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LETTERS

Chatting with Francis, the church & the Jews

FRANKOPHILE

Your "Chat with Pope Francis" (November 15) was a great spoof! Warmest congratulations to the editors. The introductory sentence alone is a gem—from the three translations to the discarded copy and the final reconstruction "from memory." And the note in the zucchetto—blessing it and tossing it back—*priceless*. I'm still laughing out loud over the lines "I picked up so many bad habits in my Jesuit days" and "Please, call me Frank." One more reason to love being Catholic. Who else can fully enjoy this marvelous writing? I suspect Pope Francis himself would be your greatest fan. Only in *Commonweal* would this be possible. The editors deserve a raise—but then, at *Commonweal* that would be impossible.

ADELE LEGERE
Chicago, Ill.

TEXT & CONTEXT

In his long, appreciative, yet in places critical review of David Nirenberg's *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* ("Through a Glass Darkly," September 27), John Connelly rightly insists on the importance of "context" in interpreting ideas and positions. At the end of the review, however, he makes a sweeping assertion that, to my mind, errs precisely by ignoring context.

Connelly claims that Benedict XVI, in revising the Good Friday Prayer for the Jews—that they "acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Savior of all men and women"—"did not see the contradiction" of the prayer "with the teaching of Vatican II." Unfortunately, Connelly does not indicate which teaching of Vatican II he believes the prayer contradicts. Instead, it appears that Connelly here fails to do justice to the full context and content of the council's teaching.

Thus *Nostra Aetate* itself insists: "It is the duty of the preaching church to proclaim the Cross of Christ as the sign of God's universal love and the source of all grace." Moreover, *Ad Gentes*, on the church's missionary activity, teaches:

> Christ and the church, which bears witness to him through the preaching of the gospel, transcend every narrowness of race and nationality and so cannot be considered foreign to anyone or to any place. Christ himself is the truth and the way, which the preaching of the gospel opens up to all people, when it speaks to them the words of Christ himself: "Repent and believe the good news.

And, of course, *Lumen Gentium* begins with the joyful proclamation of Christ as "the light of the nations."

One could go on citing other documents of the council, but the above should suffice to counter Connelly's claim that "one of our time's leading theologians" [Joseph Ratzinger] failed to appreciate the council's teaching in this regard. For, if Christ is, as the council clearly affirms, the "light of the nations," "the source of all grace," "the truth and the way," then it is completely consonant with that persuasion to pray that all people, including the Jewish people, come to realize this truth and share fully this grace. Indeed, is it not an imperative of discipleship so to pray? The Good Friday Prayer, I suggest, does nothing other than conform the church's *lex orandi* to its *lex credenda*—both of which find their sustaining center in Christ.

(REV.) ROBERT P. IMBELLI
Newton, Mass.

THE REVIEWER RESPONDS

It is one thing for the church to proclaim the good news of Christ, another for the Jewish people to "acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Savior of all men and women." The former is the church's voca-

continued on page 6

From the Editors

The Threat of Peace

Negotiations resume this week between Iran and the West over lifting economic sanctions in return for verifiable measures on the part of the Iranian government to limit or dismantle its uranium enrichment program. The sanctions, which have prevented Iran from selling much of its oil, frozen its foreign assets, and limited its access to the international financial system, have devastated the country's economy. Some critics of the sanctions policy orchestrated by the Obama administration, such as Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, insisted it would never work. Yet it now appears that the mullahs are desperate to seek relief, and the recently elected Iranian president, Hassan Rouhani, has pledged to resolve the nuclear issue within six months. He seems to have the backing, at least for the moment, of supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. How long Khamenei and hardliners in the Revolutionary Guards will continue to support Rouhani's overtures is anyone's guess, but this opportunity to roll back Iran's nuclear program while forestalling the possibility of war should not be forfeited because of the belligerent posturing of Netanyahu and hawks on Capitol Hill. After the Iraq fiasco, the United States has an obligation to exhaust every diplomatic avenue before using force.

Iran insists that its nuclear industry is intended only for peaceful purposes. But it would be irresponsible to take Iranian promises at face value. Iran remains a brutally repressive regime, as well as a source of much of the violent turmoil in the region; the threat it poses both to Israel and to its Sunni Arab neighbors should not be minimized. Still, almost by definition, most efforts to avoid war involve dealing with dangerous and untrustworthy foes. Consequently, confidence-building steps are necessary. Led by Secretary of State John Kerry, the international community has proposed an interim agreement to test the regime's real intentions. The deal would involve a temporary lifting of some sanctions in return for the suspension of Iran's high-grade enrichment program for a six-month period, something the Iranians have already taken steps toward doing. Assuming the interim deal proves stable, a more permanent agreement would open all of Iran's nuclear facilities to rigorous inspection and force the regime to render harmless its stockpile of highly enriched uranium. The goal is to prevent Iran from developing a uranium or plutonium enrichment capacity that would allow it to quickly construct a nuclear weapon at some point in the future.

An interim deal was nearly completed earlier this month but fell apart when France objected to certain aspects of the proposal, especially the Iranians' insistence that construction continue on a heavy-water nuclear reactor. Should that facility come online, it would indeed make it easier for the Iranians to make a "sprint" to a nuclear weapon. Prime Minister Netanyahu has also been a vociferous opponent of any interim deal, claiming that if sanctions are lifted even temporarily it will be impossible to re-impose them. Netanyahu and some in Congress want the sanctions tightened further, arguing that only the harshest pressure can force the Iranians to make meaningful concessions. Given his previous objections to the administration's Iran policy, Netanyahu's newfound faith in sanctions is curious, to say the least. Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States are opposed to any deal at all, fearing the United States is extracting itself from the Gulf region and leaving them alone to confront the Iranian threat.

Diplomacy rarely succeeds unless each party offers the other a way to save face with hardliners at home. In that light, the sort of interim agreement Secretary Kerry is proposing seems worth the limited risks involved. France's concerns should be addressed, but should not derail efforts at confidence-building. Should negotiations fail and Iran resume its high-grade enrichment programs, military confrontation of some kind is almost inevitable. A war between Iran and either the United States or Israel would plunge an already tumultuous region into even greater chaos, while wreaking havoc with an international economic system still dependent on Middle East oil. Sanctions, followed by tough but realistic negotiations, remain the best option. Saber-rattling on the part of neocons in the United States or militarists in Israel only feeds mutual suspicion and heightens tension. For both moral and strategic reasons, bombing Iran is the worst possible option. Nearly every military assessment has concluded that an attack will strengthen the regime's resolve while setting back its nuclear program only a few years. Those who have long opposed the administration's sanctions policy should not now be given veto power over diplomatic efforts that the sanctions made possible. Congress must not throw up frivolous last-minute obstacles to either an interim or long-term agreement. The American people do not want to fight another war in the Middle East, and they will hold accountable politicians who avoid the hard decisions peacemaking requires. ■

November 19, 2013

tion; the latter involves the betrayal of a different and distinct vocation. Twenty centuries after Christ's time on earth we know that those who follow Christ are not Jews. In his translation for the little-used Latin version of the Good Friday prayers, Benedict XVI was in effect praying that Jews cease being Jews.

It is a matter of freedom of conscience if this Jew or that Jew converts to Christianity, and of course all Christian churches welcome newcomers, but that is not what Benedict's prayer is about. Look at the interviews in *God and the World*, where then-Cardinal Ratzinger said that Christ is the "Jewish Messiah," and that Catholics therefore believe that Jews must "say yes" to this Messiah—not as individuals, but as an entire people. This must have been what young Ratzinger learned in seminary in the 1940s.

In fact, according to the teaching of Vatican II, Catholics are not compelled to look forward to the day when "Israel" says yes to Christ. In the summer of 1964 the council fathers rejected a draft (put forward by conservatives close to Paul VI) that contained the following words: "The church waits with unshaken faith and deep longing for the entry of that [Jewish] people into the fullness of the people of God established by Christ." The next year they approved a text that included the following: "The church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and 'serve him shoulder to shoulder.'" The latter formulation contained no script for how God or the Jews were supposed to behave at the end of time.

But if there had to be a new Good Friday prayer in Latin, why did the pope not simply translate the one that Catholics have used in the vernacular since 1970, which does not suffer from such presumption? It reads as follows:

> Let us pray for the Jewish people, the first to hear the word of God, that they may continue to grow in the love of his name and in faithfulness to his covenant.
>
> Almighty and eternal God, long ago you gave your promise to Abraham and his posterity. Listen to your Church as we pray that the people you first made your own may arrive at the fullness of redemption. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The spirit of this prayer is very different from that of Benedict's. It reveres Jewish faithfulness to a covenant that exists, rather than speculating impiously about what God might desire in the future.

