called "one-on-ones" are so essential. These "sacred conversations" don't just permit greater honesty, and trust; they allow the Spirit, not the ego, to set the agenda.

And then there's always the temptation to "do something," to "take action." That's necessary to bring about change, but the impulse needs to be resisted, at least at first; reflection is more important. It's another way CSPL infuses traditional meth-

ods of community organizing—which often begins with political and power analysis—with Catholic spirituality. Instead of a purely secular "clarification of thought," CSPL engages in spiritual *discernment*, a process (pioneered by St. Ignatius of Loyola and the Jesuits) of prayerfully and communally pondering the path forward in the light of God.

Discernment, the group explained, isn't so much about obtaining pragmatic consensus as it is a way of incarnating the church as the members of CSPL want it to be, moving it into more direct engagement in the public square. It's a way of proceeding that's not hierarchical or authoritarian, but horizontal and relational. Pope Francis might call CSPL's approach *synodal*—by walking together, members create new synergies and open new spaces, freeing people's latent energies and talents to emerge and bear fruit.

"And that's precisely where many of our parishes are falling short," Okińczyc-Cruz said. He meant that while parishes may well provide community, sacramental nourishment, and a spiritual home, they're also failing to empower their parishioners to advocate more forcefully for their political and economic interests. Parishes might be *ministering* to people on the margins, but they're not letting them lead.

"As Catholics we hear terms like 'power' and 'self-interest,' and it makes us nervous," Okińczyc-Cruz said. "But we're followers of Jesus of Nazareth, who preached a message of justice and radical mercy, who boldly challenged unjust systems of oppression." He stressed that Christ Himself—whom he characterizes as one of the most successful community organizers in history—encourages us to enter directly into politics not naively, but compassionately. "We can't understand the depth and meaning of God's love if we're not willing to hear and respond to God's cry for justice."

Just before dinner, Okińczyc-Cruz had driven me around Maywood. He explained that many of its suburban residents lacked access to the economic opportunities available in the city. "All of the construction, all of the capital is being pumped into the old working-class neighborhoods of Chicago, colonizing those neighborhoods and pushing people out here. Due to rising rents, poorly funded schools, and violence, Maywood's one of the few places families can afford to live."

Which is what makes Maywood such an important community to organize with. Parking outside the Quinn Center at St. Eulalia's, Okińczyc-Cruz talked me through CSPL's successes thus far. One early victory was bringing together parents, school administrators, and police to create the "Smart Routes" program. Modeled on "Safe Routes," developed in Chicago's South Side, it's a violence-prevention initiative that, besides guaranteeing a safe passage to school for young children, enables Maywood parents to take a more active role in communicating their needs to local government officials.

That experience of organizing and being heard had a ripple effect, leading CSPL to take action on a number of other issues. First was the lack of access to a decent supermarket. Maywood is a food desert, and residents have to travel to shop for groceries a few miles away. But the store is near an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) field office, which discourages undocumented residents from making the trip. So CSPL began working with local grassroots leaders, parishes, and universities to form worker-owned cooperatives (*cooperativas*) to help provide healthy food alternatives to the Maywood community. Then, besides the census initiative currently underway, CSPL also wanted to confront the acute mental-health crisis and suicide epidemic in the Latinx and African-American communities, which tend to stigmatize mental illness and depression. So it started training community leaders, and advocated for training for local police officers, to administer person-to-person mental health first-aid. Even with events like the El Paso pilgrimage drawing closer, Okińczyc-Cruz stressed the importance of the local. "The trip will come and go. Our work—training leaders, building our institutional partnerships, engaging in grassroots community organizing—has to happen here."

In her book *Cuéntame: Narrative in the Ecclesial Present*, theologian Natalia Imperatori-Lee argues that for the Catholic Church to succeed in the present cultural moment, it should stop thinking strictly in terms of geographic parishes and instead look to "lay-led groups, DIY religion, and even the possibility of personal parishes" for new models. Such groups have a few obvious advantages over traditional territorial parishes: their flexible, responsive leadership and dynamic spiritualities can speak to disaffected Catholics seeking a more relational, participatory church. And by abandoning old geographic boundaries, they can harness new energy and new ideas, especially from young people, who are both less likely to be settled in any particular place and more likely to travel greater distances.

But Imperatori-Lee cautions against facile idealism. Throughout church history, paradigms and practices have come and gone. To be successful in

How should the coalition address racism and sexism in the church? How can it attract and include young people, many of whom are indifferent about the fate of Catholic parishes?

the long run, new movements can't just root themselves in the church's ancient spiritual traditions, or merely aspire to activism in the face of injustice. They also need to guard against corruption, homogeneity, and exclusivity.

Perhaps the most basic challenge faced by CSPL is its long-run financial independence. Much of the initial seed money, Kathleen Maas-Weigert told me, came from a community of women religious. Since then, CSPL has gained the support of other private foundations. But grant money doesn't last forever, and CSPL's board would like to see the coalition become even more capable of sustaining itself through annual membership dues, from both individuals and institutional partners. This is particularly challenging because CSPL aims to organize and serve communities without much disposable income. (Dues are currently paid according to a sliding scale, and contributions from members are in fact growing.) And unlike a parish, which receives support from the larger diocese and whose donors can more easily see their tithing at work (improvements in the physical plant, community events, ministries, etc.), CSPL's budget is both less certain and less visible—there's the rent for the office space and expenses for actions, which can vary, but there's also the rising cost of health insurance for the staff.

A second challenge is that as a broad-based coalition, CSPL's diverse membership necessarily represents a plurality of interests. A few weeks after my dinner with some of the CSPL board in Chicago, Maas-Weigert reminded me that while much of CSPL's recent work has been centered on advocating for justice for immigrants, that's hardly the group's sole focus. Its mission instead has three interrelated elements: immigration, violence prevention, and economic justice—with the latter undergirding the first two. True, a large portion of its current membership is Latinx, and that's a reflection of demographic realities in the U.S. church. But CSPL has also worked to build broader solidarity with other marginalized communities, including African Americans and Asian Americans. "People tend to forget that there are African-American Catholics, too," confirmed Byron Diggs and Anthony Williams, both local restaurant owners and CSPL board members. "The church needs to hear from us."

CSPL wants its model to be replicable elsewhere, but there are questions it hasn't yet answered definitively, even as it builds partnerships with groups and institutions outside of Maywood and the Chicagoland area. For instance, how


2017

True synodality is a church that's not born from shared geography or neighborhood boundaries or ethnic ties, but one that springs into being from closeness and fellowship, that only emerges on the way to someplace else.

should the coalition address racism and sexism in the church? How can it attract and include young people, especially college students, many of whom are indifferent about the fate of Catholic parishes? (It's had some marked success here, particularly with students at nearby Dominican University, Loyola Chicago, and Notre Dame.) Finally, how should CSPL navigate its relationship with both the Archdiocese of Chicago and the wider institutional church? "We don't want to alienate the people we're trying to work with," Okińczyc-Cruz told me. "We want to be respectful of the church we all love. But we still have to challenge injustice."

That's the most difficult aspect of sustaining any extra-parochial movement, since, at least for the time being, parishes remain the primary site where Catholics celebrate liturgy, receive the sacraments, and nourish and pass on their faith. CSPL is no different; its members currently worship across a range of parishes throughout Chicago and its suburbs. There's the core St. Eulalia's contingent, with parishioners mostly supportive of CSPL's agenda. But then there are also some who attend Mass at parishes where CSPL's work encounters some resistance: "Sometimes well-off Catholics are comfortable funding food pantries and soup kitchens, but they don't want to hear about addressing structural injustices," Sue Ross explained. "They think people should just lift themselves up by their bootstraps." I asked whether she ever felt uneasy worshiping there. "Not really," she said calmly. "We're all sinners. I've got nothing but love for them; I hope my presence at Mass helps convert them."

It was a warm Wednesday evening in October, and the El Paso pilgrimage was about to begin. About seventy-five people were gathered inside Chicago's Holy Name Cathedral, their bags stacked in the aisles as a pair of buses waited outside. The pilgrims ranged widely in background and age: many belonged to a group of Latinx college students from the University of Notre Dame and Dominican University, but there were also graduate students from Loyola Chicago, employees of the Archdiocese of Chicago, middle-aged activists, and older African-American veterans of the civil-rights movement. All, by virtue of their participation in the pilgrimage, were members of CSPL.

As the send-off Mass got underway, Chicago Cardinal Blase Cupich channeled Pope Francis and gave a moving homily about accompanying people on the margins. After the Mass ended, he called everyone to the altar for a blessing and even attempted some light humor: "So, you're all going to El Paso *by bus*? Who organized this?" They looked around, a little embarrassed, then gave a collective response: "We did!"

After some prayer and song, and interviews with local television crews, the trip got underway. The bus ride itself was mostly uneventful, featuring the kind of ordinary mishaps and frustrations you might expect on any long road trip: crankiness from lack of sleep, soreness from the tight space, flashes of real anger from the driver when one of the toilets broke down (and nobody told him).

As the buses crossed the plains of Oklahoma and entered New Mexico near Santa Fe, we began tracing an old pilgrim-and-trade route known by Spanish colonists as *El Camino Real*, the royal way. With monumental rock formations gliding by outside, a few pilgrims made speeches, gave workshops, and offered prayers, transforming the buses into impromptu stages, classrooms, and chapels. (After it grew dark they also became makeshift karaoke bars.)

The closer we came to the southern border, the more people opened up. A few Notre Dame students spoke about their desire to better understand the sacrifices their parents had made by crossing from Mexico. Karina DeAvila, a Latina activist from outside Chicago and one of the key organizers of the gathering in El Paso, explained her plans to run for local political office. Josh Long, a documentary filmmaker, admitted feeling conflicted about his former admiration for his uncle, who had worked as a border-patrol agent years ago. After some Norbertine brothers came on board and joined us in prayer, I realized what I was seeing: true synodality, a church that's not born from shared geography or neighborhood boundaries or ethnic ties, but one that springs into being from the spirit of closeness and fellowship that only emerges *on the way* to someplace else.

As the teach-in unfolded over the weekend in El Paso, many pilgrims told me that whatever they'd experienced—which they couldn't quite articulate—was life-changing. It wasn't just the rousing plenary speeches, workshops on nonviolence and anti-racism, or seminars on border theology and Catholic social teaching. Nor was it simply crossing the Paso del Norte bridge into Ciudad Juárez and seeing thousands of migrants and asylum seekers camping by the roadside in squalor (though that had indeed been important, as some had participated in helping fifteen Mexican asylum-seekers legally cross the border). It was the fact of being together—something their monthslong efforts had achieved—and seeing that

they weren't alone. Hundreds of others, just like them, had come from New York, Los Angeles, and elsewhere. They'd filled local churches and streets; they'd shown themselves, and the country, and each other, who they were.

A few months after the pilgrimage, I caught up with Okińczyc-Cruz over the phone. To be sure, he said, the El Paso trip had built momentum among CSPL's membership. But there was more work to be done closer to home: the census campaign, which was kicking into high gear, and the mental-health workshops, which had become quite popular. There was also a move to a bigger office, requiring new furniture. Overall, though, he seemed calm and confident about the future: "Now it's time for us to see where the Spirit leads."

Whether extra-parochial groups like CSPL may help reshape parishes in the future is of course uncertain. After all, under canon law, parishes are not autonomous. There are currently 17,000 parishes in the United States, serving some 75 million Catholics. All exist and operate at the intersection of community and geography, and each is run under diocesan authority by a bishop who in turn connects them to the universal church. If Catholic parishes are "particular" communities, with all the local variance that implies, they're also juridical territories, uniformly constituted from above as branches of a global, hierarchical institution.

This tension is built into the way the church has understood its local communities since the late Middle Ages, when the Latin terms *parochia* and *diocesis* were both used to denote local churches led by a bishop. But they had very different connotations. Early Christian writers used the Greek *paroikos* to mean "sojourner," and *paroikia*, the word for parish, implies a community of believers on a pilgrimage, journeying through the world toward their heavenly home. *Diocesis*, on the other hand, is rooted in notions of power and authority: the Greek *dioikein* means "to control, govern, administer, or manage a house." Parishes, then, are paradoxical: they're specific territories with fixed earthly ties, but also simultaneously on their way to someplace else. Ultimately, couldn't this be a useful way to think about the future of the parish—and the place of extra-parochial groups like CSPL in reimagining it?

GRIFFIN OLEYNICK *is an assistant editor at* Commonweal.

POETRY

SERVANTS AND INSTRUMENTS OF SONG —Marie Ponsot: Cento

Kathleen Gunton

*Each line is drawn from a different poem in Marie Ponsot's collection, *Easy*.

The lesson of the day: longing
Ready hearts hammering
Out resurrection, halleluia in yanked abandon
At the edge of vision
Grateful, grateful, my hand slow to turn the page
Close to the edge of a clear brook
Is a bridge or go-between
Others call sky
We extravagant chat easily
Conversing hand lifted to open hand
The delicious tongue we speak with speaks us
Servants and instruments of song
We are more than we thought
My self, its selves, and how they move to unify
It's more than one thing at a time
The will dissolves here. It becomes the infinite
Across our other sky
A universe at its origin

KATHLEEN GUNTON *is completing her collection of cento poems. More than forty-five of these poems have appeared in publications as varied as the* Cresset, Cura, First Things, Hawaii Review, Rhino, *and* Rockhurst Review. *She lives in Orange, California.*

JASON STEIDL

Necessary Affirmation

LGBTQ ministry at Out at St. Paul's

I first heard about Out at St. Paul (OSP), the LGBTQ ministry of St. Paul the Apostle Church in Manhattan, on a date. I was new to New York City, a PhD student in theology who still had not come out to my Midwestern evangelical family. My date was a confident medical professional and lay leader who invited me to his LGBTQ-affirming parish. I appreciated the invitation, but was not ready to accept it.