But the Tridentine Rite not only gives God pointers on how his will should be done, it has the effect of impeding the spread of the gospel by involving the church in duplicity. *Nostra Aetate*, which is authoritative church teaching, says that God does not repent the "calls he makes" (Rom 11:28–29). These words have been understood (for example multiple times by John Paul II) to mean that God's covenant with the Jews remains valid. Why then should Catholics pray to God to undo the existence of a people with whom he is united in an eternal bond?

JOHN CONNELLY

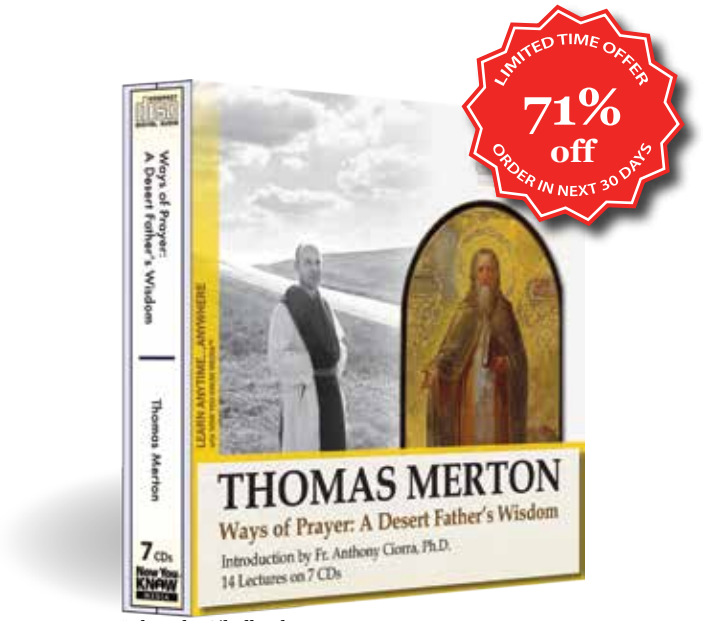
NO STRINGS ATTACHED

I thoroughly enjoyed Mollie Wilson O'Reilly's piece "Wild Thing: Taming My Two-Year-Old" (October 11). My son is now twenty, but I also used Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* for inspiration when he was young.

Arriving home from preschool one day, my son was definitely a "wild thing"—acting out, hitting his sister, and causing me to lose my temper. When I got control of myself, I said that he must have had a difficult time at school, but that now—borrowing a line from the book—he was home, "where someone loves you best of all." At that point he broke down in tears and melted into my lap.

Reflecting on the experience afterward, I realized that in that moment I had not only expressed God's unconditional love to my son, but my son had allowed himself to accept it. Thank you, Mollie. God bless you on your parenting journey!

HOLLY WIEGMAN
Niskayuna, N.Y.



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Mollie Wilson O'Reilly

O Holy Fight

MORE BATTLES IN 'THE WAR ON CHRISTMAS'

...Or else

In my neighborhood, the war on Christmas began on Halloween. The precipitating incident was the use of the neighborhood e-mail list to discuss calling a proposed December get-together a "holiday party" instead of a "Christmas party."

To you or me this might seem a matter of little concern (especially if you or I have trick-or-treaters to chaperone). The non-Christians in the neighborhood might consider it a friendly gesture, if they consider it at all. But one brave culture-warrior could see the suggestion of inclusive language for what it really was: an attack on the American way. He hit reply-all to give us a piece of his mind. "SHAME!!!" was his gentle salutation.

I don't know the neighbor who felt so strongly about what someone else's wassail should be called. But I regard his e-mail as a masterpiece of the Keep-Christ-in-Christmas complaint tradition. "Will you tell your children that you will have a Holiday tree instead of a Christmas tree?" he asked. "Will you take them to Holiday services or Holiday Mass instead of Christmas services or Mass?" Well, no, I hadn't planned to. Then came the obligatory feint at inclusiveness, in an attempt to characterize his complaint as something other than special pleading: "Will some take their children to Holiday services instead of Hanukkah services?" he asked. "Will they have a Holiday dinner instead of a Seder dinner?"

It's true, nobody expects those unspecified "some" to change the names of the things "they" do. And no one where I live is asking Christians to hedge about their Christmas trees either, much less rename Mass. In fact, answering all those questions honestly might lead one to conclude that having a neighborhood-wide "holiday party" is, in an important sense, the *opposite* of forcing people to compromise their beliefs. But this guy was on a righteous roll. "Inclusion does not mean giving up our traditions and core beliefs," he argued. "It means respecting those of all groups without offense." And therefore, all the "theys" within earshot would just have to respect that when *this* neighborhood has a mixer in December, it's a *Christmas* party. Never mind that we've never had such a gathering before. (Can't imagine why!)

Speaking of masterpieces: that friendly fellow is likely to find Sarah Palin's new book *Good Tidings and Great Joy: Protecting the Heart of Christmas* under his holiday tree. In it, according to the publisher, Palin "calls for bringing back the freedom to express the Christian values of the season...and laments the over-commercialization and homogenization of Christmas in today's society."

Only Sarah Palin (or her ghostwriter) could lament the commercialization of Christmas in a book published just in time for the holiday shopping season. But to be fair, from what I can make out, it's not the shopping as such that Palin minds; it is the possibility that some might be buying and selling without the name of Jesus on their lips.

I am all for keeping Christ in Christmas. For me, though, the real struggle is keeping Christmas out of Advent, something that won't be helped by snapping at every retail clerk who says "Happy Holidays!" between now and New Year's. "Jesus Is the Reason for the Season," the pious used to remind each other—a gentler slogan, more centering mantra than reprimand. Now the Knights of Columbus distribute "Keep Christ in Christmas" car decals that have a confrontational air: Keep Christ in Christmas *or else*.

Sitting in traffic, staring at one of these chilly reminders, I wonder: Or else what? Let's let Palin explain what's at stake: "The war on Christmas is the tip of the spear in a larger battle to secularize our culture, and make true religious freedom a thing of America's past." Unless Christians insist on the de-facto establishment of Christianity in public life, "true" religious freedom will be imperiled. It's hard to escape the conclusion that, in this formulation, "true" means "Christian," and "religious freedom" means "cultural dominance."

It's no secret that culture-warriors such as Palin—she of the campaign-trail preference for "real America"—have turned divisiveness into a profitable industry. All the more reason, then, to be concerned about the "heart of Christmas." Peace on earth and goodwill toward men (not to mention the rest of us) can't thrive among Christians worried about "protecting" their privileges. Publicly dressing down a neighbor who invites you into her home because you don't like the words she uses is a pretty good sign that Christ is absent in more than name. The good news, for my neighbors and me, is that we have many weeks left to find the heart of Christmas. If that doesn't work out, I'd settle for nonspecific holiday cheer—and a reply-all cease-fire. ■

Fr. Nonomen

Rethinking Catholic Schools

WHO REALLY NEEDS THEM?

I admit that I grumble a little when I sign the monthly parish check to support the local Catholic school. It's for a lot of money—thousands of dollars—and I always think of it as a drain with little gain. Being fortunate to live in a town with an excellent public-school system, I can count on two hands the number of parish children who are enrolled in the Catholic school. It's a fine place too, but it can't really compare with what the local public school offers when it comes to music, art, sports, and special education.

What *does* it offer? What distinguishes it from the public school next door? In its advertising, the school professes to integrate gospel values with the academic and cultural lives of its students. Its website boasts about many extracurricular activities like choir, Scouting, bowling, and basketball, but curiously nothing related to Scripture study or Catholic social concerns and outreach. Sure, I know they have a religion class every day and a school Mass once a month. Yet I also know that, for the most part, the teachers are fresh out college and have no formal religious or even teacher training. As a matter of fact, some of the volunteers who teach religious education in our parish have had more advanced study in Scripture and Catholic moral teaching than some of these parochial-school teachers. As a result, at our local Catholic school the children are taught solely from a standard-issue textbook with the teacher often learning right along with them. Mass is less a contemporary expression of prayer and more a repetition of what Sr. Mary Glen was doing back in 1977, complete with tired processional banners studded with doves made of white felt and bowls of symbolic rice in the offertory.

My intention is not to bash Catholic education. I have enjoyed and reaped the benefits of many, many years of it. But that was back when Catholic schools were firmly connected to the parish. Now, at a time when most schools are regionalized and serving larger geographic areas, I think it might be a good idea to take another look at how so many dioceses structure their educational system. What works in one town might not work in another. Where there is a well-financed and strong public-education system in place, Catholic schools are finding it harder to compete for the students they need to remain solvent. In those places, wouldn't it make more sense to redirect energy and resources back into parish religious-education programs? Isn't the parish the best place to assist parents and families with "integrating gospel values" that are, first and foremost, learned in the home?

If that happened, church financial support and other resources could be focused on Catholic schools located in towns where public education is inadequate. Those schools might then serve a new and wonderful purpose by offering a genuine alternative educational experience affordable to all. I realize this would require a potentially disruptive change in the mission of suburban Catholic education, especially in schools where the majority of the students are not in fact Catholic. The school would be less about preparing a second-grader for First Communion (which is a parish responsibility anyway) and more about providing high-quality education to all who seek it, regardless of religious affiliation. What fascinating and exciting work could be done in a school like that, from nurturing a deeper understanding of common values and beliefs to shaping powerful interfaith prayer experiences.

Wouldn't such a school be a powerful way to promote and build the kingdom? Supporting a program like that would be well worth writing out that monthly parish check. ■

CNS PHOTO / KAREN CALLAWAY, CATHOLIC NEW WORLD

Fr. Nonomen *is the pastor of a suburban parish. He has been a priest for more than twenty years.*

Married Priests

A Countercultural Witness

Richard R. Gaillardetz

It is very difficult to have a productive conversation about the possibility of a married priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church. For some Catholics, any discussion of a change in the church's current discipline constitutes either an attack on the priesthood itself or a capitulation to a secular culture that cannot appreciate the spiritual gifts that a celibate priesthood offers the church. Some Catholics support a married priesthood as a way to argue against priestly celibacy, which they regard as an antiquated discipline that is antisex and at least indirectly responsible for the clerical sex-abuse crisis. Still others will argue for a married priesthood as a necessary pastoral response to the shortage of priests: the people of God, they say, have a right to the Eucharist, and that right trumps any spiritual or pastoral value in a celibate priesthood. Frequently, advocates of a married priesthood will point out that ecumenical accommodations have already been made for married Protestant ministers who convert to Catholicism, but those cases remain the exceptions to the rule. What is needed today is a constructive argument for a married priesthood in the Latin Church that is neither a pastoral/ecumenical accommodation nor a repudiation of priestly celibacy.

Any discussion of the relationship between celibacy and priesthood needs to distinguish between three different "logics" that have governed the practice of committed celibacy in the tradition. We find the first logic in the words of Jesus commending those who freely become "eunuchs for the kingdom" (Matthew 19). We might speak of this as celibacy's prophetic witness to the values of the reign of God. According to this logic, one chooses a life of committed celibacy and renounces the sexual intimacy and companionship of marriage in order to enter into the paschal mystery in a distinctive way and give public witness to its transformative power.

This logic is not antisex: those who freely choose this way of life can also give witness to the liberating power of authentic sexuality, in part by resisting the contemporary tendency to reduce sexuality to sexual acts. This kind of prophetic witness invites all Christians to consider anew their own call to exercise the virtue of chastity, whatever the particular circumstances of their lives. A crucial characteristic of this logic is the presumption that the person considering a celibate way of life actually possesses a charism for celibacy. For those who recognize that charism in their lives, celibacy can be both demanding and fruitful. Without such a charism, however, celibacy can become a sterile burden. Prophetic celibacy first emerged in the witness of hermits and monks and continued to flourish in later forms of consecrated life. It has no intrinsic connection with the ministerial priesthood.

A second logic for celibacy, characterized by a concern for both moral and ritual purity, appears with particular force in the fourth and fifth centuries. Before examining this logic, we should recall a basic distinction: sexual continence refers to abstinence from sexual relations, whereas celibacy refers to forgoing marriage (and of course presumes sexual

Richard R. Gaillardetz *is the Joseph Professor of Catholic Systematic Theology at Boston College. He is the co-author of* Keys to the Council *(with Catherine Clifford, Liturgical Press, 2012) and the author of* A Daring Promise: A Spirituality of Christian Marriage *(Liguori, 2007).*

continence as well). The logic of purity sees the sexual continence of the clergy not as a freely embraced charism but as a canonical obligation intended to preserve the purity of the priest in view of his holy office. When it became difficult to ascertain whether married priests were observing sexual continence before celebrating the Eucharist, bishops and regional synods began calling not just for priestly continence but also for priestly celibacy.

The logic of purity is constructed around a selective appropriation of the norms governing the Levitical priesthood, as presented in the Old Testament. This logic treats sexual activity as a form of ritual defilement. It also draws on ancient Stoic suspicions of human sexuality. Sex, even in marriage, is viewed largely as a concession to natural appetites and to the necessity of procreation. Partly as a consequence of this second logic, sexual continence and eventually celibacy would become a canonical obligation for priests in the Latin Church.

Finally, there is a third logic for celibacy, what we might call the logic of ministerial freedom. This logic sees celibacy as providing a greater freedom for Gospel service because the minister is not preoccupied with familial obligations. (A fourth logic emerged in the early Middle Ages as a way of protecting church property from the inheritance claims of the clergy's offspring, but this logic lacks a properly theological foundation and so will not be considered here.) Note that the logic of ministerial freedom, like the logic of prophetic witness, assumes the presence of a charism, without which celibacy will be experienced only as a burden, not as a gift.

As long as celibacy was intended to preserve ritual purity, it made sense for it to be a canonical obligation for all priests. According to the logic of purity, the point of forbidding priests to marry was just to prevent them from engaging in sexual activity, which was judged to be incompatible with their cultic function. Since the Second Vatican Council, however, this logic has been largely abandoned (for good reasons). So we are left with the logics of prophetic witness and ministerial service. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,

> All the ordained ministers of the Latin Church, with the exception of permanent deacons, are normally chosen from among men of faith who live a celibate life and who intend to remain *celibate* "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven." Called to consecrate themselves with undivided heart to the Lord and to "the affairs of the Lord, they give themselves entirely to God and to men [and women]. Celibacy is a sign of this new life to the service of which the church's minister is consecrated; accepted with a joyous heart celibacy radiantly proclaims the Reign of God. (1579)

But this leaves us with a difficulty. As Heinz Vogels

argues in *Celibacy: Gift or Law* (1993), a celibate life lived as prophetic witness and in genuine freedom for gospel service cannot be mandated by canonical obligation; it can emerge only as the free recognition and embrace of a particular charism.

A better understanding of celibacy's proper role in the church would require a better theology of vocation—one that properly distinguished between various ministries on the one hand and various forms of holiness on the other. Despite some helpful developments in its theology of vocation, the Second Vatican Council continued to draw on the traditional view of Christian vocation, configured around three alternative "states of life": marriage, priesthood, and religious life. However, an alternative framework presents itself in the middle four chapters of *Lumen Gentium*. Chapters 3 (on the hierarchy) and 4 (on the laity) explore how the church is constituted by its different charisms and ministries. Chapters 5 and 6 are concerned with the call to holiness—the former with the perfection of charity to which all Christians are called, and the latter with the public witness to holiness offered by consecrated religious. What we see embedded in the order of these four chapters is not the traditional "three states" schema, but the outlines of a new schema constructed along two axes. The first is ministerial: Am I called to serve the church through the charisms I have received from baptism or through ordination? The second axis has to do with holiness and forms of Christian discipleship: Am I called to pursue that Christian holiness proper to all disciples of Jesus, or am I called to give a public witness to the demands of discipleship and the values of the reign of God through a form of public vowed life? This framework has the merit of unhinging the ministerial priesthood from any necessary relationship with either celibacy or marriage, since the call to priestly ministry would be realized along one axis, and the call to the single life, marriage, or committed celibacy along the second axis.

Some male religious communities have preserved this distinction by insisting that those seeking entrance into their community focus on their embrace of its charism and apostolate before they explore the quite separate question of whether they are called to priestly ministry. The process for those entering the diocesan priesthood should be adapted along the same lines, so as to leave room for the possibility that a candidate for priestly ministry may not have a charism for celibacy. The lack of that charism should not be thought to invalidate a vocation to the priesthood.

For much of the history of the Latin Church, priestly celibacy was defended according to the logic of purity: the priesthood was seen as essentially incompatible with the sexual intimacy of marriage. This logic depended on a rather harsh appraisal of the character of human sexuality. A much more positive theology of sexuality emerged in the twentieth century, offering the possibility of a new assessment of a married priesthood—one based on the recognition that Christian marriage is not an alternative to an ascetical life, but a form of it.

I have no wish to demonize secular culture; grace is at work there too. Yet we cannot ignore the force of consumerism, which turns goods into commodities and encourages an "upgrade mentality," even with respect to human beings. This mentality can make lifelong commitment appear almost nonsensical. At the same time, our culture's preoccupation with romance and passion can make the mundane marital practice of companionship appear boring, laborious, and ultimately unnecessary. Consider the myth of Mr. or Ms. Right—the naïve conviction that there is one "right person" out there for each of us. This is a myth often underwritten by an inadequate understanding of divine providence and the misguided Christian conviction that God has intended "one person and only one person" for each of us who feel called to marriage. This myth can make the inevitable pains and disappointments within a marriage appear as indications that one has chosen the wrong person ("I see now that my spouse was not the right one").