Years later, after I'd been in my first serious relationship, found a theological home at Fordham University, and settled into my calling as a gay man, I visited OSP for the first time. The Mass I attended took place just after Pope Francis met with Kim Davis, the notoriously homophobic Kentucky clerk who refused to issue marriage certificates to lesbian and gay couples, when he visited the United States in 2015. The pontiff who asked "Who am I to judge?" had broken my heart. I felt betrayed. I needed to be with my people.

The community that OSP provided that night—and ever since then—has been a balm within a church that continues to wound.

I am not alone. The ministry—set on the northern edge of Hell's Kitchen, New York's lively gayborhood—has a mailing list of more than five hundred. Many LGBTQ people have embraced their Catholic faith because OSP exists. Some were expelled from other parishes. Others lost their biological families when they came out.

We are not ashamed of God's goodness, revealed in our romantic and sexual relationships, which testify against a tradition that describes us as "intrinsically disordered."

OSP began in 2010 when Fr. Gil Martinez, then head-pastor of St. Paul the Apostle, noticed a number of parishioners who, in another era, could be described as "festive," "flamboyant," or "queer." How could he better minister to the lesbians and gays under his spiritual care? He had a heart for his neighborhood and the multitudes of LGBTQ people exiled from the church. A decade before Fr. Gil's arrival, there had been a vibrant lesbian and gay ministry at the parish led by Catholic activist Donald Maher, but that was a distant memory for most. Fr. Gil began a new work that fostered servanthood and spiritual formation for lay leaders.

Since its founding, OSP has never tried to hide that it serves out and proud Catholics. The parish prints OSP's calendar of events in the bulletin alongside other ministries. OSP members give announcements at the end of Sunday's 5:15 p.m. Mass. The ministry even celebrates a Pride Mass every year in Sheridan Square, the hallowed ground outside the Stonewall Inn where the modern movement for LGBTQ liberation began.

This openness to LGBTQ Catholics has made OSP a target for the Archdiocese of New York and outside agitators. Why can't LGBTQ Catholics just stay quiet? Shouldn't they join Courage, the church's twelve-step program for those "afflicted by same-sex attraction"?

What makes OSP necessary is its affirmation that LGBTQ people are created in the image of God. Many OSP members are partnered or married. Our diverse sexualities and genders are expressions of the divine, gifts to the church and world. We are not ashamed of God's goodness revealed in our romantic and sexual relationships, which testify against a tradition that describes us as "intrinsically disordered."

Our parish is full of allies. Many young people and families do not want to be part of a homophobic church. We welcome LGBTQ people as lectors, Eucharistic ministers, Sunday school teachers, and choir members. Without them, these ministries would languish. Hospitality toward LGBTQ people also advances the charisms of the Paulist Fathers. Following the example of their founder, Fr. Isaac Hecker, the Paulists carefully listen to the Spirit's calling, which has led them to minister at the margins for more than a century and a half. OSP is a Gospel ministry of reconciliation and healing.

OSP's mission "seeks to engage our Catholic faith through service to our community, social activities, and the exploration of Catholic spirituality." Service takes the form of a monthly din-

ner at the Gay Men's Health Crisis, where OSP members prepare and serve meals to folks living with HIV/AIDS.

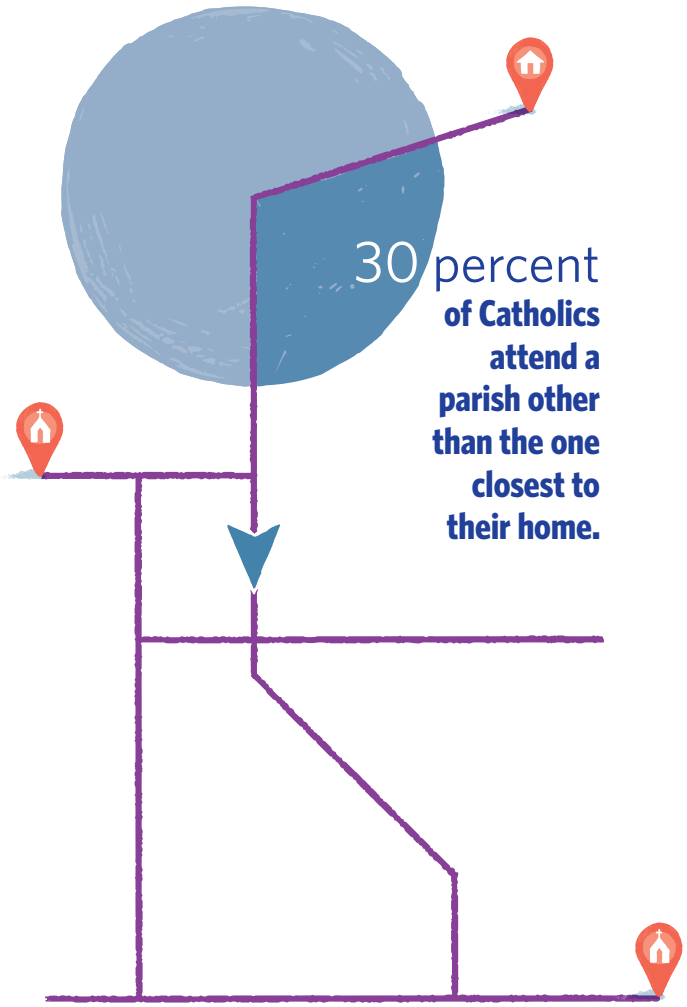
Social activities double as opportunities for evangelism. We regularly meet newcomers in gay bars who may be afraid to enter a church but are happy to discuss faith over a drink. We hold a monthly supper club at local restaurants to foster intergenerational friendships. Other social events include holiday parties, dance classes, museum trips, and hiking.

OSP's emphasis on spirituality becomes clear at its quarterly Masses, monthly book club and faith sharing, lectures by theologians, and annual retreat. Seventy men and women involved with OSP, young and old, attended the most recent retreat on the Jersey Shore. We foster a lively dialogue with academic and pastoral leaders. Our experiences are a rich source for the church's ongoing discernment of LGBTQ pastoral care. We are also strong advocates for LGBTQ people both within and outside the church. One of our most successful initiatives was producing a short video called *Owning Our Faith*, which shared the spiritual journeys of several community members.

For all of its strengths, OSP has growing edges as well. Two years ago, we spent time considering sexual ethics. What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus and LGBTQ? We have invested in loving relationships that allow us to be honest and vulnerable as we seek to answer difficult questions together. This year, we have struggled through issues of intersectional justice. How can we build a community that welcomes and affirms all people? OSP is overwhelmingly white, cisgender male, and middle- to upper-class. Where are the least among us? Most glaringly, women are underrepresented. While three OSP members have gone on to seminary, there are no such opportunities for our sisters.

As a gay man, it often feels impossible to remain Catholic. So much of the church's official teaching is harmful and so many of its leaders are homophobic. Whenever my soul aches, however, I find healing and a home at St. Paul the Apostle. I am Catholic because I know that I am loved and supported there. OSP is Christ's heart beating for LGBTQ people in Hell's Kitchen.

JASON STEIDL *is a Visiting Professor of Religious Studies at St. Joseph's College in Brooklyn and Long Island. His research, advocacy, and ministry focus on grassroots attempts to transform the relationship between LGBTQ Catholics and the hierarchy.*



SOURCE:
Zech et al., *Catholic Parishes of the 21st Century* (Oxford University Press)

MOLLIE WILSON O'REILLY

Just Five Minutes

Making Mass child friendly

Every year on Ash Wednesday we hear a summons from Joel: "Proclaim a fast, call an assembly; gather the people, notify the congregation; assemble the elders, gather the children and the infants at the breast." A few years ago, surrounded by my own babies, I was struck by the inclusion of nursing infants (and, presumably, their mothers). Now, with four boys under the age of nine, I am challenged by the call to "gather the children." There are so many weeks when it seems easier not to.

For my kids, going to Mass every Sunday is a fact of life. I know that is far from the norm for Catholic families today; even in their Catholic elementary school we may be in the minority. I don't have any great ideas for changing that. A welcoming environment helps, of course—parents shouldn't feel the need to apologize for bringing their children to church. But my own experience has been very positive. In my parish, indulgent smiles far outnumber scowls. People are plainly happy just to see us there, chaos and all.

Still, my children are less than enthusiastic about going to Mass. My four year old still thinks he can opt out if he just tries hard enough: "I don't want to go to *poopy church*," he seethes, using the strongest language he can muster to express his displeasure. I don't know how to change that either, and honestly, I'm not sure it's important to try. Church is not meant to be entertainment for kids. It's meant to do something for adults—but what? I have almost forgotten. Just getting through an hour with four wriggly kids can be an all-consuming task. When I stop to reflect on why we do it, I can almost see my hopes for them, my prayer that they will learn to embrace their roles in the Body of Christ. But one of them has a birthday next week; another is in that stage of pre–potty training where he isn't ready to perform, but he is experimentally taking off his own diaper when I leave him alone for too long; and the older three need help assembling costumes for the school "parade of saints" on Friday. I don't have a lot of time for reflecting.

All the struggle leads me to one concrete suggestion for pastors who want to be hospitable to families with young children. It won't cost any-

thing, I don't think anyone will complain, and you can implement it immediately. Here is my idea: shorter homilies, every Sunday. I'm talking five minutes. Six, if you must.

We could debate the purpose of the homily and its prominence in the context of the Sunday liturgy. But my motives are practical: it is, obviously, very difficult for kids to sit still and be quiet, and the homily is when things really start to fall apart. I can channel my children's restlessness into changing postures, following responses, and observing whatever happens on the altar. A well-timed hymn can really help. But when we settle in for a long stretch of simply listening, their limited reserves of self-control burn up fast. After five minutes of even the best preaching, my children are squirming like a sack of cats and I am silently begging Father to wrap it up.

Five minutes is long enough to articulate an insight, connect it to the scriptures, and leave us with a challenge. And if I didn't have to struggle to keep my kids still for five to ten minutes more, they might have something left in the tank for the second half of the Mass. In a parish with a no-more-than-six-minutes preaching policy, I would have been able to stay in the pews and pray the Liturgy of the Eucharist more often during the past eight years, instead of dragging a disruptive toddler out the door. I'd have received Communion more often, which isn't a small thing, now that I'm thinking about it. And my kids' experience of the consecration might feature less of their father and me hissing in their ears, "Be still RIGHT NOW OR ELSE."

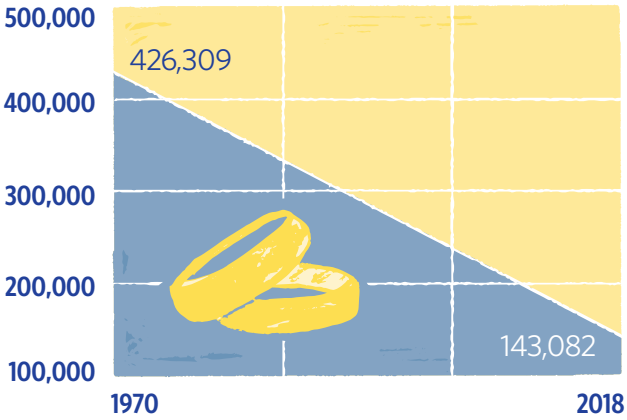
Why do I keep on bringing my kids to Mass, even when it is so often so unpleasant? I want them to see what the Catholic faith looks like lived out in a community. I want them to know that Christ is present in the assembly—something worth mentioning in a homily, Father, while I'm making suggestions—and that we become the presence of Christ when we enter into this prayer together. All of us, fidgety kids included, are part of that body, making Christ present in this place. It's a mystery they have trouble understanding, but that doesn't mean they can't be part of it.

My hunch is that a consistent practice of short Sunday homilies would make families like mine feel less discouraged about making another trip to "*poopy church*." And if the homily comes to seem a little less dominant in the overall scheme of things, what might grow to take its place? It could be a deeper awareness of the holiness of the assembly and how much we need each other.

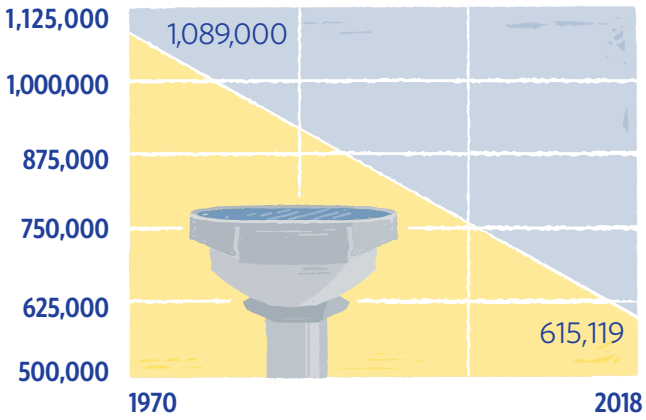
For now, I am relying on a distant memory of what it was like to pray without a toddler climbing me like a tree, and doggedly returning to Mass each week in the hopes of finding that experience waiting for all of us on the other side of the preschool years. On Friday I will drape my sons in old pillowcases and scarves and send them off to school pretending to be saints. My Peter will be clutching a set of oversized keys that we spent way too long making. And then, on Sunday, I will wrestle them into their church clothes and gather them into a pew, hoping that, if we just keep showing up together, we will find the keys to unlock this mystery.

MOLLIE WILSON O'REILLY *is an editor at large and columnist at* Commonweal.

Catholic marriages, 1970–2018



Infant baptisms, 1970–2018



SOURCE: CARA

An interview with Fr. Hector Madrigal

The 'Heart Work'

Dominic Preziosi & Milton Javier Bravo

LISTEN

Look for the full interview with Fr. Hector Madrigal on an upcoming episode of the Commonweal Podcast.
commonwealmagazine.org/podcast

Fr. Hector Madrigal is the pastor of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Amarillo, Texas, which has been featured in a USCCB study on best practices for shared parishes. For nearly two decades he has served as a trainer, facilitator, and speaker on building greater appreciation of culture in church settings. From 2013 to 2016, he was a consultant to the USCCB subcommittee for Hispanic/Latino Affairs, which developed the process for the V National Encuentro of Hispanic/Latino Ministry, and since 2014, he has been a consultant to the National Leadership Roundtable. Commonweal *editor Dominic Preziosi and audience development director Milton Javier Bravo spoke with him recently about "ecclesial integration"; the importance of welcoming, accompanying, and empowering different cultural groups; and how Hispanic ministry contributes to the good of the entire Catholic Church.*

COMMONWEAL: As the pastor of St. Joseph's, you've spoken of wanting to increase the appreciation of all the cultures within the Amarillo diocese and develop a stronger sense of community among all of us. Can you talk about the variety of the cultures you see, not only in the diocese but at your parish specifically?

FR. HECTOR MADRIGAL: I've been at St. Joseph's for thirteen years, and it didn't start off with all these different groups. We had a strong group that I would call Americans; sometimes, in this part of the country, we call them white people. But we also had a significant number of what I call "integrated-slash-assimilated" Mexican Americans. Now, thirteen years later, the parish consists not only of Americans and integrated Mexican Americans, but we have many Mexican immigrants, and they're the largest group. We also have a significant number of families from South Sudan. We have Salvadorians, Bosnian refugees, and of course, Filipinos. And that's very much reflective of our diocese.

In terms of "appreciation," we've been very clear that we're called to open the doors of our church and our hearts to all the people who come to St. Joseph's. And so in order to do that—partly because of my background in sociology, and partly because I understand, being a Mexican American myself—I began to preach and teach about the importance of recognizing that culture is a gift, that our cultures all have something to contribute to the church. God has brought them into our midst, to our parish. And so we are to receive them as we receive Christ, including their ways of thinking and singing and eating and praying.

CW: What kinds of successes have you seen in terms of realizing this sense of communion in your parish? And what are some of the challenges or difficulties or surprises?

HM: At the very beginning in our parish, we went through a listening process, a planning process, and we very clearly felt called as part of our mission to welcome all God's children. We didn't fully understand what it meant at the time. But now I tell the community it was a very prophetic experience—because within two or three months of this whole planning process, we had several South Sudanese families literally come knocking on the door, saying *we're looking for a church*. And so we began with this refugee community, and it was so surprising to me how the parish just embraced the community, embraced the South Sudanese in every way they could to help them feel at home in the church.

Now the challenge, which is sad, is that about two years later, the pastoral council came to me and said, "Father, it looks like we have a lot of Spanish-speaking people in our neighborhood. Why aren't they in our parish? Why aren't we having Mass?" So I went through a listening process with them and then we agreed to start a Spanish Mass. That was a challenge, because the assumption is that refugees are here legally, and the majority are. But people assume that Spanish-speaking people are here illegally or are undocumented. So we had to work through all of that and begin to challenge the community that we're here to evangelize, not to Americanize.

Now there's another serious issue that nationally, in our episcopal region, and in our parish, we have to do a lot of work on: in bringing in the new people, we haven't done a good job of preparing what we could call the "host" community. And so I began to accompany and listen to a lot of the people who were uncomfortable with the changes, who might even have been angry. You know, there's a sense of loss. There's pain in making room for the new people. You know, they're uncomfortable with a different language, a different culture. And so I have to learn to be intentional in creating space, so they can be honest about what they feel and so we begin to understand them as well. On both sides, it's a challenge. I call it the "heart work." T, not D. Yes, it's also *hard* work, but it's about the heart on both sides. And the bottom line is to not be afraid of it. Diversity is a gift. The only thing that we really should be afraid of and uncomfortable with is sin and the consequences of our sin.

CW: At St. Joseph's you have an event called "Intercultural Disciple-Making Sunday." Is this a regular effort or something relatively new, and what is the goal of it?

HM: We've had it for over six years, and we try to understand what it means for us to be disciples, make disciples. I discovered that when you focus on that sense of mission, who we are as church, that makes it a lot easier. We had some difficulties throughout the years in trying to have, for example, a trilingual Christmas midnight Mass, or a trilingual Holy Saturday celebration, or to teach people at the English Mass to sing a bilingual hymn… But in focusing on how all of us are called disciples, it occurred to us, this is a wonderful opportunity for us to come together as church—not as the 10 o'clock Mass group, or the 12 noon Mass group, but together as one parish to learn what it means to be a disciple of Christ. So we separate in language groups to be able to do the catechesis. And then we come together to pray and give testimony, and then the final blessing. And then we have a reception and, you know, food brings us together—it doesn't matter what food it is. So there are the different language groups, and the children running around, and we're all together and just having a good time.

CW: Your parish has been identified by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops as having achieved "a high level of ecclesial integration." How is that determined? And what do you consider to be a high level of ecclesial integration?

HM: When I began to see that people across the board are not only supporting the parish in their own particular way, but they feel comfortable coming to the table and influencing decisions that are being made, that's when I think that community is fully integrated.

So when you have, in our case, the three main groups—the South Sudanese, the Mexican immigrants, and the Euro-American-slash-Mexican-American—all sitting together on the financial council and the pastoral council, the two most influential bodies in the parish, they then get that place at the table to say, "Look, this is what's going on with us." And then they're able to challenge each other, like, you know: "Why aren't you coming to this event?" or "What does this word mean?" or "What is this, this 'altar for the dead'?" And so they also kind of catechize each other, together.

[The USCCB study] began with the general understanding of what a shared parish is: one pastor serving several groups of people, people of different language groups, of different cultures. Somehow you're having to negotiate working with each group and sharing the space in the process. So the USCCB identified twenty pastors doing this work, and began to see some things that we had in common.

The USCCB identifies nine steps to integration. There are three that I call giant steps. The first step is about welcoming, giving people a place to feel and call their home. The second, once they've been welcomed, is to let people feel they belong and can influence decisions. This leads to the third giant step, the commitment to stewardship and communion. There are also individual steps in between. So the USCCB looked at the twenty parishes they studied and were able to find evidence of all nine steps at St. Joseph.

CW: Those who study shared parishes note that tension and conflict may be inevitable. What do you recommend to some of your colleagues in other communities in dealing with these challenges?

HM: One of the most important things I'm learning to do, and really, this is still a work in progress after thirteen years, is how to be a good pastor. And one of the most significant things I have to remember as a pastor is to give each group the opportunity to be themselves. That is key. Not just celebrating their feast days but acknowledging the way they socialize and study and learn. Sometimes, a group may need the opportunity to vent, to be angry, and there's nothing wrong with that. Priests, pastoral leaders, the whole parish staff have to be willing to accompany all the different groups. It's literally walking with them, listening, not telling them where they need to be or should be, but to acknowledge that where they're at is okay as long as they keep moving toward that integration. They need to understand themselves in the process, and to know when they're ready. And it's not easy because you have to discern when people are ready to buy in. So it takes a lot of pastoral skill in listening and accompanying and taking time to be with them. I, and all of us, we have to learn to do that better.

I would say this is the most difficult thing for me to deal with: some choose not to participate in the process, and regrettably they leave the parish. And sometimes I personally struggle with this. Could I have done this better, or maybe I didn't listen well enough? But people have to be free to choose whether they're going to be a part of this integration or not.

But what excites me is when new people come to this parish and say, "We're here because of what you're working for at St. Joseph's. You reflect what's out there in society." And so I tend to balance out the pain of letting go of those who choose not to stay by being grateful to God for those who say, okay, this is of value to me. It's happening at work. It's happening in school. When will it happen at church?

CW: The most recent National Hispanic Ministry Encuentro provided American Catholicism with a synodal type of process that called for a broad consultation among bishops, priests, lay ministers, and others. Could you describe how the Encuentro was seen in your parish, or in your diocese? Also, was this primarily Hispanic-led in your parish, given the fact that you do have so many different communities?

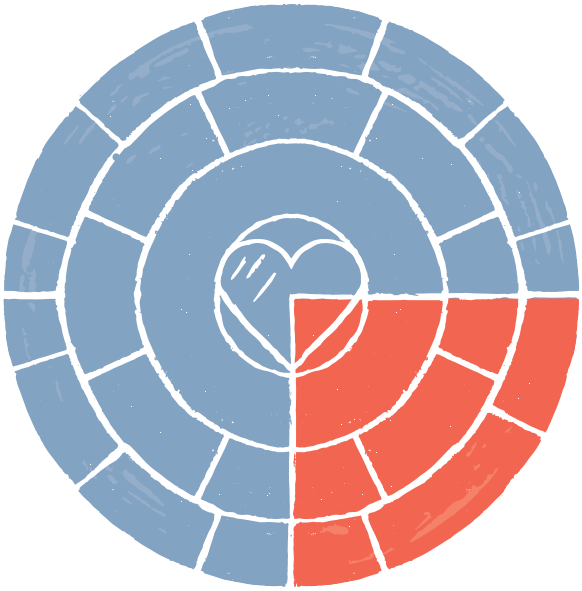
HM: It was a very positive, exciting experience for us, not only in my parish, but in the diocese. We didn't have a large number of people participating, but those who did were instrumental because they then began to replicate some of the experiences that they had.

I was part of the national team from the beginning, so that helped me understand the process. What was really significant was the idea that it's no longer just what the church in the United States can offer the Hispanic/Latino community, but what the Hispanic/Latino community can do to better serve the church. And so with that, I knew it wasn't just for Hispanics. So I was able to introduce it to the parish and we ended up having two groups. Interestingly, the smaller one was in Spanish and mostly immigrant, and the larger group was in English and reflected all the other English-speaking groups.

So the bottom line for us, not only here in our parish and the diocese, but even regionally and nationally, is that the *encuentro* experience gave us an opportunity to reflect on who we are as People of God. Not just as Latinos, but as People of God, and how we're called to become missionary disciples. And that experience is across the board. At St. Joseph's, we're trying to replicate that with all the groups.

CW: Given your experience in Hispanic ministry at the national, regional, and diocesan levels, what can be done to change the perception that it only serves Latinos or Hispanics?

Language doesn't have to be a barrier. We use it as an excuse all the time. But it's really the way we greet people, the way we approach people, the way we accompany people.



25 percent

of U.S. parishes intentionally serve Hispanic/Latinx Catholics.

SOURCE:
Hispanic Ministry in Catholic Parishes: A Summary Report of Findings from the National Study of Catholic Parishes with Hispanic Ministry

HM: Hispanic ministry can provide something to the entire Catholic church. When we speak to families, when we speak to other people in ministry, we consistently need to be reminding them we're here to serve the church. And I think we're getting there. Language doesn't have to be a barrier. We use it as an excuse, as a barrier all the time. But it's really the way we greet people, the way we approach people, the way we accompany people. I think people around the country are beginning to understand that.

CW: Data shows that first-generation Hispanics make up 18 percent of U.S Catholics; the second generation, around 12 percent; and the third generation and higher, 9 percent. Given the cultural diversity in your parish, how are you seeing these generational differences play out, and how do they affect your ministry?

HM: We've been talking about this with the pastoral council in trying to understand how different generations seek God and how they're trying to develop their own spirituality, different from what we're accustomed to. We've been good about incorporating and integrating our different ethnic groups, but what about the younger people? And so we had some listening sessions where we evaluated our hospitality, our hymns, and our homilies. And there it surfaced very clearly that generational difference is a serious issue for us and we need to address it.

Younger generations are seeking authenticity, community, and purpose. So with that general idea, the most essential thing is that we're not just going to talk *about* them. We're going to talk *with* them. And it just so happens that today I had my *last* meeting with the pastoral council that doesn't include any young people. We've come up with a new structure, and one of the requirements is that a third of the pastoral council must reflect this younger generation. We're being as intentional about it as we were in including the South Sudanese in leadership, the Spanish-speaking, those who speak more English—now we're saying we have to include the younger generation in the leadership of this parish.

RAND RICHARDS COOPER

A Not-So-Unlikely Messenger

'Corpus Christi'

Nominated for Best International Film at this year's Oscars, *Corpus Christi* is the work of the young Polish director Jan Komasa. Though its setting is the Poland of today, in some ways it could be the nineteenth-century American frontier, where isolated towns served as a refuge for charlatans and con men of all types—scoundrels who could outrun their misdeeds and start anew, with little more than their ability to sell, flatter, or persuade.

Or, in this case, to preach. *Corpus Christi*'s opening scenes transpire in a juvenile-detention center, where Daniel (the luminous young actor Bartosz Bielenia) is nearing the end of a sentence for an unspecified malfeasance. From the start Komasa keys us into Daniel's moral ambiguity—showing us his passive acquiescence in the beating of a fellow prisoner, then cutting to his careful tending of the makeshift altar at a prison church-group meeting, where Daniel finds both solace and special favor with the prison priest, Fr. Tomasz.

Whatever Daniel's crime—and it will only be revealed near the movie's end—it's clear that this young man has an ample spiritual side. Where other inmates chortle over Fr. Tomasz's spiritual guidance, Daniel embraces it, accepting the priest's message with what appears to be devout earnestness. "We're here to remember something important," Fr. Tomasz says. "Each of us is the priest of Christ. Me, you, each and every one of you."

Daniel ends up taking this message literally. After his release, he joins old friends for a night of drugs, dancing, and sex; waking the next morning from this debauched spree, he jokingly dons a cleric's collar he has stolen from somewhere, as his pals chant a raucous "St. Daniel!" In truth there's nothing Daniel would like more than to attend seminary, but his criminal record rules that out. And he isn't ready to comply with the terms of his parole. Sent to a work program for recently incarcerated juveniles at a remote rural sawmill, he takes one look at its dreary, laborious isolation and hightails it out of there, following the sound of distant church bells to a nearby village church.

When a teenage girl in the nearly empty church pegs him as a runaway from the sawmill, Daniel fends off her snarky condescension with an impulsive lie. "I'm a priest," he says. "Well, then I'm a nun," the girl retorts. Challenged to show his clerical collar, Daniel reaches into his bag and produces the one he filched. All too soon he finds himself being introduced to the parish priest. As it happens, the priest is ill and in need of medical help; and so, by a series of happenstance events, our young ex-con—"Fr. Tomasz," he calls himself—is thrust into the role of fill-in village pastor.