Against this cultural backdrop, authentic Christian married life will inevitably be countercultural and prophetic. The public profession of marriage vows engages Christian spouses in a prophetic form of renunciation, a free embrace of limits for the sake of Christian witness and mission. The vows of marriage bind a couple together "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health." The faithful companionship to which Christian marriage calls us retains a vital and necessary ascetical character. Moreover, we must resist reducing marital lovemaking to "the thing celibates don't get to do"; it, too, participates in the prophetic witness of marriage. Conjugal love is not constituted by a mere "right to the body of one's spouse" (*ius in corpus*). In its potential for intimacy and vulnerability, as well as delight, and in its humble openness to new life, it is a sign of contradiction in a culture that commodifies sex and depreciates fidelity.

Christian married couples, like faithful celibate priests and consecrated religious, give prophetic witness to eschatological values associated with the coming of God's reign: chastity, radical forgiveness, vulnerability, fidelity, hospitality, generosity, and gratitude.

Were leaders in the Latin Church to recognize the prophetic witness of Christian married life, they might look at the possibility of a married priesthood with new eyes. They might see that marriage, like committed celibacy, is a concrete form of the universal call to holiness that can fruitfully support priestly ministry. They might come to see a married priesthood not as a reluctant pastoral or ecumenical accommodation but as a genuine gift to the entire church. They might recognize in a married priesthood a valuable complement to a celibate priesthood, a form of life well suited for both ministry and prophetic witness. And if a married priesthood helped challenge the misuse of priestly celibacy as a support for clerical elitism, well, that wouldn't be so bad either. ■

Raising Catholic Kids

The Challenge of Rooting Family in Faith

J. Peter Nixon, Liam Callanan, Christopher C. Roberts, Sidney Callahan, Peter Leibold & Liz McCloskey, Eleanor Sauers

J. Peter Nixon

Several years ago, in an effort to find some spiritual fellowship, I decided to join our parish men's group. Then in my early thirties, I was generally the youngest man at the meetings, often by two or three decades. I suppose it is a sign of the times that, now in my mid-forties, I am still the youngest man at our meetings.

As I grew to know these men, I discovered that many of them shared a common pain. Despite their best efforts, their children were not practicing Catholics. Some of their children had married in the church or had their own children baptized, but no longer attended Mass regularly. Others had not done even that much.

In those early months of participation, I was warmly welcomed but also treated as a kind of curiosity. Here was someone the same age as their children (or, in some cases, grandchildren) who attended Mass, was active in the parish, and, to all outward appearances, was a "serious" Catholic. What magical secret to passing on the faith had my parents discovered?

I had no answer because, in truth, my embrace of Christ and his church is only tangentially related to the way I was raised. Yes, we were Catholic. But we were Catholics of a decidedly ambivalent sort. My mother was raised in a large, poor family of Irish descent and, like many who have sprung from those roots, her relationship to her childhood faith is complicated. She has not attended Mass regularly since leaving home in her early twenties. My father, of "lace-curtain Irish" extraction, was raised by an extremely pious mother and dutifully married in the church and had his children baptized. We did not, however, attend Mass as children. My grandmother, apparently troubled that her grandchildren were growing up as pagans, continued to press my father on this point while surreptitiously sending me pamphlets on St. Thérèse of Lisieux and, on one occasion, a glow-in-the-dark rosary.

My father finally relented and began taking me and my sister to Mass around the time I turned ten. He chose a parish that was very "modern," complete with the guitar music, large felt banners, and nonrepresentational stained glass that were popular at that time. Because of the late start to my religious education, I received First Communion and Confirmation in the same year.

I had a brief burst of piety around my Confirmation but started to drift away fairly quickly after that. I had no friends at the parish and no connection to it other than Sunday Mass. These were the early years of the Reagan administration and I found myself in profound disagreement with the "Christian" leaders who supported the president's militarism and scapegoating of the poor. I was too disconnected from my own church to know that the U.S. Catholic bishops often had different views on those questions.

I try the reader's patience with these details of my life story only to suggest this: If you had wanted to write a book about how *not* to raise your children Catholic, my parents (cheerfully, in my mother's case) could have served as models. Yet here I am, my faith as much a mystery to me as it is to the rest of my family, none of whom are practicing Catholics anymore. Let it suffice to say that, in the end, my "reversion" was not a decision so much as a surrender to a power that simply overwhelmed me with its passionate desire for my return.

I have two children of my own now. Many parents react to perceived deficiencies in their own childhood by leaning violently in the other direction. I am no different. I have done everything in my power to give my children the deep roots in the Catholic tradition that I did not have. My wife and I have made the financial sacrifice to send our children to Catholic school, a sacrifice that will become all the more difficult as they enter (God willing!) the local Catholic high school. Both of us pursued graduate work in theology and we are deeply involved in a wonderful parish where we are active in a variety of ministries.

Aside from the investment in their education, I did not do most of these things for my children. I did them because they seemed at least a meager return for what God has done for me in Jesus Christ. But I have also tried to live my faith in a way that would make it truly attractive and credible to my children.

RAISING THE EYES THAT HIGH

Looking westward through the porch screen,
White light from the full moon shivers
On snow crust, on glaze over fields.
The silvered-seconds, the whited-minutes,
The wind-chimes euphony, the wavy-warped drifts,
The attempt to capture potential in the rising moon
Is, I know, the beginning of composition....

*

Maybe it is like the act of tipping the head back,
Eyes rising, tracing the pale-pearl flush overhead,
Untouched, skeletal, almost fibrous in its network
Across the sky of dark-blue drape, an eternal law
That promises what with grace we must become:
Marginal angels, immortal transience, fresh tracing
A lost beginning grafted to God's sweetest words.

—Daniel James Sundahl

Every now and then I feel that it's working. One of our family traditions during the last days of Advent is to recite the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) together. When my children come to the lines that read, "He has cast down the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly; he has filed the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty," you would think that they were narrating the climactic victory of the rebels over the Death Star in *Star Wars*. What better way to anticipate the coming of him who "gives light to those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death"?

Most of the time, though, I feel that I am failing. I am writing these words shortly after yet another argument with my precocious twelve-year-old daughter about why she has to come to Mass with us, an argument that usually ends with me frustrated and her in tears. She claims that she is an atheist and hates going to Mass. Of course, she says she hates going to Mass in the same tone that she uses to say she hates showers or cleaning her room. My fourteen-year-old son is not particularly passionate on these questions, but has made clear that he has no intention of going to Mass when he is no longer under our supervision.

No doubt many readers will think I am being unduly pessimistic. This sort of adolescent rebellion is very common, even healthy, they will argue. Children who leave the church in their high-school and college years have often returned when they marry or have children.

Alas, that pattern seems to be breaking down. The fastest-growing religious community in the United States is those who claim no religious identity. These "nones" account for almost one-third of adults under thirty, and their number is growing. There was a time when the "thickness" of Catholic culture exerted a strong pull on those who had left. That culture, however, no longer has the power it once did, and efforts to restore its exterior trappings are too often tinged with a peculiarly Catholic form of fundamentalism.

I am not worried that my children will be bad people. They are too much like their dutiful parents for that. I am sure they will be gainfully employed, take jury service seriously, and yield to drivers attempting to merge ahead of them on the highway. Both of them are kind, and sensitive to injustice, and will no doubt volunteer some of their time to help the less fortunate as they pursue their chosen careers. In that way, their lives will mirror our own.

Shouldn't that be enough? Perhaps it should. But if one believes, as I do, that the point of Christianity is not primarily to make people well behaved but rather to proclaim what Reinhold Niebuhr once called "the nature and destiny of man," then it seems to lack something essential. I don't think I would do my children any favors by pretending otherwise.

There is always a temptation as a parent to think that your children are clay that you are called to shape. The truth is that we are merely stewards of something precious that ultimately belongs to God. If he can call a prodigal like me back to him, he can certainly do the same for my children if he so chooses. In the end, faith is his gift to give, not mine.

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Liam Callanan

Our daughters are older now, but still: you know us, and you knew us when. We are *that* family, the one with the very young, very active children who decided to come to your otherwise quiet, even somnolent Mass. We did not sit in the crying room—the soundproof, glassed-in space that does more to divide the faithful than those pre–Vatican II communion rails ever did—but rather paraded ourselves and our three girls into the pews, and then spent the next eight hours (or did it only feel like that?) trying to keep some kind of order while Mass unfolded.