Masquerade and mistaken identity have served up comic gems from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* to *Being There* and *The Big Lebowski*, and at times *Corpus Christi* seems to veer toward comedy—as when Daniel, having recklessly declared himself a priest, finds himself taken to the sacristy to change out of his civilian clothes, and tries in desperation to escape out a window. (It is locked.) Later, forced to hear confession, he sits terrified in the confessional—while consulting a "Guide to Confession" on his smartphone. But Komasa steers every such moment back toward seriousness, and what the film mostly offers is a vicarious sense of being an impostor; much of *Corpus Christi* resembles those bad dreams in which you are thrust into a situation for which you are unqualified. What if you had to pretend to be a figure of public authority, and everything depended on pulling it off? Nervously, we watch Daniel desperately boning up on Scripture the night before having to lead his first Mass, biting his nails and chain smoking.

In the event, desperation proves the mother of liturgical invention. Bailing out of a Mass he doesn't fully know how to perform anyway, Daniel delivers an impromptu homily on one's personal relationship to Jesus and to salvation. "It's like this," he tells the congregation. "We come to church. We look at him. Jesus, how can I imitate you? You are so pure, while I bring all this dirt with me. How am I supposed to act on your behalf, if I can't manage my own life?" His simple sermon, with its confession of personal failing—summoned from his own, jagged experiences—moves the parishioners, whom he urges to "go and pray…from the bottom of your heart." By the time he tops it off by singing "The Lord Is My Shepherd," the congregation is in love with him, and palpably eager to accept him as their priest.

As it turns out, Daniel has a knack for it, especially for sensing the pain of others and summoning novel means of helping them. The villagers carry a burden of grief and recrimination—it has to do with a shrine outside the church, where photos of six young people are posted—and badly need consolation. As "Fr. Tomasz" gains confidence, his sermons grow bolder: seizing the village's rage at the loss of six young people and aiming it at God, and offering a frank admission—even elevation—of spiritual doubt.

Daniel's own doubt and anger serve as proxy and incitement alike, both alarming and thrilling the villagers, even as he injects a measure of joy into their religious practice (baptizing a baby, he throws handfuls of baptismal water high in the air and lets it cascade down). Improvising, borrowing from group-therapy techniques used in prison—including, at one point, a group primal scream—he points the village's adults toward novel spiritual practices, while titillating the young with heterodox views. "You know," he says to a group of giggling teens who question him about temptation, "celibacy is pointless. God had a kid, and no one bothers him."

Corpus Christi represents a startling advance over Komasa's previous effort, *Warsaw 44*, a gruesome account of the Warsaw uprising full of seemingly random changes in texture, tone, and camera work. As deliberate and focused as that earlier film was hectic and uneven, *Corpus Christi* involves us in a taut drama of sin, forgiveness, and mercy. Its tension grows as doubts about "Fr. Tomasz" creep in, and events threaten to lay bare Daniel's charade. Komasa uses these events not merely to heighten suspense, but to lay out ironies and paradoxes, exploring how fraudulence can belie a deeper authenticity.

Moving toward its close, *Corpus Christi* follows parallel narratives, in which the congregation is absolved of its anger, pain, and sin, while Daniel undergoes humiliation and torment. Switching between the story lines, Komasa follows Daniel and his parishioners in starkly divergent directions, suggesting a zero-sum economy of redemption and sacrifice—healing on the one hand, cued by a subtle nod of mercy; and on the other, an image (I won't reveal the details) worthy of Edvard Munch, a face caught in a rictus of dread and pain.

The power of *Corpus Christi* is inseparable from the particular talents of Bartosz Bielenia, a near-novice actor just twenty-seven years old, who as far as I can tell has appeared in three films. From the film's opening moments, as he gazes with rapt admiration at the prison priest, his face is both mesmerizing and mesmerized; his glassy blue eyes, gaunt cheekbones, and transparent-seeming skin evoke the young Christopher Walken, his skeletal visage surrounded by a penumbra of ecstasy tinged faintly with horror.

What makes the film's Christ comparison palatable is that Komasa isn't coy about it—at one point showing us the ersatz priest at the altar, disrobing and stretching his arms out in crucifixion pose. The juxtaposition of priestly suffering and parishioner redemption comes off not as authorial manipulation, but as a highly suggestive metaphor won through sympathetic human storytelling, and makes the film's denouement at once cathartic and awful.

Corpus Christi gives parish Catholicism a jolt of Protestant spiritual energy, the interventions of "Fr. Tomasz" superimposing charismatic practices on the stolid Catholicism of rural Central European life. The effect is to reaffirm Christ's message—a revolution of love, delivered by a criminal-cum-priest, unexpectedly and movingly embodying the lesson of Scripture: "For he who is least among you all is the one who is great."

RAND RICHARDS COOPER *is a contributing editor to* Commonweal.

COURTESY OF FILM MOVEMENT

Bartosz Bielenia in *Corpus Christi*

The Cant-Hunter

George Scialabba

What George Orwell can still teach the Left

Conscientious Christians (sometimes non-Christians too) are wont to ask in tricky situations: "What would Jesus do?" Fortunately the New Testament is fairly compact and can be read through in a week, even at a relaxed pace. Democratic socialists have a few candidates for guide and exemplar: John Stuart Mill, William Morris, Michael Harrington, Noam Chomsky. My own choice—and a pretty popular one, I suspect, at least among those who know that democratic socialism goes back further than Bernie and AOC—would be George Orwell.

The nearest thing to Orwell's Testament is sprawling rather than compact, the four-volume *Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters*. Coedited by Ian Angus and Sonia Orwell, George Orwell's widow, it includes nearly all his nonfiction from 1920 to 1950 (except for his books: *Down and Out in Paris and London, The Road to Wigan Pier,* and *Homage to Catalonia*). The set was first published fifty years ago and was reissued last year in a commendable act of literary citizenship by David R. Godine, Inc., a small, semi-legendary Boston publisher.

The four volumes are a very rich harvest. All the great essays are here: "Why I Write," "My Country Right or Left," "Looking Back on the Spanish War," "Notes on Nationalism," "The Prevention of Literature," "Politics and the English Language," "Writers and Leviathan," the essays on Dickens, Tolstoy, Kipling, Henry Miller, P. G. Wodehouse, and more. There are also hundreds of book reviews and letters, and perhaps most engaging and revealing, the very numerous weekly columns, titled "As I Please," that he wrote for the venerable left-wing journal *Tribune*, where he was literary editor from 1943 to 1945. Until the spectacular success of *Animal Farm* (1945), he made his living from this occasional writing, which perhaps qualifies him as a patron saint of freelance writers.

Orwell has been much fought over. Among the notable jousts: Irving Howe vs. Isaac Deutscher; Howe again vs. Raymond Williams; Christopher Hitchens vs. Norman Podhoretz; Hitchens vs. Edward Said. Lionel Trilling's famous introduction to Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* floats serenely above all controversy, acknowledging a few possible criticisms of Orwell but gently flicking them away. Seventy years after his death, the dust has settled and Orwell is unquestionably a culture-hero. All the more reason to remember that at least a few wise and well-meaning persons found plenty to disagree with, and even dislike, in St. George.

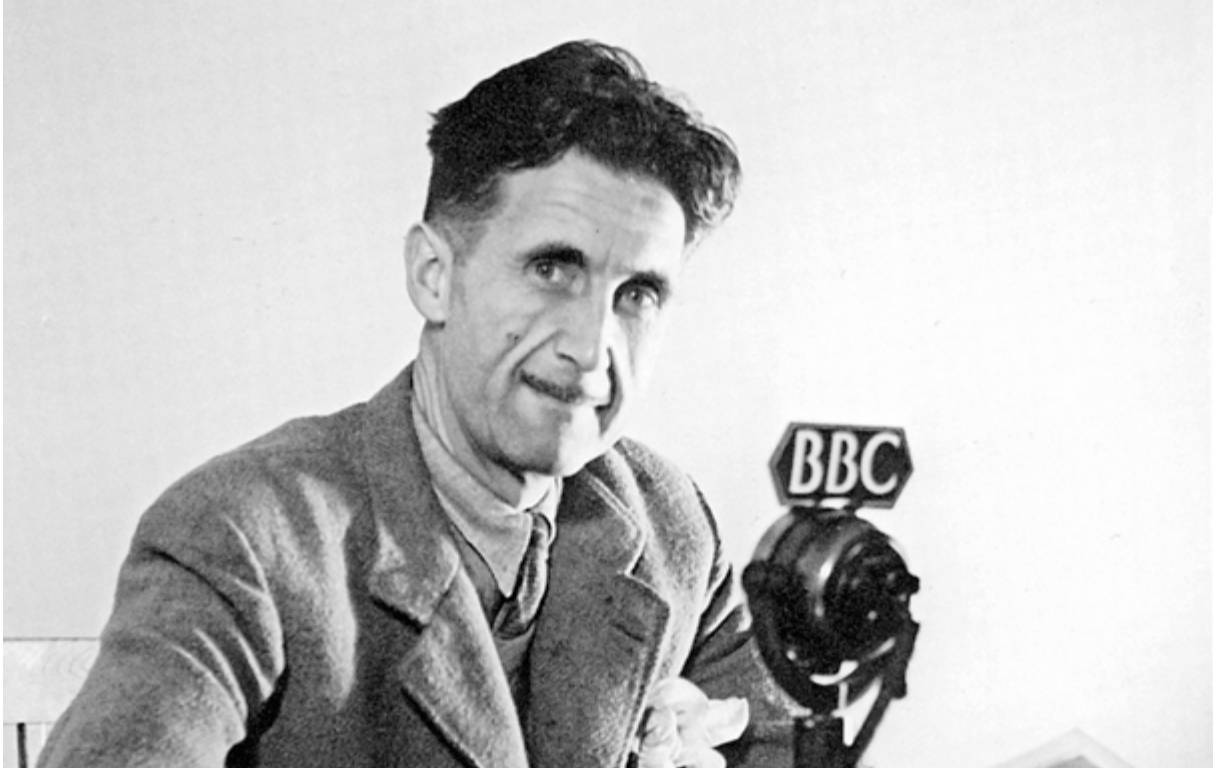
THE COLLECTED ESSAYS, JOURNALISM, AND LETTERS OF GEORGE ORWELL, VOLUMES 1–4

ED. SONIA ORWELL & IAN ANGUS
David R. Godine, Inc.
$19.95 each

HIS CHIEF ALLEGED OFFENSE WAS ONE HE DIDN'T in fact live long enough to commit. (He died of tuberculosis in January of 1950, age forty-six, a few months after 1984 was published.) English leftists (Deutscher, Williams, E. P. Thompson, et al.) deduced, mainly from that novel, that he would have taken America's side in the Cold War. What he actually said, though, was that if there were a hot war, he hoped the imperfectly democratic states of the West, rather than the totalitarian states of the East, would survive. Did this not terribly startling or objectionable declaration commit him to permanent uncritical support of American foreign policy, or at least to always finding reasons not to oppose it very vigorously, which was the characteristic stance of Cold War liberals? That seems to have been the assumption of his leftist critics.

There was also his inveterate antipathy toward Communism. He attacked British Communists and Communist sympathizers in season and out, so that the reader of these volumes may well tire of hearing it. Is he, the suspicion arises, kicking an underdog?

Now that the Soviet Union is long gone, it can be difficult to grasp the extraordinary malignity of Stalinism: the suffering inflicted on its subjects and the damage wrought on the Western democratic left. Its dishonesty, intolerance, and cruelty, expressed in famines, firing squads, and gulags, were fathomless. Even the fraction of these horrors



George Orwell

that was known at the time would have made sympathy, much less support, on Orwell's part impossible.

And his enmity was personal as well. As a volunteer on the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War, he saw the Soviets leverage their military aid into control of the government, followed by a purge of non-Communists. Thousands of Trotskyists, anarchists, and unaffiliated leftists were imprisoned and executed, including many of Orwell's comrades. He himself narrowly escaped a firing squad. The wonder is that he didn't become a right-wing avenging angel like, say, Whittaker Chambers and the cadre around *National Review*.

He might have done so eventually, it's true. (This was Norman Podhoretz's argument in a 1983 *Harper's* essay.) He was an ornery person, irritable and impatient, and he took an unholy pleasure in upbraiding his left-wing brethren. But he had seen too much of the British Empire and of the underside of capitalism to be anything but a leftist himself. He served as a colonial officer in Burma for five years and was a persistent advocate of Burmese and Indian independence. He *saw* the Burmese and Indians, as British imperialists (like Churchill) did not. He would, later on, have seen things that Cold War liberals and their successors (including the neoconservatives) did not. He would, for example, surely have seen the North Korean civilian population huddling underground in the 1950s, while overhead virtually every structure in the country was demolished, including hospitals and dams, by American bombs. He would have seen Cambodian and Laotian civilians living underground in the early 1970s under equally ferocious American bombing. In the 1980s he would have seen the civilian (including the religious) population of Central America terrorized by American-trained and -equipped death squads. In the 1990s he would have seen the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children and adults killed by American-spearheaded sanctions. And what he said about all these things would very likely have barred him from the pages of the *New York Times,* the *Washington Post,* the *Wall Street Journal*, and *Foreign Affairs* just as certainly as Noam Chomsky's similar pronouncements have barred him. Contrarian that he was, Orwell would probably have measured the adequacy of his criticism by the opprobrium it brought him in those respectable quarters.

Then again—Orwell does keep one on the *qui vive*, morally speaking—in a 1942 *Tribune* column, he defended the RAF's bombing of German civilians.

> Now, it seems to me that you do less harm by dropping bombs on people than by calling them "Huns." Obviously one does not want to inflict death and wounds if it can be avoided, but I cannot feel that mere killing is all-important. We shall all be dead in less than a hundred years, and most of us by the sordid horror known as "natural death." The truly evil thing is to act in such a way that peaceful life becomes impossible. War damages the fabric of civilization not by the destruction it causes (the net effect of a war may even be to increase the productive capacity of the world as a whole), nor even by the slaughter of human beings, but by stimulating hatred and dishonesty. By shooting at your enemy you are not in the deepest sense wronging him. But by hating him, by inventing lies about him and bringing children up to believe them, by clamoring for unjust peace terms which make further wars inevitable, you are striking not at one perishable generation, but at humanity itself.