To be clear, our girls were, are, good. And as parents, we weren't, aren't, terrible. When our kids were young, we kept order with a minimum of fuss and whisked our charges away if the misbehavior wouldn't stop. But on one occasion we weren't fast enough, which caused us to learn a lesson I return to whenever I think about the role families play in the life of the church, and vice-versa.

The instructor here was my daughter Honor, who was all of four. She fidgeted through the readings, bounced from one lap to another during the homily, and then, during the Eucharistic Prayer, started roaming farther and farther away from us, down the length of our (but of course) otherwise empty pew. Finally, she made a break for it, barreling toward the front of the church just as the priest was elevating the Host. I ran after her, scooped her up, and marched back to our place. Struggling and twisting against my embrace, she finally wriggled free enough to point to the altar and announce in a ringing voice, "Let me *go*, Daddy! I'm trying to get to *God*."

I know, I know, Matthew 19:14: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Which, yes, Jesus means figuratively and literally—but also, I believe, urgently. *Urgent* because it feels—to families, to parents, and, I imagine, to kids—like there are so many obstacles these days that keep us from getting to God.

There are, for example, obtuse dads like me, and families like mine, who face a blizzard of conflicting societal and doctrinal pressures. More plainly: There's the Disney Channel, cell phones, e-books, and a thousand other modern diversions from a straightforward path to faith.

And then there's the church, or rather its leaders, who I find sometimes get in the way of me bringing my family to God. This feels like a new phenomenon, but I know it's not. I think, once again, about Matthew 19: the reason Jesus says "Let the little children come to me" is because moments before, some children had been brought forward "for him to place his hands on them and pray for them," and "the disciples rebuked them." Two thousand years later, some disciples are still at it.

Fair enough; there's much to rebuke. And I understand the concept of boundaries, laws, doctrine: I'm a parent, after all; my wife and I have rules we expect our family to follow. A girl running pell-mell from pew to altar is not allowed. But we used to live in Alexandria, Virginia, where a girl wasn't allowed to process to the altar, either, at least not in the role of altar server. That was because our parish fell within the Diocese of Arlington, at that time one of two in the United States that forbade female altar servers. (Lincoln, Nebraska, still has its diocese-wide ban.) Our parish had been an early adopter of female altar servers, and suddenly they all had to be decommissioned. I admired the pastor's quiet fix while we awaited better days: he took his ex–altar girls and made them lectors, greatly diversifying the largely male and graying corps of lay readers.

Still, the situation was especially awkward in our family. My wife had converted to Catholicism after we married, largely due to the example of my grandmother and other churchgoing relatives. I don't think my grandmother set out to convert my bride with stories of seeing Dorothy Day at parties in New York or subscribing to the *Catholic Worker* for more than fifty years. My uncle probably didn't intend to embody a new generation of lively, active Catholic faithfulness by sharing his extremely colorful opinions of papal wrongheadedness while never failing to attend 7 a.m. Mass every Sunday. But in these interactions with my family, my wife witnessed a full-throated faith that wrestled with faith, one that honored saints and dissenters.

I reassured my wife that it wasn't just my family that embraced this kind of Catholicism. I did more than that, actually: I reassured her that this *was* Catholicism. And so we agreed to raise our kids Catholic. We left Virginia and moved to Wisconsin, where we enrolled our daughters in Catholic school so we could be certain they learned the faith. And we learned that, even as we tried to teach our children what it meant to be Catholic, to be Christian, to be family, our children would be leading us to God.

I'll turn to Honor once again, older now but no less wise. She no longer tries to rush the altar during transubstantiation, but happily, she is still a rule-breaker. And the rule she flouts most beautifully every day is the one that, in the end, has taught me most about what my family—and my church—values: Honor doesn't believe in society's rule that difference is to be disdained. Specifically, she thinks her classmate Grace is a brave, beautiful person. Many kids at school agree. Many outside school, sadly, do not. Grace has Down syndrome. Such children have not always found a ready home in Catholic schools, but our school's principal firmly believes Catholic tradition obligates us to embrace diversity in every respect: implicit in *Let them come to me* is *Let them come to us*.

But that is easy to say. Like faith, it's difficult to live. One behavior Grace and her classmates struggled with, for example, is that when Grace became excited or eager for someone's attention, she would grab their hair and hold on—on and on. It could be very painful. But the kids were repeatedly told that Grace didn't mean to hurt anyone, and the class, through a shed tear or two, managed: the other girls put their hair up or wore it short, and they learned not to resist but rather wait for the aide or teacher to come to untangle things. It wasn't always stress-free, but I came to discover that it was often very holy. At our year-end conference, Honor's teacher commented on how wonderfully the class, and especially our daughter, had treated Grace. We nodded, but admitted we'd had it easy, since Grace never pulled Honor's hair. We'd heard stories about how rough it had been on some of the other children.

The teacher just looked at us, and then said, cautiously, "Grace pulled your daughter's hair harder and more often than anyone else's. You didn't know this?" We did not. Our daughter had not said a word, not once.

I am a graduate of a Jesuit high school and university. Is it wrong to say that a ten-year-old's silence is the most powerful catechism I've ever experienced? Or that the most spiritual baptism took place at a water park? This was during Grace's birthday party. While the kids ran around splashing, I caught up with Grace's mother. I was surprised to learn the setting

had been chosen more for the benefit of the guests than for Grace, who didn't like stairs or heights, and—

Two people suddenly arrived in the sluiceway next to us: my daughter and Grace, who had just conquered the park's tallest platform, together.

The bigger surprise came when the two girls ran off. Or rather, when Honor ran off. Grace was left fumbling to get out of the water. I called sharply after Honor to lend a hand, but Grace's mom shook her head. "No," she said. "Honor's treating her like a real friend. She's not coddling her. And that's why Grace loves her."

Some parents in our community have it all figured out, and I envy them: their faith, their fitness, their firm belief that not only are they doing everything right, the church is too.

A smaller collective of us worry constantly. We worry what kind of church our children—especially our daughters—will inherit, worry that we're not doing enough to improve that church, worry that our children see us worrying too much. But then, around us, we see these acts of witness—the schoolgirl patiently waiting while the hand yanking her ponytail is prised free; the two girls, different in so many ways but in their smiles different in no way at all, rocketing down that water slide; the toddler bolting ahead to get to God.

In our collective are two parents who are former members of a real collective, a Jesuit Volunteer Corps house in East Saint Louis. "It ruins you," one told me, speaking of the experience with a distant smile. "You can't live your life the same after. Whatever you go on to do, it just ruins you in the most amazing ways." This is the theology I want for my family. I want my children's Catholic upbringing to ruin them in some wondrous, revelatory way. My friend the JVC alumna was more direct: "I want my children to know how to pray," she said. "I want them to feel part of a community that shares a language for expressing God in our day-to-day lives. I want them to feel the love and belonging a community can provide, especially in crisis. I want them to know the comfort of ritual. And I want them to experience all this as children."

I want to experience all this as a child as well. I want to be—need to be—an adult who protects and leads and educates his family, but I also want to be a fellow child before God. There's a problem with this theology, I know. To be a child is also to be, in many ways, powerless, and bringing about change—whether it's girls at the side of the altar or women behind it—will require power.

But as my daughters daily teach me, it will also require love. I love my family. I love that my effort to raise them right raises me up as well. And I love most of all that even if I—or a bishop—or the secular world—occasionally keep them from getting to God, in the end, grace helps them through.

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Christopher C. Roberts

A Christian family is a "domestic church," according to *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. In these small cells of the universal church, the council asks parents to do two things: witness to the faith, and help children discern the vocation "proper to each of them." I find it striking that of all the things the council might have asked parents to do, helping children discern their vocation is prioritized.

As I understand it, to think of one's life in vocational terms means to live under a summons, to be listening, to be in the habit of showing God the details of your life and remaining open to whatever God may have in store for you. Deep understanding of our own desires and longings is part of discernment, but, ultimately, a vocational disposition is able to say, "Yes, let it be according to thy will...*thy* will, not mine."

My wife and I have been married for sixteen years, and we have tried to live this way. During those years, we lost one parent to breast cancer, another to suicide. We have made three transatlantic moves, each one representing a career change, each one an attempt to follow a call, none of them wholly chosen. Our marriage could easily have run aground any number of times. But we had our eyes on the Cross. Jesus was teaching us how to die to self, to save our life by losing it, to lay aside plans and refashion ambitions. We enjoy blessings and love today because we were taught the language of faith, a theological perspective that enabled us to face each moment in trust that Jesus was deepening us, taking us somewhere good.

Life is often unpredictable, but ordinary middle-class life normally allows us to make many key decisions for ourselves, such as whether and whom to marry, where to live, what kind of education or job to seek. My wife and I have a goal as Catholic parents: to prepare our children to put their lives at God's disposal when those decisive moments come, whether they are making choices or dealing with surprises. To put it in Vatican II terms, our vocation is to help them discern their vocation.

That will require certain spiritual skills: to be capable of discernment means to possess interiority, to be able to regard one's life, as well as nature and culture, with a certain loving attention and detachment. To be capable of discernment means to hunger for truth, no matter where it takes you. To embrace a vocation implies being capable of suffering, even when the world tempts you to dodge that suffering because there's an easier way out. To live a vocation implies being in the habit of gratitude and hopefulness.

At this stage, with three daughters under seven, we are laying foundations for these skills. We stock the house and family life with Catholic words, stories, images, music, and objects. We give thanks at every meal, with songs and ceremonies adjusted to follow the liturgical seasons. We chose

the house where we live partly because it's close to a parish with a school. We attend Mass as a family, and we talk about Mass at home (how to behave, what was said or read, what happens and why). We also take regular inventory of the health of our own adult faith, to make sure we're living what we're trying to communicate. The girls see us going to confession monthly, and volunteering in our parish and with the poor. We seek kid-friendly opportunities in the parish and diocese, and we join the committees that create these things. We learn, and practice, understanding our own identity in terms of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Jesus, Peter, and Paul, and church history from the apostolic era to the present. As my children mature, I want them to understand themselves as guarded by, and accountable to, this great covenant. I want them to know that God has a name and a particular history, a church, of which our domestic church is a member.

There is a bit more to it than this—for example, we try to simplify our material possessions, as well as our schedules. We think carefully about what the children read. Beauty matters, for we're trying to cultivate our children's hearts and minds. I know living in a bubble is not an option. But I also don't want to be too casual about the children's innocence. We have the ability to resist the invasion of electronic devices into our homes. And as for the birds and the bees, the girls have noticed the chart tracking my wife's cycle, so we've already answered a question or two about Natural Family Planning, and I reckon this conversation will gradually continue.

No doubt adolescent challenges are coming soon enough on a number of fronts. No doubt we are making mistakes. But the gist of it all is simple: Let tangibly Catholic love shape and leaven all of life.

There are many obstacles to embracing this Catholic outlook. In my nook of middle-class America, the catalog of obstacles includes busy schedules and scattered lives, which sap the leisure necessary for prayer and parish community. In places like the Catholic college where I used to teach, or the affluent neighborhood where I still live, the longing for prestige and upper-middle-class gentility is a distracting enchanter; it's not wrong to want to be acknowledged or to live in a nice place, but these desires can metastasize. Curating a certain lifestyle, performing for an imaginary jury, can warp decisions with respect to schooling, extracurricular activities, career, money, and housing. You can only hold so many priorities in your heart at any one time.

Paying attention to the wider culture, it's also worth keeping an eye on what Notre Dame sociologist Christian Smith calls Moralistic Therapeutic Deism—his name for contemporary American spiritual mush. After more than a decade spent interviewing thousands of American adolescents, Smith and his colleagues report that "MTD" is the

regnant faith of assimilated American youth, whether their confessional heritage is Catholic, Protestant, Jew, Muslim, or something else.

The MTD God is the God of whatever, the God who wants you to be a "good person," making "healthy choices," happy and nice. The MTD rhetoric has a grain of truth to it, but its emphasis on getting along and smiling can make spiritual life banal. The MTD faith emphasizes inclusiveness at the expense of reverence and quiet awe. MTD catechesis is so cozy that it skates lightly over awkward subjects like sin or chastity. You might pray to this God in a crisis, but this is not the God we're talking about if we really mean what we say in the Eucharistic prayers. The MTD faith, by definition, cannot yield a vocation. A God without a name in a community without a history will not speak your name or ask you to do anything challenging. He certainly will not love you with the flaming passion of the Song of Songs. He has no Old Testament prophets who might question your affluence and gentility. He has no sacraments to enchant the created order, no Ephesians 5 to shape a marriage into a covenant of self-gift. If you happen to have the inner resources to suffer for the truth—perhaps when a disabled family member needs your care, or perhaps when something at work requires you to take a courageous stand—then it's despite, not because of, the MTD God. Spiritual mush has no horizon, no forge for forming a character.

So as Catholic parents, we play offense, and promote the faith. We also play defense, trying to be savvy about the culture. I expect it to get harder as the girls get older. We are praying that a good community of peers will be in place when they become teens. And we are trying, gently for now, to prepare our girls for being different from the surrounding culture in sometimes uncomfortable ways. I hope for the moment that we're laying in the spiritual and psychological resources to see us through whatever's coming.

Christian Smith says parental presence is the number one factor in the background of youth who resist MTD, the ones who develop a hunger for Truth and a thick religious identity. I find that encouraging, because although there are profound limits on what we can control, showing up and being present is something we can do. We can't control outcomes, but we're hoping our domestic church tilts the odds.

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Sidney Callahan

Today alienated Catholics do not gently "lapse" or nostalgically "fall away," they decisively and definitively leave for good. Forget "once a Catholic, always a Catholic" or a "Come Home for Easter" campaign. Every poll shows the nonreligiously affiliated—now called "nones"—increasing in number. That number includes all my grown children. But it wasn't always this way.

In 1967, my husband Dan and I, along with our five sons and one daughter (all born between 1955 and '65), could be found each Sunday at Mass. Everyone was baptized, the three oldest confirmed. I had been teaching in the CCD program for seven years. We were a full-court-press Catholic family, members of the Christian Family Movement (observe, judge, act), Catholic Worker enthusiasts, and eager advocates of Vatican II reforms. Dan was an editor of *Commonweal* and we both wrote for and participated in exciting Catholic intellectual circles. Forty-six years later, I sit alone in the same pew on Sundays, and have been doing so for decades. I remain a grateful Catholic convert, while everyone else in the family is long gone from the church.

I date 1968 as the onset of the cultural hurricane that beset our family and New York City suburb. One year we were a '50s-style American family with suits, ties, and dancing lessons, the next we were battling countercultural chaos and hippie mayhem. The '60s' swirl of riots, protests, assassinations, promiscuity, drug use, and dropouts could not be held at bay. This produced predictable disasters. My children's classmates died from drug overdoses, jumped out of windows on LSD, and got arrested for smoking pot in the woods. Quite a few were carted off to jail, rehab, and mental hospitals. The schools, police, church, and most middle-class families were not prepared for this youth revolt. Certainly, our ordinary and relatively conservative parish could not cope.

As each of our children got older they were captured in turn by the counterculture, stubbornly refusing to cut their hair, dress properly, work in school, or attend church.

CNS PHOTO / GREGORY A. SHEMITZ

One son, a devotee of Nietzsche, departed from our CCD program with a Nazi salute and a "Heil Hitler, I quit." No more Catholic Family of the Year after that! I was deeply shamed by this out-of-control adolescent behavior, but I was even more frantic and fearful for their physical and mental survival. To this day that era's walking wounded can be seen around town. Many never recovered. Thank God our children, like most others, came through alive, but that was only after years of struggle.

Our parental battle was to fight against the moral relativism and permissiveness of the youth culture. I still loathe Jimi Hendrix. Using every stratagem at our command, we urged dropouts to go back to school, others to stay in school, and all to stay away from addicted and aimless peers. We devised ways to expose our children to attractive young adult worlds and included them in our own work activities. Our affectionate family bonds were strengthened by frequent celebrations, trips, and happy vacations. But church was a lost cause. Since my husband's faith had faded, he wasn't worried over the religious defections of the children. In fact, he wanted all of us to leave the church when he did. Now he hardly remembers all the grief he gave me for staying, and those long-ago arguments about Catholicism have gradually evolved into a general détente. Mom is the designated believer in the family—and that is that. Let's all just love, support, and be grateful for one another every day.

When it comes to Catholicism and my children, I have learned humility from parental failure. But I have also learned about hopefulness. Hopefulness, patience, and perseverance are now at the top of the list of the virtues I esteem. If death or permanent damage at an early age can be avoided, disasters can be turned around, rifts healed, and weaknesses overcome. Today my middle-aged children are happy, morally upstanding people. Our five grandchildren are blessed with super parents. Our children all love and help one another and seem devoted to their old parents.

Here, amidst the remains of the day, we who believe are confronted with the mystery of faith. Clearly, no one can answer God's call for someone else. But social and cultural factors can play a part in nurturing faith. In hindsight, I can now see how crucially important Catholic peer groups are for faith development. In our town the educated professionals were mostly secular or Jewish, the Catholics mostly working-class people. Going through the excellent public schools, none of my children had a close Catholic friend or peer group that could support his or her faith. Did we choose the wrong town, the wrong parish, and the wrong schools?