As a general proposition—that "the slaughter of human beings" is less harmful than "stimulating hatred and dishonesty"—this seems a little dubious. Hatred and dishonesty can be overcome, after all, while there is something final about slaughtering people. But even if this were no more than a rationalization of British military policy (or, equally likely, a poke in the eye at pacifists, whom he could not abide), it would, in the circumstances, be pardonable. England in 1942 was resisting absolute evil, and not on its own behalf alone. The Battle of Britain was, like the contemporaneous siege of Leningrad and like very few other occasions in modern history, a supreme emergency. On the other hand, using poison gas (at Churchill's behest) on defenseless Arabs rebelling against British colonial rule in the 1920s; or bombing the dikes in North Korea (a war crime, pure and simple); or

dropping more bombs on three small, poor Southeast Asian countries than the United States dropped in all theaters in World War II—none of these would have seemed to Orwell justifiable as a response to a supreme emergency.

FOR THOSE WHO KNOW *1984*, ESPECIALLY WINSTON SMITH'S long interrogation in the Ministry of Truth, there are intriguing foreshadowings in these volumes. In the novel, Winston tries desperately to maintain his sanity by holding to a belief in objective truth—famously, the belief that two plus two is four, no matter what the Party says—a belief his nemesis, O'Brien, ridicules. Under protracted torture, Winston loses his grasp on truth and betrays the woman he loves. He is, finally, a husk, bleating his love for Big Brother.

Many critics have not known what to make of this utterly bleak ending, beyond suggesting that Orwell had a sadistic streak or conjecturing that his fatal illness darkened his mind. Most have assumed that the book is simply exhorting us to hold fast to objective truth—moral as well as historical and scientific—and warning us against moral and philosophical relativists like O'Brien (and, by implication, devious Communist commissars).

In a subtly brilliant essay called "Orwell on Cruelty" (in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 1989), the philosopher Richard Rorty offered a different interpretation. *1984* is, obviously enough, a satire on Communist totalitarianism. But Oceania was something more: a society beyond good and evil, in which the techniques of psychological and social control had been perfected and human nature had been abrogated. Orwell "convinced us," Rorty writes, "that there was a perfectly good chance that the same developments which had made human equality"—Orwell's frequently expressed hope—"technically possible might make endless slavery possible."

> He did so by convincing us that nothing in the nature of truth, or man, or history was going to block that scenario, any more than it was going to underwrite the scenario which liberals had been using between the wars. He convinced us that all the intellectual and poetic gifts which had made Greek philosophy, modern science, and Romantic poetry possible might someday find employment in the Ministry of Truth.

Orwell anticipated this conclusion a number of times, usually in passing, including these two striking passages. The first is from a 1939 review of *Russia under Soviet Rule* by N. de Basily:

> The terrifying thing about the modern dictatorships is that they are something entirely unprecedented. Their end cannot be foreseen. In the past every tyranny was sooner or later overthrown, or at least resisted, because of "human nature," which as a matter of course desired liberty. But we cannot be at all certain that "human nature" is constant. It may be just as possible to produce a breed of men who do not wish for liberty as to produce a breed of hornless cows. The Inquisition failed, but then the Inquisition had not the resources of the modern state. The radio, press censorship, standardized education, and the secret police have altered everything.

The second is from a *Tribune* column in 1944:

> The fallacy is to believe that under a dictatorial government you can be free *inside*.... Why is this idea false? I pass over the fact that modern dictatorships don't, in fact, leave the loopholes that the old-fashioned despotisms did; and also the probable weakening of the *desire* for liberty owing to totalitarian methods of education. The greatest mistake is to imagine that the human being is an autonomous individual. The secret freedom which you can supposedly enjoy under a despotic government is nonsense, because your thoughts are never entirely your own. Philosophers, artists, writers, even scientists, not only need encouragement and an audience, they need constant stimulation from other people.... Take away freedom of speech, and the creative faculties dry up.

Orwell has often been taken for a champion of common sense, objective truth, and ontological realism because of well-known passages like the following, from one of Winston's interior monologues: "Truisms are true, hold on to that! Stones are hard, water is wet, objects unsupported fall toward the earth's center.... Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two makes four. If that is granted, all else follows." Rorty gives the usual interpretation a slight twist. "I suggest that [Orwell] can be seen as saying that it does not matter whether 'two plus two is four' is true, much less whether this truth is 'subjective' or 'corresponds to external reality.' All that matters is that if you do believe it, you can say it without getting hurt. In other words, what matters is your ability to talk to other people about what seems to you true, not what is in fact true. If we take care of freedom, truth can take care of itself."

If we take care of freedom, truth can take care of itself. This was Rorty's political creed (sometimes he expressed it as "Take care of democracy, and truth will take care of itself"), and this essay was his audacious attempt to claim Orwell as a forebear. I think he succeeded.

WHATEVER ORWELL'S METAPHYSICAL PREDILECTIONS, HE was indisputably one of the twentieth century's foremost cant-hunters. He was extremely good at detecting and exposing ideological rationalizations, even well-meaning ones, from both the Right and Left. In the late 1930s, with Fascism looming, both Tories and Popular Front leftists proposed that Socialists put radical politics aside and urge class cooperation on the workers. (It sounds like the kind of thing that might have appeared in a *New York Times* editorial at any time during the Cold War.) Orwell was unmoved: "I do not believe that a man with fifty thousand pounds a year and a man with fifteen shillings a week either can, or will, cooperate. The nature of their relationship is, quite simply, that the one is robbing the other, and there is no reason to think that the robber will suddenly turn over a new leaf." So much for capitalism, though he had no more patience for "the suffocating stupidity of left-wing propaganda" produced by people "looking at the modern world through nineteenth-century spectacles"—i.e., Marxist ones.

Humbug (one of Orwell's favorite terms) has not notably declined since his time, and it's worth wondering which

subsequent terms, phrases, or notions Orwell's sardonic gaze might have lighted on. The Cold War furnished a rich harvest. From Dulles to Kissinger to Brzezinski to countless *Foreign Affairs* essays, "responsible" (another choice morsel of humbug) American officials worried about "stability" in important regions. The meaning of "stability" may be deduced from one of Kissinger's immortal utterances: "We had to destabilize Chile in order to stabilize it." Translation: we had to cooperate in overthrowing an elected government and plunging the country into years of murder, repression, and austerity in order to protect American investments, free business from government interference, and discourage other Latin American electorates from voting Socialist. The same concern for "stability" led to intimate involvement in the overthrow of insufficiently business-friendly or overly independent-minded regimes in Nicaragua, Iran, Guatemala, the Congo, Argentina, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Cambodia, and to the support of brutal but obedient regimes in South Korea, Thailand, South Africa, El Salvador, Honduras, Turkey, and elsewhere. American intervention for the sake of "stability" has in fact been the main source of global instability since World War II. How so many Americans manage not to know this would have flummoxed Orwell: for years now, poll after international poll has designated the United States the greatest threat to world peace. For several years in the '40s, Orwell wrote a "Letter from London" for *Partisan Review.* The contemporary equivalent to *PR* is, I suppose, the *New York Review of Books*. I suspect Orwell would have tried to publish a blistering essay there about the humbug of global "stability." Whether he would have succeeded, I don't know.

I imagine he would have been equally exercised by the right-wing theft of the word "free." The phrase "Free World" must be one of the most successful rhetorical sleights-of-hand in history. Among the countries denominated "free" by the State Department during the Cold War were Syngman Rhee's Korea, Shah Pahlavi's Iran, Anastasio Somoza's Nicaragua, Carlos Castillo Armas's Guatemala, Mobutu Sese Seko's Zaire, António Salazar's Portugal, Castelo Branco's Brazil, Jorge Rafael Videla's Argentina, Augusto Pinochet's Chile, Greece under the colonels, apartheid South Africa, and many others where the citizens were not free at all but American business operated with few or no restrictions. Forty years ago a celebrated right-wing intellectual explained in an influential essay that the unfree states in the Evil Empire were totalitarian, while those in the Free World were merely authoritarian, and therefore less bad, even though, during the Cold War, many more people, proportionally, were killed or imprisoned for political reasons in authoritarian Latin America than in totalitarian Eastern Europe.

The term "free markets" was not in vogue in Orwell's time (though in Volume 3 there appears an interesting and respectful review of Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*), but I think Orwell's gorge would have risen at the hypocrisy of contemporary conservatives and right-wing libertarians. I think he might agree with what I wrote in *Slouching Toward Utopia*:

Orwell was understandably indignant that one English publisher after another turned down *Animal Farm*. "If liberty means anything at all," he wrote, "it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear."

> If you have the misfortune to be a left-wing social critic, the most galling part of each day is encountering the ubiquitous self-designation of apologists for capitalism as champions of freedom. One day a Tea Party Congressman introduces the Economic Freedom Act, which would free the 4,700 people who pay it from the estate tax and the rest of us from Social Security and the minimum wage. The next day some foundation with "freedom" in its name gives an award to Charles Koch for his stalwart defense of Koch Industries' freedom to render sizable areas of West Virginia, Arkansas, and Louisiana uninhabitable. And every day the Congressional Freedom Caucus warns sternly that it will not rest until the tens of millions of Americans who cannot afford proper health care without assistance from the rest of us are free to go without it.

Orwell spent a lot of time down and out in Paris and London (see "How the Poor Die" in Volume 4) and living in the doss-houses in the north of England (see "*The Road to Wigan Pier* Diary" in Volume 1) in order to write books on those subjects. He had seen a vast amount of misery in those places, which he attributed (correctly, I think) to capitalism. He was quite bitter about it and probably would have taken a much harsher tone than I did.

Orwell also saw a good deal of cant and hypocrisy on the left. The English Communists were an easy target, proclaiming their independence but slavishly following every twist of Russian foreign policy. More surprising was his relentless criticism of English pacifists. In essays like "No, Not One" (from Romans 3:10: "There is not one that is righteous; no, not one") and "Pacifism and the War" (both in Volume 2), he insisted that pacifism was dishonest and "objectively" pro-Fascist. "The notion that you can somehow defeat violence by submitting to it…is only possible to people who have money and guns between themselves and reality"—or, as he sometimes put it, to island-dwellers protected by a powerful navy.

Criticizing adversaries as "objectively" this-or-that is tricky, however. For example, Orwell was understandably indignant that one English publisher after another turned down *Animal Farm*. "If liberty means anything at all," he wrote, in an often-quoted sentence, "it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear." But what if telling people certain truths induces ambivalence or confusion at a critical moment? What if telling them Soviet Russia was a tyranny would have made them less willing to support a second front? Would publishing *Animal Farm* have been "objectively" pro-Hitler? (In fact, the tide had turned in the East by 1944, when the book was published, but suppose it had been written two years

Orwell would probably have noted that the explosive growth of inequality in the United States has closely paralleled the explosive growth of the diversity industry.

earlier? Would that have altered the case? Is "free speech" a matter of circumstances rather than principles?)

MIGHT ORWELL'S SENSITIVE NOSE HAVE DETECTED A WHIFF of cant anywhere on the contemporary left? I suspect he would have cast a baleful eye on identity politics. He would, I think, be dubious about "diversity." Why do every college and corporation in America have a fleet of "diversity" officers? What is gained by ensuring—at enormous expense—that every student or employee is proud of his/her culture and that every other student or employee respects it? According to Walter Benn Michaels in *The Trouble with Diversity*, what is gained is the avoidance of class conflict. "The commitment to diversity is at best a distraction and at worst an essentially reactionary position.... We would much rather celebrate cultural diversity than seek to establish economic equality."

Orwell was moderately obsessed with class. He would probably have noted that the explosive growth of inequality in the United States over the past four decades has closely paralleled the explosive growth of the diversity industry, and would have drawn some conclusions. He might have asked: If there were two societies with the same Gini coefficient, but in one of them, the proportion of billionaires by race and gender matched that of the general population, would that society be morally better than the other? Or: If the ratio of CEO to median employee earnings was the same in two societies, but in one of them the proportion of CEOs by race and gender matched that of the general population, would that society be morally better than the other? I'm pretty sure that most diversity bureaucrats would answer "yes" to both questions, and that Orwell would have answered "no."

Orwell was fearless, so a tribute to him shouldn't pull any punches. I think he would suggest that there was something irrational about the way we enforce our most sensitive taboo: the N-word. From the wholesale banning of *Huckleberry Finn* to the many times teachers and civil servants have been censured, and in one case fired, for using the word "niggardly" (which has no etymological relation to the N-word) to the resignation under pressure recently of a Cambridge, Massachusetts, school committeewoman for using the N-word in a discussion of a proposed high-school course about the N-word, we have often made fools of ourselves and done disadvantaged African Americans no good. As the school superintendent summarized the Cambridge case: the committeewoman "made a point about racist language and used the full N-word instead of the common substitute, 'N-word.'... Although said in the context of a classroom discussion, and not directed to any student or adult present, the full pronunciation of the word was upsetting to a number of students and adults who were present or who have since heard about the incident." No one, however, as far as I am aware, has publicly expressed hurt feelings over the fact that the average net worth of African Americans in the Boston area is $8. (Eight, no zeros.) As Benn Michaels observes: "As long as the left continues to worry about [respect], the right won't have to worry about inequality."

Orwell wrote a particularly fine essay titled "Not Counting Niggers." For an Englishman in the 1930s, the word signified a non-white subaltern in one of the European colonial empires. The occasion of the essay was a book proposing that the democracies of Europe and the United States federate in order to deter Fascist aggression. The idea was getting much favorable attention, though no one really expected democratic statesmen to have the imagination or appetite for innovation on such a scale. But none of the liberals and leftists commending the idea seemed to notice that the far-flung British, French, Belgian, Dutch, and other colonies were to be incorporated in the new super-state as dependencies—as subject peoples, without change of status. So much for a federation of democracies. Orwell was indignant. "The unspoken clause is always 'not counting niggers.'"