Looking back I see that there was no structured way in our parish for my children to get what I had gotten in my intellectual journey to the Catholic faith. I always had access to the sophisticated historical, intellectual, and theological dimensions of the faith. I've always known exemplary, magnetically attractive Catholics who inspire me. With these wellsprings of truth and joy, the faith and the Sunday liturgy sing. But I can't seem to communicate such religious experiences to my skeptical family and friends. For many of them the church remains a medieval, male-dominated, and authoritarian institution that's focused on unintelligible rituals. Worse still, it is repressive, corrupt, and power-hungry. Needless to say, the horror of the sexual-abuse crisis has confirmed such anti-Catholic attitudes among many people.

Fortunately, despite their rejection of religion, my children have continued to develop in moral sense and sensibility. With the aid of providence, conscience and morality can still flourish outside religious communities. Reason, experience, and goodwill generate good people. Through trial and error persons discover for themselves that virtuous commitments to love and work do indeed lead to happiness. The Holy Spirit continues to transform the hearts and minds of believers and nones alike. Where love is God is. As the gospel says, "A bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not quench."

Sidney Callahan *is the author of* Created for Joy: A Christian View of Suffering, *among other books.*

Peter Leibold & Liz McCloskey

When we were dating as college students in the 1980s, we would occasionally have philosophical discussions about our Catholic faith and about the differences in how our families lived that faith. Peter was at Haverford College, and he was seriously considering leaving the church and becoming a Quaker. Liz was at the College of William and Mary studying religion and history, active in the Catholic Student Association, and fully committed to remaining Catholic. Settling how and where we would worship together if we were to get married and have children was terribly important to us.

We made a decision together (says Liz, who won the debate) to remain in the Catholic Church. Our backgrounds were different, but our Catholic identity ran deep, with Irish-Catholic roots spreading in almost every direction. Liz's uncle, a Jesuit, and Peter's cousin, a Franciscan, concelebrated at our wedding. We wanted those roots to be the foundation for our family.

We started our two sons in a parochial school when they were kindergarteners, but soon decided to move them to public school. The tipping point came when Liz attended a school Mass on a Marian feast day. The homilist told the children they should be perfect as Mary is perfect. On the way home, Liz asked our first-grader, "What does it mean to be a Christian? Does it mean to be perfect, or to be forgiven?" When our seven-year-old son's immediate response was "to be perfect," we knew the school was wrong for him.

Since then, we have home-schooled our three children at certain times in addition to sending them, as appropriate,

We have always been honest about our own doubts, hoping that if our children continued to practice the faith, they would do so thoughtfully and with humility. We wanted them to know that having doubts and questions is not inconsistent with developing a mature faith life.

to public school, a nondenominational Christian school, an all-girls Salesian school, and an all-boys Jesuit school. Through it all, we have sought environments and experiences that help each child grow toward completeness, toward becoming the person he or she was born to be. That, to us, is the essence of raising our kids in the Catholic faith. Our job is to help them find a spiritual home in the church, a home where their individual gifts, disposition, and way of engaging the world are recognized and nurtured. Rather than "be perfect like Mary," the message we try to pass on to our children is St. Francis de Sales's encouragement to "be who you are and be that well."

Aside from weekly Mass, we have tried to make prayer part of our family life. In this regard, the Franciscan, Jesuit, Salesian, and Benedictine spiritual traditions have provided inspiration. Early on, we established a pattern of morning and evening prayer, which admittedly did not always go smoothly—or at all. David Robinson's book *The Family Cloister: Benedictine Wisdom for the Home* (Crossroad) helped connect our prayer with the practice of the liturgy of the hours, and identified principles such as hospitality, community, and growth that we wanted to emphasize in our family life. A visit to Assisi brought the Prayer of St. Francis into our home (and his statue into our garden). We offer family prayers and Celtic blessings on first days of school, before trips, before athletic competitions, and when other challenges arise. Liz's Jesuit uncle celebrates informal home Masses when the extended family gathers, and has done so for fifty years.

We have also made a point of not avoiding difficult doctrinal issues. If, for example, one of the children asked us why the church teaches that Mary was "ever virgin" yet also teaches that within marriage there is a sacramental dimension to sex, we would explain the doctrinal argument for Mary's perpetual virginity, while also acknowledging that, to us, the idea that Mary remained a virgin does not seem very plausible. We have always been honest about our own doubts, hoping that if our children continued to practice the faith, they would do so thoughtfully and with humility. We wanted them to know that having doubts and questions is not inconsistent with developing a mature faith life. We hoped that by walking them through the arguments, we would be raising children who, in the words of John Paul II, use reason and faith as "the two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth."

Given our own hesitations, some might ask why we have raised our children as Catholics and not in some other Christian denomination. Why not join a faith community where women can be priests and gay and lesbian people do not need to hide their relationships? Why did we continue in the Catholic Church after the pedophilia crisis revealed that those in authority lacked the basic moral instinct to protect children? Why have we stayed even when the church's righteous indignation over abortion has too often drowned out other Catholic social teachings that are also rooted in a commitment to the dignity of every person?

We can only offer a classic Catholic response: Faith is a mystery. Whatever the church's shortcomings—not so different from those of any other religious institution—we want to pass on to our children the Catholic mystical and spiritual tradition. Karl Rahner once said that either Christians of the future will be mystics or they will not exist at all. Raising our children as Catholics has meant hoping they would blend a healthy skepticism with a feeling of being at home in the mystery of the church. Part of that mystery is the frank acknowledgment of the fact that the founders of the spiritual traditions that have nourished our family were also profoundly imperfect people.

Each of our children seems to be identifying with the spiritual traditions that best fit his or her own temperament. For Brian—a twenty-two-year-old who has spent two and a half years away from college traveling, volunteering in the national parks, living in Alaska, and writing—the wisdom of the desert fathers, the simplicity and passion of Franciscans such as Richard Rohr, and the searching social criticism of Thomas Merton have been inspirations. He is not in the pews every week. Instead, he says he plans "to take what's sacred and worthwhile in the Catholic Church and leave the rest. That probably means I will not be a practicing Catholic. I'll keep practicing though, practicing something…trying to get somewhere."

Collin—a twenty-year-old student and distance runner at Georgetown University who is studying biology and theology—has found particularly compelling the Ignatian values of "being men and women for others" and caring for the whole person. He attends Mass and says he continues to "identify as a Catholic." Each year, he has inspired and sponsored a fellow member of the track team to join the Catholic Church at Georgetown's Easter vigil.

Nora—a junior at an all-girls Salesian high school that encourages its students to "Live Jesus"—is discovering her gifts and who she will become. She says that because she has had a firm faith-based upbringing, it is second nature for her to look to Catholicism in everyday life: "My faith is especially prevalent when I find myself in a situation where I need to make a difficult decision. As I continue to grow, I will combine my strong personal convictions with the beliefs I have grown up with to create an even stronger, lifelong faith."

Our hope is that their Catholic spiritual roots run as deep for them as they have for us. Like Karl Rahner, we believe that if our children are to remain in the Catholic Church—or even the Christian tradition—it will be because they have tapped into a particular vein of its mystical and spiritual traditions and made it their own.

Peter Leibold, *a graduate of Yale Law School, is the executive vice president and CEO of the American Health Lawyers Association.* **Liz McCloskey,** *a graduate of Yale Divinity School, is the president and CEO of the Faith & Politics Institute and a PhD candidate in spirituality at the Catholic University of America.*

Eleanor Sauers

"Hope has two beautiful daughters," St. Augustine remarked. "Their names are anger and courage; anger at the way things are, and courage to see that they do not remain as they are." The preceding essays, from parents concerned about keeping their children in the faith, display both anger and courage. Anger shows itself as displeasure with the prevailing culture and the obstacles to God that it places in our path, but also with the church itself, and its seeming inability to provide adequate intellectual undergirding for the development of faith. Courage underlies the deliberation with which these parents are constructing their lives to secure a Catholic home that might withstand the tests of postmodern living—doing so in the hope that their children might grow to be adults whose faith is integral to their very being.

I understand how difficult this can be. I happen to have two lovely daughters, both of them moral, compassionate, and responsible young women. My husband and I raised them in the church and sent them (this was in the 1980s) to Catholic elementary school. They both went on to public high school and subsequently chose to attend Catholic colleges. We went to Mass regularly, celebrated all the Catholic holy days, and expected that our children would do the same and remain in the pews for the rest of their lives. Though we had some conversations about matters of faith, we didn't talk often about being Catholic or what that meant. It was simply who we were, as constitutive of our identity as being American.

So it came as a bit of a shock when our younger daughter, during her college years, simply stopped going to Mass. Attempts to discuss this change were not fruitful: "Church doesn't mean anything to me anymore," she would say, or simply "I don't want to talk about it." I was perplexed, but came to the realization that trying to impose my own spirituality on my daughter would not succeed. After berating myself on my failure as a parent to keep my child in the church, I finally learned, with the help of some friends, to place the situation in God's hands.