> We always forget that the overwhelming bulk of the British proletariat does not live in Britain, but in Asia and Africa. It is not in Hitler's power, for instance, to make a penny an hour a normal industrial wage; it is perfectly normal in India, and we are at great pains to keep it so. One gets some idea of the real relationship of Britain and India when one reflects that the per capita annual income in England is something over eighty pounds, and in India about seven pounds. It is quite common for an Indian coolie's leg to be thinner than the average Englishman's arm. And there is nothing racial in this, for well-fed members of that race are of normal physique; it is due to simple starvation. This is the system which we all live on and which we denounce when there seems to be no danger of its being altered.

It is hard to imagine a more anti-racist essay, right down to its bitterly sarcastic title. (Another powerful one, "Marrakesh," occurs a few pages earlier in Volume 1.) It would be a pity if timidity or a lack of discrimination among educators kept it away from students merely because Orwell used "the full N-word."

"IN OUR TIME," ORWELL WROTE IN "POLITICS AND THE English Language" (Volume 4), "it is broadly true that political writing is bad writing." That essay was a small contribution to making bad political writing rarer. *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters* is a large contribution to making bad political thinking rarer, then and now.

GEORGE SCIALABBA's *most recent book is* Slouching Toward Utopia. *His* How To Be Depressed *will be published this spring by the University of Pennsylvania Press.*

ART & MATHEMATICS

Judy Brackett

In the museum she takes off running, jumps
into one of Thiebaud's slide-down-a-waterfall
streets, vertiginous & curvy, hops
into a fancy car teetering
on the crest of a hill, careens around
telephone poles & cars & UPS trucks,
down & around the steepest hills, makes a big
swoopy swerve through Marina Green, dodges
gamboling dogs, kite-flying kids,
tattooed nannies pushing strollers,
& heads straight on toward
white sails & whitecaps stippling the water,
bridges shining—one silver, one orange—
helps herself to sweet-potato pie
& a pinch of lemon-yellow 7-layer cake
& listens to Mr. Tweed-Cap-Know-It-All
intoning about Thiebaud's clever insertion of algebra
& geometry into the streets, the cars, even the desserts—
x + y, green (x), blue (y)—that building & that yield
sign a perfect parallelogram, he says,
& she is in & out of the paintings, eating sweets,
feeling the salty, foggy air swish by as the fancy car lurches
uphill again past the chocolate factory, & she thinks
about the fat-bottomed bowls cupping a scoop
of vanilla &, oh, that hot fudge, waxy coating
on her tongue, whipped cream as white as isosceles sails
on the bay in fog-filtered Thiebaud-ish light.

JUDY BRACKETT *lives in a small town in the northern Sierra Nevada foothills of California. Her poems have appeared in* Epoch, *the* Maine Review, Catamaran, Commonweal, Midwest Review, *the* Midwest Quarterly, Subtropics, Crab Orchard Review, *and elsewhere. Her poetry chapbook,* Flat Water: Nebraska Poems, *was published by Finishing Line Press in 2019.*

The Education of a Wonk

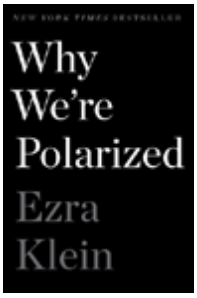
MAX FOLEY-KEENE

During the George W. Bush administration, a group of precocious bloggers stormed the progressive-media world. Dubbed the "Juicebox Mafia" for their youth, the gang included Matthew Yglesias, Dylan Matthews, and Brian Beutler, but had a clear ringleader: an affable, nerdy writer from California named Ezra Klein. Against the bumbling malevolence of the Bush administration and the perceived incompetence of the Democratic mainstream, the Juicebox Mafia was defined by a committed empiricism and faith in policy experts. Klein was scooped up by the *Washington Post* in 2009, where he founded its policy vertical, Wonkblog, which revelled in data and charts, economics and expertise. For one popular feature, the Wonkblog staff invited prominent politicians and public intellectuals, from Joe Biden to Thomas Piketty, to choose their "Graph of the Year." By this point, Klein and his cohort were writing while a kindred spirit sat in the White House. Barack Obama was a frequent reader of Klein's work, and his early governing philosophy shared a certain affinity with the Juicebox Mafia: gather lots of evidence, make good arguments, and put the smart people in charge. Let technocracy reign.

Of course, things didn't go according to plan. Congressional Democrats, who enjoyed majorities in both chambers, passed the Affordable Care Act, Obama's signature domestic policy accomplishment, by the narrowest of margins. Then came the backlash, a Tea Party wave that essentially foreclosed the possibility of major legislative action for the rest of Obama's tenure. Whether or not Obama and sympathetic journalists had the right arguments didn't matter: Republicans in Congress adopted an explicitly obstructionist strategy, and it worked. Today, the GOP controls the lion's share of the American state, and much of Obama's legacy—the Affordable Care Act's individual mandate, the Iran nuclear deal, the Paris Agreement on climate change—is in tatters.

And so, for the past several years, Klein has been trying to answer a question: What happened? How did the heady days of the early Obama administration give way to Trumpism? Why did coolheaded technocracy appear so incapable of lasting policy accomplishments? Why did earnest attempts at persuasion so often fall flat?

In pursuit of answers, Klein mostly traded economics and policy analysis for the insights of academic political science. The result is his useful but ultimately disappointing new book, *Why We're Polarized*. It's an ambitious project that tries to explain the "master story" of what's awry in American politics, summarizing research that interrogates the growing political polarization in the United States. Klein is a lively and conversational writer; he mostly succeeds in explaining specialized journal articles and academic-press books, even if his narrative occasionally resembles a stitched-together quilt of research abstracts. But as an effort to locate the fundamental defect in American politics, *Why We're Polarized* fails to live up to its stated, rather grand ambitions. The inability of our institutions to accommodate polarization is a serious *obstacle* to addressing the most pressing challenges we face—namely, a fossil capitalism that is swiftly ravaging the natural basis for its own existence, and the political forces arrayed in its defense—but it is not the master problem itself.



WHY WE'RE POLARIZED

EZRA KLEIN
Avid Reader Press
$28 | 366 pp.

Klein's argument is made up of two parts. First, he describes how the two parties became significantly more distinct, both ideologically and demographically, over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, and how that shift has changed the way people think and behave politically. The historical narrative he spins is a familiar one. By the middle of the past century, the two major American political parties were largely incoherent. The Democratic Party was an alliance between northern liberals, racial and ethnic minorities, and southern, conservative whites. In the 1950s, a Democratic voter casting a ballot for a pro-union, pro-civil rights Senate candidate was also casting a ballot for a Senate majority that included arch-segregationist Strom Thurmond. For political scientists at the time, this was a problem: political parties, in order to provide a meaningful cue to voters, should stand for something clear. The two parties would better serve the public by offering distinct platforms to which they could be held accountable.

Political scientists got what they were asking for. The New Deal coalition slowly broke apart, a split driven by the shifting partisan loyalties of conservative white voters, especially southerners, in response to the civil-rights legislation of the 1960s. "Democrat" for the

most part came to mean "liberal," and "Republican" came to mean "conservative." What's more, Klein argues, drawing on research by University of Maryland political scientist Lilliana Mason, our political identities have in the past several decades become mega-identities. That is, racial, religious, and regional identities increasingly "line up" with our political identities. The GOP is mostly white, mostly Christian, and disproportionately rural; the Democratic party is far more diverse, far more secular, and far more urban. It's increasingly rare for Americans to have identities that cut across, and thus moderate, their political identities—for example, a Republican who is also an atheist and a union member.

Klein marshalls this research to argue that polarization—especially so-called "negative polarization," which is driven by antipathy toward the other party—is far from incoherent. It makes sense for a Democrat to fear and loathe the GOP, as the GOP is authentically opposed to what the average Democrat believes in. More importantly for Klein, that average Democrat also disdains the GOP because it represents a set of social groups that rarely overlap with the Democratic coalition. Given the tendency of human beings to quickly form group bonds and distrust outsiders, a tendency Klein documents in exhaustive detail, it makes sense that engaged Americans aren't really responsive to arguments that challenge their political identities. For Klein, much of what we like to think of as "rational" political thinking, based on evidence and persuasion, is just an elaborate attempt at in-group protection.

In the book's second half, U.S. political institutions take center stage. Klein's contention is that they are simply incapable of functioning under the polarized conditions he describes; indeed, these institutions have built-in incentives to *further* polarize the public in an endless feedback loop. For example, political campaigns have come to realize that, despite rising numbers of people describing themselves as "independents," fewer and fewer people are actually persuadable. That means campaigns aim to activate their strongest, most polarized supporters. They do so by adopting increasingly dogmatic issue positions and rhetoric, which, of course, further polarizes the public.

Ezra Klein

In the book's strongest chapter, Klein notes that the past forty years or so have seen remarkable partisan parity in Congress. Unlike previous eras, control of one or both of its chambers is now up for grabs nearly every election, making large-scale bipartisan cooperation irrational. If a minority party doubts it has any real chance of taking the majority, its best hope of influencing public policy is to closely cooperate with the majority. But if a minority party has a shot at taking control in the near future, it will do everything it can to sabotage the majority with the hope of being returned to power. The American political system, with its abundance of veto points, makes such sabotage easy to do, essentially guaranteeing protracted periods of gridlock. Because they serve hyperpolarized bases of voters, who of course do not want anything in the way of bipartisan cooperation, neither of the two parties are ever really punished for sabotaging the other. There's no end to this pattern in sight.

There's much to commend in Klein's approach. He is largely right, I think, to embrace a "social group theory" of voter behavior, in which voters make decisions based less on ideology than on which candidates or parties seem most congenial with the social groups they belong to. He is also wise to home in on negative partisanship, a key fact about contemporary political life that helps explain why the two major parties have been relatively stable in their support, despite widespread dissatisfaction with both. Likewise, by treating partisan identities as mega-identities—combining the power of racial, regional, and religious loyalties—he does a lot to explain why, for example, the percentage of Americans who are comfortable with their child marrying someone of the opposite political party is at an all-time low. And Klein admirably avoids the trap, common to much writing on this topic, of treating both major parties as being polarized in equivalent ways. In fact, he correctly observes that Trump, in his gleeful stoking of white racial grievance, is far from a radical break with the contemporary Republican Party; rather, he writes, Trump is "the most authentic expression of its modern psychology."

But *Why We're Polarized* is also, at times, surprisingly sloppy. Take Klein's discussion of money in politics. He argues that there are two main kinds of campaign donors: super-rich "transactional" donors, who corrupt the American political system, and highly ideological small donors, who polarize it. For Klein, big-dollar transactional donors dominate the small stuff; they secure tweaks to the tax code or regulatory apparatus to benefit their bottom line. The "polarizers," however, propel the high drama of American politics—the big legislative fights, the grueling presidential campaigns.

This is almost laughably simplistic. For one thing, financial interests, by funding think tanks, research institutes, and university programs, have enormous say over what ideas are considered reasonable or mainstream in American politics. What's more, they are often implicated in the very polarization Klein decries. The ultra-wealthy will frequently attempt to exacerbate existing social divisions, especially along racial lines. For example, the primary beneficiary of the bipartisan war on "big government" was big business—and central to that campaign was a well-funded effort to trick millions of non-wealthy whites into believing they had fallen victim to a class of poor, non-white moochers taking advantage of government benefits. The so-called "transactionalists" had to polarize the public in order to protect and expand their privileges.

In the face of coordinated corporate power, how do regular folks have a shot at having their voices heard? Through organizational and fundraising tactics that Klein would describe as "polarizing." Pushing policies that take on the ultra-wealthy into the mainstream is essentially impossible without organized networks of highly ideological donors, voters, and activists. That is, a country without these countervailing "polarizers" is a country that has abandoned its governance to an economic and political elite—those who have the time, resources, and organizational capacity to effectively influence policy making.

Unfortunately, there isn't much room in Klein's model for new ideas to enter the political arena, win converts, and affect public policy. And it's when Klein discusses the futility of such attempts at persuasion that we most acutely feel his disappointment over the Obama years. In reference to his prior journalistic approach—marshaling evidence in an attempt to persuade rational, open-minded readers on policy issues—he laments that "once our political identities and interests push themselves in front of our cognition, that model of reasoning falls to pieces." But does it? It's certainly quite difficult to persuade extreme partisans to switch from an issue position strongly associated with one political identity to an issue position associated with an opposing political identity. But *what it means* to be a part of a certain identity group is constantly in flux; that is, there's plenty of room for writers, politicians, and activists to adjust the bounds of what a social group stands for, and therefore shift the broader, prevailing sense of what's politically possible.

Let me offer an example of how this can work. While on his book tour, Klein did an event with the author and former *Atlantic* writer Ta-Nehisi Coates. Coates, with his titanic essay "The Case for Reparations," dramatically changed what it means to identify as a racial progressive, making support for reparations something of a litmus test on the Left—and that's in no small part because he made an *argument* that people found persuasive. Further, because racial progressives comprise a significant portion of the Democratic primary electorate, numerous Democratic presidential candidates came out in favor of Coates's primary policy recommendation: H.R. 40, which would create a commission to explore how reparations might be paid. Klein, I think, is too quick to liken research on identity-protective cognition to "staring into an abyss." Persuasion isn't dead yet; it's just that it most often takes place within the confines of an identity group, or through making certain traits—such as economic class—more central to how people perceive their own social roles and behave in the political sphere.

It's easy to view Klein's intellectual shift over recent years as a wonkish optimism being bludgeoned by the difficulty of political change and succumbing to a decided pessimism. That's certainly part of the story. But Klein remains, despite all the Obama-era trauma, fundamentally an optimist about American politics. He basically admits as much in his final chapter on managing polarization, in which he proposes tweaks to make American politics just "a bit" better—after all, Ezra is quick to note, American politics has been far more oppressive, cruel, and racist in the past. He suggests reforms to democratize American politics (eliminating the Electoral College and granting Washington, D.C. statehood), protections to prevent partisan conflict from resulting in calamity (scrapping the debt ceiling), and measures to balance the power of the parties (guaranteeing both parties five seats on the Supreme Court, with a remaining five justices appointed, through consensus, by the partisan justices).

After implementing Klein's recommendations, we certainly would have a political system that is somewhat more *functional*. But is it markedly more just? Would the central problem really have been dealt with? We'd still have a horrific climate crisis bearing down on us; we'd still have a rapacious economic system that kills people every day; we'd still have a Republican Party that is, by Klein's own admission, a vehicle for white resentment, and a Democratic Party complicit in most of the major American crimes of the past several decades (the Iraq War, mass incarceration, a wholesale policy attack on the poor). Indeed, if we take Klein's suggestion to find areas where we can "lower the stakes" by guaranteeing the parties "equal power," we will have further entrenched two parties which are, as currently constituted, entirely incapable of achieving the dramatic social and economic transformation that justice requires. Certainly, taking on the forces of nativism and oligarchy is easier with functional democratic institutions. But there are numerous countries—the United Kingdom, for example—whose political institutions I'd far prefer to our own, but which remain fully susceptible to the right-wing nationalist movement currently dominating global politics.

There's a funny moment in the book where Klein describes how the two parties used to cooperate more closely. He gives two examples: Republican legislative support for Medicare in 1965, and Bill Clinton working with Republicans to cut welfare benefits in the mid-1990s. The political system "functioned" in both of these instances, in that it produced *outcomes*, but

what about the ideological (and moral) *content* of those outcomes? How did it come to be that, in 1965, a single-payer health-insurance system for elderly people was mainstream, but thirty years later, welfare rollbacks garnered bipartisan support? Explaining that dramatic shift involves explaining the end of the broad post-war truce between labor and management, and the economic and racial bases for the neoliberal turn. It requires telling a story about the political consequences of a transition in American capitalism, one which a polarization model of recent political history is largely incapable of explaining. Deeper than the rising polarization of the past several decades is a more profound fact: capitalists managed to escape the confines of social-democratic compromise and transform the priorities and ideologies of both major parties. Capitalism, as it currently exists, threatens the natural order that supports human civilization—and taking it on will require something more radical than getting rid of the filibuster.

Despite seemingly constant tumult, American politics these days is in many ways stuck. The parties in Congress are locked in a stalemate. Results in presidential elections are remarkably stable from year to year, with only the slightest of shifts deciding who prevails. But this is a historical aberration. It hasn't always been this way. There are, in fact, alternatives. Responding justly and humanely to the immense challenges ahead will likely require some kind of political realignment. It'll require politicians and activists—and, yes, writers and journalists and public intellectuals—working to activate new or dormant identities, and thus building coalitions broad enough to achieve reforms previously thought impossible. Political science and history can be quite useful in explaining the public as it currently exists, but avoiding calamity will mean calling forth a public that has yet to be born. Maybe Klein could be a part of that.

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BOOKS IN BRIEF

THE WEIL CONJECTURES

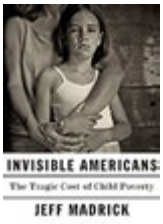
KAREN OLSSON
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
$26 | 224 pp.

"The Weil siblings both undertook to translate into language something beyond words, beyond symbols," writes Karen Olsson in *The Weil Conjectures*, a book that traces the lives of one of the twentieth century's most remarkable brother-sister pairs: the mathematician André Weil and the philosopher Simone Weil. Olsson, a math major turned writer, evokes the search for truth that both siblings persued—André through abstract calculation, Simone through activism and ascetic denial. In writing that recalls the Weil sister's own aphoristic style, Olsson shows us how their fates intertwined and diverged, with André finding fame during life, and Simone dying at thirty-four. In telling their stories, Olsson reminds us of the ancient, though often forgotten, idea that "mathematics was a bridge to the divine."

LIMA : : LIMÓN

NATALIE SCENTERS-ZAPICO
Copper Canyon Press
$16 | 80 pp.

Natalie Scenters-Zapico's narrator is both more and less than a woman in the poems of *Lima :: Limón*. She is the dinner she prepares for her *macho*, chiles burning her fingers and eyes, and the table on which it is eaten. She is a canvas for abuse; a porcelain doll come to life; a border; *a frutería* that sells lemons plucked from between her own ribs. She is her mother's daughter, telling the story of the terrible price paid by generations of women in and around Ciudad Juárez for the chance to make a dollar, to not be alone, or simply to live. Her collection is a story of shame, pain, and brutality, beautifully and fiercely told.



INVISIBLE AMERICANS

JEFF MADRICK
Knopf
$25 | 240 pp.

Impassioned as Jeff Madrick is in his diagnosis of child poverty in the United States, he's even more succinct in proposing a solution. By his plausible estimates, as many as one in three American children live below the poverty line, which means they lack many basics, but one above all: money. Emphasizing work for parents through income tax credits—U.S policy for the past forty years—has not alleviated the crisis. What will? Substantial cash grants to all families with children, no strings attached. Wealthier families would have the income taxed away, while those truly in need would truly benefit. Madrick points to socioeconomic research to support his case, while citing the success and popularity of other universal programs like Social Security and unemployment insurance. "These are what made America great," he observes. Do children deserve anything less?

Against the Infernalists

KAREN KILBY

David Bentley Hart is an unusual voice in contemporary theology. Though he has university theological training (a doctorate from the University of Virginia) and is generally well respected in the theological guild, he does not write in a typical academic style. He pronounces more widely and more confidently than current standards of scholarly specialization and caution encourage, and he does not bother with footnotes, or even give the names of contemporaries with whom he is in debate.

That All Shall Be Saved is not, then, an academic monograph. It is also not a textbook, nor an edifying piece of pastoral or spiritual writing. What it is, most fundamentally, is a polemic—a scathing, vigorous, eloquent attack on those who hold that that there is such a thing as eternal damnation

Hart aligns himself with what has mostly been the minority position in the history of Christianity (though possibly not in the first few centuries): belief in universal salvation. He draws particularly on the vision of Gregory of Nyssa, the fourth-century theologian and bishop of Cappadocia best known for his role in shaping the doctrine of the Trinity. In Nyssa's theology, what we find in the Bible is not a story that ends in a division into two camps, the saved and the damned, heaven and hell, but a story that ends in the fulfilment of what God has always envisioned: all of humanity—and indeed all rational creatures—drawn, in union with each other in Christ, into the glory that was always intended. There is still a place for hell in the vision Hart offers us, but no *eternal* place for it. It is possible to reject God's love, to alienate oneself from God, but that sinful capacity to refuse God is finite, and can never be the last word.

THAT ALL SHALL BE SAVED
Heaven, Hell & Universal Salvation

DAVID BENTLEY HART
Yale University Press
$26 | 232 pp.

However, most of Hart's energies do not go into setting out and defending this positive vision of the final victory of God and the salvation of all, but into attacking the alternative. The "infernalists," as he calls those committed to belief in the eternity of hell, take a position that is unnecessary, unbiblical, incoherent, and above all, he insists again and again, morally repugnant.

We are so used to assuming that eternal damnation is part of the Christian package, he maintains, that we dramatically misread the New Testament texts. Not only do we dismiss or interpret away all those passages that seem clearly to point to universal salvation (Hart lines up twenty-three of them at one stage in his argument), but we also fail to notice the kind of language Jesus used in relation to judgment. "I am quite sure," he writes, "that, had Jesus wished to impart a precise and literal picture of the Age to come, he could have done so. But in fact the more closely one looks at the wild mélange of images he employed…the more the picture dissolves into evocation, atmosphere, and poetry." Hart points readers to his own recently published translation of the New Testament, which in its unusual literal fidelity to the Greek restores the original ambiguities of some key texts.

The most intellectually dense strand of the book—and the most difficult for non-specialists to follow—is Hart's argument against the idea that any rational being might permanently choose evil. The density here comes from the fact that Hart is working within a philosophical and theological paradigm that was once mainstream for the Christian tradition but is now unfamiliar to most Christians, even the well-educat-

CHRONICLE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ed, unless they have formal theological training. If one accepts this paradigm (with its assumptions about the relation of intellect and will) about the fundamental ordering of all creatures towards God, and about the nature of evil as privation, then one should find it inconceivable, Hart insists, that any human or angel could continue forever to choose against God. The idea is simply incoherent. This is a genuine challenge that needs to be taken up and wrestled with by Thomists and others who work within this classic theological paradigm.

Hart believes that people have not noticed this and other forms of incoherence because "infernalist" belief has darkened the minds of those who hold it, encouraging them to appeal to analogy, mystery, and paradox to cover over nonsense and contradiction. His biggest theme is not intellectual incoherence, however, so much as moral repugnance. It is to this that he turns again and again. The majority view is manifestly "odious" and the acceptance of it morally indefensible. The attempt to believe in eternal damnation has corrupted the moral imagination of Christians, causing it to "bend and lacerate and twist itself" in all kinds of terrible ways.

One explanation for the polemical tone of *That All Shall Be Saved* lies here: Hart is writing a book that, as he sees it, should not need to be written. The impossibility of a loving God damning anyone to an eternity of torment is so clear to a properly functioning moral instinct that it should not be necessary to go into complex biblical interpretation or philosophical analysis to settle the question. And Hart is constantly trying to remind his readers of this, to break through the resistance to the morally obvious.

In my view extended polemic is usually not a useful or responsible way for theologians to go about their work. But in this case I wonder whether there is some justification. Many ordinary Christians, and indeed many theologians, are in fact universalists of one kind or another, but they can often seem to be on the back foot, apologetic, under suspicion, their orthodoxy and seriousness about Christian faith in need of defense. Hart's polemic helps shift the burden of proof, turning, at least for a moment, the question and the suspicion against the "infernalists." It is a forceful intervention that may usefully rebalance the debate.

Still, the rhetorical fireworks and polemical vigor do come at a cost. Non-specialists will be left with a rather distorted impression of contemporary theology. Hart paints himself as a lonely, embattled hero and presents the current state of theology rather too pessimistically. He also deals with a fairly common position closer to his own—"hopeful universalism," the belief that we are permitted to *hope* (but not to be certain) that hell is empty—with only a dismissive couple of pages. To give full force to his rather pugnacious rhetorical gifts, it suits Hart to present himself as surrounded by fools and sadists, but he has no shortage of potential theological allies—and not only in the fourth century.

KAREN KILBY *is the Bede Professor of Catholic Theology at the Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University in England.*

Sustainable Decadence

ANDREW J. BACEVICH

I read *The Decadent Society* while on a weeklong cruise from Miami to Miami, stopping at various sun-bleached points in between. Future historians may well classify such voyages back to the place where you first embarked as the very embodiment of early twenty-first-century bourgeois decadence, with food and drink, entertainment and diversions, all available in seemingly endless supply. With chapter titles such as "Sclerosis," "Sterility," "Repetition," "Comfortably Numb," and "Kindly Despotism" ("*No jeans in the dining room after 6:00 p.m., please.*"), Ross Douthat's new book, *The Decadent Society*, seemed particularly apt as I considered whether or not to make another pass through the buffet line before heading to the bar for the extended happy hour.

It is not my intention to have fun at Douthat's expense, however. He is, in my judgment, the only *New York Times* columnist regularly worth reading—this due in no small part to his sturdy refusal to succumb to Trump Derangement Syndrome. Indeed, his new book pays refreshingly little attention to our forty-fifth president. Donald R. Trump is "fundamentally more farcical than threatening," he writes, a point with which I heartily agree.

The Decadent Society offers a fresh take on an old subject: the decline of Western civilization, with the United States leading the pack. Douthat writes from the perspective of a Catholic conservative Gen Xer at the top of his game. To this semi-senescent Catholic conservative Boomer, the resulting critique is original, insightful, and largely persuasive.

Decadence, as Douthat uses the term, consists of "economic stagnation, institutional decay, and cultural and intellectual exhaustion" combined with "a high level of material prosperity and technological development"—not bad as a broad description of our current situation. A vibrant society, Douthat believes, creates, discovers, and expands. Until well past the midpoint of the twentieth century, the West generally and the United States specifically exhibited these qualities. Around the time my fellow Boomers reached maturity, however, anomie and stasis set in, with the results now everywhere evident. "Resignation haunts our present civilization," Douthat writes, with "therapeutic philosophies and technologies of simulation" having displaced passion, conviction, and faith. Overstated? Perhaps, but not wrong.

THE DECADENT SOCIETY
How We Became the Victims of Our Own Success

ROSS DOUTHAT
Avid Reader Press
$27 | 272 pp.

Yet apart from cruise ships that cater to a mostly white clientele searching for an escape from terminal malaise, what is the evidence of decadence? Douthat cites several factors, but I found most interesting his reflection on the declining birthrate in the United States and throughout most of the developed world. "Below-replacement fertility," he writes, "is the fundamental fact of civilized life in the early twenty-first century." It is also "an inevitable corollary of liberal capitalist modernity," welcomed in some quarters as a predicate to personal liberation, especially for women, and as necessary to counter the threat of global overpopulation.

But for Douthat "the empty cradle" fosters a host of problems. Just a half-century ago, it was more or less taken for granted that building a traditional family was the foundation for living a fruitful life. Today, it is one option among many. Family is whatever I say it is. The same goes for you. And you can change your mind whenever it suits you. This describes the freedom that decadence allows.

Yet among the consequences, Douthat writes, "men and women seem to be having more and more trouble successfully and permanently pairing off." Today sex itself may be falling out of favor, with information technology offering "virtual alternatives to old-fashioned copulation." As families become smaller, discretionary, and disposable—a trend that Douthat calls "postfamilialism"—loneliness and alienation increase. The relationship, he insists, is causal.

Furthermore, as birthrates fall, average age goes up. Aging societies, according to Douthat, tend to be risk-averse and are therefore less dynamic and less creative. While immigration can offset these effects, it comes with its own complications, contributing to the sort of racial, ethnic, and class divisiveness so much in evidence today in the United States and in many other parts of the West.

BANKSY / ALAMY

Douthat is not suggesting that returning to the days of Ozzie and Harriet (who, after all, had only two children) will cure all of society's ills. Nor is his critique confined to issues related to family. He dissects in detail the "consistent ineffectuality in American governance," the ideological polarization of the two main political parties ("the most decadent part of a decadent system"), Hollywood's preference for formulaic blockbusters and remakes of whatever sold two decades ago, the reliance on drugs to tranquilize untranquil youngsters, the onset of pervasive "religious torpor," the rise of the surveillance state, the anti-democratic impact of an arrogant and insular meritocracy, and the myriad insidious effects of advanced technology clogging our daily lives like a particularly virulent form of kudzu.

A skeptical reader might charge that Douthat sometimes presses his argument a bit further than his evidence will support. I myself tend to think that he gives short shrift to the medical advances that are transforming health care in America. (No more Ozzie-and-Harriet –era dentistry for me, thank you.)

Is a decadent America in danger of coming apart at the seams? Read *Times* commentators other than Douthat and you might think so, especially if, God forbid, you-know-who should win reelection come November. Douthat himself rejects any such dire forecasts, arguing that in the United States today "drugs and suicide are far more serious temptations than political radicalism and revolutionary violence." I think he's right. Whatever one may think of Bernie Sanders, he is no radical. And the constitutional order will survive even another four years of Trump.

As for decadence itself, Douthat speculates that it may prove to be remarkably sustainable. He envisions the United States and other Western nations being subjected to an "endless autumn." Creativity, warmth, and hope will be in short supply, but there will be time to spare and, for some, money to burn. In his conclusion, Douthat proposes various antidotes to decadence, none of them especially persuasive. So cruise line CEOs take heart: business prospects appear bright—assuming, that is, that the coronavirus doesn't sink us first!

ANDREW J. BACEVICH *is president of the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. His most recent book is* The Age of Illusions: How America Squandered Its Cold War Victory.

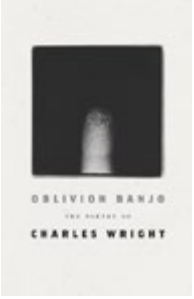
Lord of the Leftover

SUSAN L. MILLER

The poetry of Charles Wright achieves a rare feat: it's high art disguised as plain speech. It's a poetry that quietly contemplates a world beyond the self, the ordinary, and the daily, while somehow remaining immersed in all of those things. *Oblivion Banjo*, a generous selection drawn from his whole career, demonstrates Wright's unswerving dedication both to questions of purpose and to his unique form of composition. Sadly, it may be his final statement; in a 2016 interview he told Lisa Russ Spaar that he has retired from writing.

From his early beginnings as a writer, Wright's concerns have been nature, place, mortality, memory, history, and God. In fact, all his poems can be seen as part of a single lifelong project, one continuous sequence made up of other sequences (in a collection titled *Appalachia*, he began referring to his poems collectively as the "Appalachian Book of the Dead").

His earliest books, *Hard Freight* and *Bloodlines*, show a writer at play in modes and forms that don't often appear in his later work. "The New Poem" feels like an exercise: an attempt to define poetry that seems borrowed from an early modern tradition, perhaps Pound or Williams. (Wright served in the military and was stationed in Italy; his time there resonates through all his work—it's where he discovered Pound.) Other early poems echo Whitman's phrasing. Some offer personal narratives ("Virgo Descending"), which Wright mostly avoids in later work. "Tattoos" has twenty sections, and provides endnotes for each. Wright's later work dispenses with notes and trusts the reader to deal with everything from Italian phrases to Chinese poetry. One uncharacteristic poem records Wright's being molested by a school janitor in kindergarten. Wright is the last poet I'd expect to address such a subject; his poetry is so reliably lyrical that this confessional mode feels like an odd-sized shoe he's trying on. He is customarily reflective about it, though: "And if that hand, like loosed lumber, fell / From grace, and stayed there? We give, / And we take it back. We give again…"



OBLIVION BANJO
CHARLES WRIGHT
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
$50 | 784 pp.

It isn't that his poetry is impersonal—it's just that it doesn't usually rely on narrative, and Wright rarely says "I" because we're already right there with him, sharing his perceptions. Images and reflections are juxtaposed in surprising ways, and the things of this world ignite questions, philosophies, and ideas. In *China Trace*, Wright begins for the first time to push his indented lines halfway across the page. In "Reunion," he asserts "I write poems to untie myself, to do penance and disappear / Through the upper right-hand corner of things, to say grace." The poems in this collection juxtapose the language of religion with the strangeness of the ordinary world. Wright's Episcopal education, and especially the Book of Common Prayer, underlie his spiritual quest. "Give me a sign," he pleads in "T'Ang Notebook" from *The Other Side of the River*; "show me the blessing pierced in my side." But his faith is eclectic and unorthodox. In "A Journal of English Days," from *Zone Journals*, he writes that "God is an abstract noun." In the same poem, he invokes the Buddha and seems to inhabit his body. In Italy, Wright meditates so frequently on the Madonna that one might take him for a Catholic; he frequently uses reliquaries as similes. But Wright's main concern is not so much with religion itself as with the divine. In "Ars Poetica II" from *Appalachia*, he writes, "God is the fire my feet are held to."

Not that Wright is always high-toned and serious. Just as frequently his poems are weird and funny. Right after "GET RIGHT WITH GOD / JESUS IS COMING SOON" appears on the first page of *The Other Side of the River*, Wright tells a story so filthy that I can't repeat it here. In *Black Zodiac*, the poet's mortal body appears: "Something will get you, the doctor said, / don't worry about that. / Melancholia's got me, / Pains in the abdomen, pains

down the left leg and crotch." He's as likely to talk about Milton Avery or Mark Rothko as Titian, finding something worthy in each. His hometown, Charlottesville, shows up a lot, as does Locust Avenue, the street where he lives. His late titles can be comic or bizarre: "Backyard Boogie Woogie," "Sun-Saddled, Coke-Copping, Bad-Boozing Blues," "Hasta la Vista Buckaroo," "Dude." Or they quote American music—Bob Dylan's "I Shall Be Released," Tom Waits's "This World Is Not My Home, I'm Only Passing Through," Townes van Zandt's "Well, Roll on Buddy, Don't You Roll Too Slow."

Littlefoot, a book-length poem about his seventieth year, takes risks that the younger Wright avoided. The American music is still there, brief licks of the Rolling Stones or Patsy Cline's "You Belong To Me," but the songs that appear most in this book are hymns. "*Precious memories, how they linger, / how they ever flood my soul,*" quotes Wright, breaking the line and indenting it as if it were one of his own. Or he half-hears "Leaning on the Everlasting Arms": "*Leaning on Jesus, leaning on Jesus, / leaning on the everlasting love*"—and follows it up with "That's a tough lean, Hernando." He rescues "a fugitive last verse" from Flatt and Scruggs's "Reunion in Heaven": "*I am longing to look in the face of my Savior / And my loved ones who have gone, they are waiting for me.*"

All this fervent feeling—no less clearly felt for its use of quotation—is balanced by mourning and doubt. Age makes Wright reflective, less sure of another world: "We're not here a lot longer than we are here, for sure," he writes in section 1. "I will go to my resting place / and will not be born again. / I am what is scattered and not gathered up" (section 2). Later, in section 23, he falters: "Lord of the sunlight, / Lord of the leftover, Lord of the yet-to-do, / Handle my heaven-lack, hold my hand." Later still he calls the soil "our destination, / our Compostela. / We rub its rock for luck, and slip inside to get warm / As though, like our grandfathers before us, / we lie down in our own hearts." In section 34 he asks, "Is there an emptiness we all share? / Before the end, I mean. / Heaven and earth depend on this clarity, / heaven and earth." The book finishes—unbelievable! How does he get away with this?—with the entire text of the Carter Family song "Will You Miss Me When I'm Gone?" Perhaps Wright, a Southerner deeply familiar with old mountain music, sees this song as a birthright of sorts. And who are we to disagree?

Wright's later books, *Sestets* and *Caribou*, go back to his earlier mode of reining in sentiment. *Sestets* represents a formal tightening, each poem really only six lines—but six Wright lines, with those stair-step indentations. In his final poem, he writes, "I tried to make a small hole in my life, something to slip through / to the other side," and ends the poem with a question: "Whose darkness has closed our eyes?" It feels right that a poet whose work emerged out of early grief (his mother died at fifty-three, and she haunts all his books) has reached an acceptance of his own death, with his wonder still intact.

Oblivion Banjo is a major work of American poetry by a poet who draws the reader into the inner workings of his imagination as few others do. Hundreds of years from now, if American poetry is still being read, I believe that Wright's work will survive as a testament to the power of language to navigate and chart one complex soul. As he says, early on, in "Chinese Journal," from *Zone Journals*,

> To find one word and use it correctly,
> providing it is the right word,
> Is more than enough.
> An inch of music is an inch and a half of dust.

SUSAN L. MILLER *is the author of* Communion of Saints: Poems *(Paraclete Press). She teaches creative writing at Rutgers University and lives with her family in Brooklyn, New York.*

Charles Wright

HOLLY WRIGHT / FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

Bread Arrives

PATRICK HENRY

In early 2011, Fr. Daniel Berrigan, SJ asked me and my spouse to come to Manhattan. We were to join him for the annual Pax Christi Stations of the Cross, which takes place in New York every Good Friday. I had never heard of the event, nor had I read Berrigan's book, *Stations: The Way of the Cross*.

In this moving collection of poems (with terracotta reliefs by Margaret Parker) the streets of lower Manhattan constitute a modern-day Calvary, the fallen homeless recalling Christ's three falls on the way to the Crucifixion. Those still standing form a march of the living dead. There are beggars on buses, poor people pushing their belongings in shopping baskets, women living in the underground subway stations. We follow them "with every step we take in public, in every neighborhood," tracing the *via dolorosa* of John Doe, as he picks up his cross on the corner of Second Avenue and Nameless Street. At the Ninth Station, John Doe falls for the third and final time—"John-without-any-dough," we might call him, fallen, penniless, and abandoned. "These homeless," Berrigan writes, "live out in dreadful, literal detail, the poverty we would rather conceal from God [and] from ourselves." But they do so with great dignity and faith, inspiring compassion, and transforming the *via dolorosa* into a "school of mercy."

So on April 22, 2011, together with Berrigan, we began our Stations of the Cross in Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza near the United Nations on the East Side of Manhattan. There, we prayed for peace among nations, a world without war, and the abolition of nuclear weapons. Later, at the Times Square Army Recruiting Station, we repeated these prayers for all those who die on the cross of militarism, invoking God's mercy on soldiers in all armies, prisoners of war, and those held in solitary confinement. In front of a movie theater, we prayed to stop the glorification of violence, and for the estimated 1 million annual victims of sexual trafficking. Standing next to several expensive restaurants, we prayed for those who walk the streets hungry, the 47 million Americans dependent on food stamps, the twenty thousand homeless children in New York City, and the dozens of individual homeless people we passed on our way. In front of a bank, we prayed for economic justice: not only for an end to financial greed and the relentless quest for profits, but for a fairer distribution of wealth, for health care, and for a living wage for all.

When we began our walk near the UN, there were roughly two hundred of us. We distributed handouts to anyone who asked what we were doing. Our fliers read:

We are praying here on 42nd Street so that we recall that Jesus's Way of the Cross was a public event. We stop and pray along this street at fifteen places that reflect the suffering and injustice in our world. We remember that Jesus welcomed all to the table—a table of love and forgiveness, of peace and reconciliation, of care and compassion; a table representing the belief that all are welcome regardless of race, creed, gender, sexual orientation, place of birth, and class. We walk with victims of genocide and abuse, discrimination and poverty, women and children, the unborn and those condemned to die. We invite you to join us, no matter what your faith. Let us pray together for peace in our hearts and in our world.

By the time we finished, at the fifteenth station, our number had grown to six hundred.

Berrigan's non-dualistic vision allowed him to find Christ in the wretched of the earth: the imprisoned, the homeless, the destitute, the dying, the outcasts, the marginalized, the bullied, the broken, and the desperate. They too are members of Christ's mystical body, and they will always be with us. "Sometime in your life, hope [that] you might see one starved man, the look on his face when the bread finally arrives," writes Berrigan in his book *Love, Love at the End*. "Christ is merciless about the poor," he continues:

He wants them around—always and everywhere. He's condemned them to live with us. It's terrifying. I mean for us, too…. Like the look of Christ, the poor man strips us down to the bone. And, then, if we're lucky, something dawns—even on us. Why, we're the poor. The reel plays backward, everything's reversed when the Gospel is in the air…. But for the poor, we'd never know who we are…Christ guaranteed it—I don't know why. The poor you always have with you. Like a marvelous majestic legacy of God. His best possession, in our hands. Undeserved like the Eucharist…They were the workers of corporal mercy…. They save even us. They carried fresh bread to stale lives.

That Good Friday in Manhattan in 2011, in the faces of the poor, Christ indeed gave us bread to eat.

PATRICK HENRY *is Cushing Eells Emeritus Professor of Philosophy and Literature at Whitman College. He is the author of* We Only Know Men: The Rescue of Jews in France during the Holocaust *(2007) and the editor of* Jewish Resistance Against the Nazis *(2014).*

Jan Gossart, *Christ Carrying the Cross,* c. 1520–1525

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LAST SUPPER
William Glaser Wilson, 2017

I stay away from the reductive "Who, What, When, Where" of most photographs I make, wanting to preserve their magic and mystery. But this photograph in particular might be exempt from my rule. It was taken at a small Bible-based rehabilitation center in Georgia. One of my family members struggles with addiction, and I've always been intrigued by treatment that incorporates the spiritual world. The sun-bleached reproduction of the Last Supper right above the center's cafeteria table was one of the only pieces of art I saw there. It was a moment when everything lined up right.

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