In the years since our children were young, I have pursued graduate work in religious education, for the past twelve years serving as director of religious education in a suburban parish. In that capacity I would like to offer some observations about the role of family and parish in the nurturing of the faith.

The family is the first teacher. Children need boundaries and loving discipline, a sense of security reinforced by the rules of the household. They also need to know that they are good, and to be able to recognize the good in others. The role of a parent in fostering the child's understanding of the inherent goodness of life cannot be overstated. The deep knowledge that a child is loved contributes crucially to that child's emotional stability, according to the psychiatrist Robert Coles, who writes about the spiritual life of children. The spirituality at the heart of each child cries out to be nourished; helping children develop their imaginations and sense of wonder through play and creative projects will go far in this regard. "We grow morally as a consequence of learning how to be with others," writes Robert Coles, adding that this is "a learning prompted by what we have seen and heard." Children learn by osmosis, noting the ways in which parents themselves interact. "The child," Coles notes, "is an ever attentive witness of grown-up morality."

Religious growth, including Catholic formation, needs to be understood within this context. A child's image of God begins as a reflection of his or her parents—a fact that ought to make parents consider carefully just what image they are providing. The most effective teaching strategy is modeling. Part of this means bringing children to Mass, participating in the responses and singing, and being fully engaged in the liturgy—making the Sign of the Cross, kneeling, bowing, and all the various gestures involved in the liturgy. Not only do these bodily movements make the Mass seem more interesting to a child, but they result in a different type of knowing. Not all religious learning happens explicitly. Family rituals, having meals together, and enjoying family gatherings all serve to strengthen the bonds of love and offer opportunities for informal religious formation.

The evident anger of some of the contributors to this symposium toward the prevailing culture, with its permissiveness and moral relativism, clearly fuels their resolve to

raise their children in a Catholic milieu. Yet one cannot avoid that culture altogether, and perhaps engaging with the larger society and embracing some of the good it has to offer can help children learn a few important things that the church itself teaches: that the world is a good place; that God's love is available to all; that people fail and can be redeemed; that we are all human and no one is beyond the grace of God.

That this effort is necessarily a collaborative undertaking between the generations raises another important point. Instead of trying to cram our children's heads full of information about their faith, it might be more helpful to create an environment in which adults acknowledge that we learn as much from our children as they do from us. That doesn't mean parents aren't in charge; it simply means that children possess the qualities of radical trust and openness—and a joy in living—that are essential to the building of the reign of God.

Certainly, the church places obstacles in our way as we seek closer union with God. Differences of opinion with church teaching on particular matters; horror at the pedophilia scandal and cover-up; a frustrated sense of being voiceless in the greater church: for these and other reasons many have stopped practicing the faith. The truth is that throughout history the church has taken some stands that turned out to be erroneous and, as a result, has caused much suffering. Acknowledging these failings to a child can help spur her to understand that she can be flawed in the way all human beings are flawed and still be redeemed. Similarly, while it's fine to provide role models for children from Scriptures (please include some women!), one should always acknowledge the humanity of the biblical protagonists. The Gospels are filled with stories in which human failings are forgiven and the person is restored to wholeness. Children need to know that being a Christian doesn't mean being perfect, but—as Peter Leibold and Liz McCloskey point out in their essay—it does mean being forgiven.

As a church we often think of religious education as merely the catechizing of children; as a rule, we ignore the continuing formation of adults. In fact, the most effective religious education occurs when catechesis is tied to the liturgy. Ours is an adult faith, and the formation of children ought to be geared toward what they need to understand in order to participate fully in an adult church. And adults need to be educated to better appreciate the beauty of our tradition. The theological background of the authors of these five essays is highly unusual in most parishes, and helps explain their desire to create a Catholic ethos in their homes. Their expertise in Catholic matters prompts me to urge them to consider sharing their knowledge and faith with the religious-education programs in their parishes (some already do) by volunteering as catechists for either children or adults. Teaching can be spiritually enriching for the catechists themselves, and it can keep you in the whirl of parish life—which is the church to most Catholics. It is here that children and adults can learn to be a community. And it is in community that we become most truly ourselves.

So much of the work of a parish is not explicitly religious in a strict sense of the word. Parish life exemplifies our interdependence. In peer groups we make connections that teach us about ourselves, others, and God. We worship with others in our community and feel lifted up when we proclaim the prayers and sing the familiar hymns together. Ideally, we are engaged both intellectually and emotionally during Mass. All of this contributes to our becoming whole—and, therefore, holy. Religious education, in the end, is all about becoming whole. It is about informing people, of course, but also about forming them, teaching them to live well and preparing them to die well. It is about engaging the mind, the emotions, and the senses in a lifelong journey with and toward God. As Christopher Roberts writes, it is about letting "tangibly Catholic love shape and leaven all of life."

Clearly the authors of the five previous essays are serious Catholics using their education and resources to raise their children as best they can. Each has the desire to instill in their children a love of the faith—and each worries to some degree that the faith might not "stick." My best advice to parents like them: become an active part of a parish where you feel at home, where you are both comforted and challenged. If you are in such a place, your children will benefit as well. You can take some of the weight off your shoulders by recalling that you are not your children's only mentor; the community to which they belong is constantly teaching them. Meanwhile, teach your children about the faith, but don't try to burden them with things beyond their ken. Find a community of peers to walk with you on your journey of faith, as Sidney Callahan suggests. Try to live your faith in a way that makes it truly attractive and credible to your children, in the words of J. Peter Nixon. Do your best, then leave room for the Spirit to work. And remember that no one has all the answers. So relax a bit.

As Augustine understood, our anger at the way things are and the courage with which we work to make sure they don't stay that way are both signs of Christian hope. We hope that our children will find their way, that our efforts to nourish their faith will not have been in vain, and that, as Liam Callanan writes, "grace will help them through"—and perhaps lead them back, as it did my daughter when, at a recent Saturday evening Mass, she slipped into the pew next to her father. ■

Eleanor Sauers *is the director of religious education at a suburban parish.*

On the Commonweal website

Younger readers who were raised Catholic offer their thoughts on some of the stories featured here:

commonwealmagazine.org/kids-raised-catholic

Richard Alleva

An Everyday Nightmare

'12 YEARS A SLAVE'

The 1853 book *Twelve Years a Slave* by Solomon Northup, a black freeman kidnapped and sold into slavery, retails so much cruelty, physical and mental, that any movie adaptation might have become a freak show or, given an archly aesthetic treatment, a exercise in the "theater of cruelty" or, even worse, a feast for the self-righteous, with virtuously suffering victims over here and slavering sadists over there. Writer John Ridley and director Steve McQueen have achieved something immeasurably better.

In this film slavery creates a hell in which everyone burns—blacks and whites, men and women, victims and victimizers, the relatively well-intentioned and the irretrievably malevolent. To suggest that slaveowners suffered as much as slaves would be obscene, but the film powerfully dramatizes the scholar Eric Ashley Hairston's apt description of the South's slave-based economy as "a crumbling ruin of the Western world, its rulers fallen creatures largely bereft of virtue." A crumbling ruin doesn't discriminate among those it crushes.

Solomon—born free, educated, musically talented, married with children, making a modest but adequate living as a jack-of-all-trades in Saratoga, New York—seems destined to live a sane life in sane surroundings. Then two con men lure him down to Washington, D.C., to play his fiddle at a circus where they supposedly work as magicians. They're prestidigitators all right, for they manage to turn a free man into a slave on a Louisiana plantation. The delirious nightmare of kidnapping soon gives way to the quotidian nightmare of slavery. But even nightmares vary in their intensity. Under a genteel slaveowner named Ford (Benedict Cumberbatch), Northup receives affectionate respect for his musical and engineering skills (he contrives a waterway for shipping Ford's goods), but when Solomon's instinctive pluckiness puts him at odds with an envious overseer, Ford sells him to another planter, Epps, just to get him out of harm's way. It turns out that Epps is deranged, and Solomon's situation suddenly goes from bad to much worse.

What keeps *12 Years a Slave* from being a sadomasochistic wallow is the way Steve McQueen's sense of design clarifies the terrible ineluctability at work in this story and in slavery itself. Take the very opening moments. First we see a row of slaves in some field, the look in their eyes signalling bottled-up fear. What are they waiting for? Seconds pass before we get the reverse shot and the inevitable answer: a brisk, no-nonsense overseer demonstrating just how he wants his sugar cane cut. Property put to work on property.

The director uses visual parallels sometimes for irony, sometimes for pathos. An example of the former: There is a flashback to the Northup family in Saratoga, well dressed, greeted pleasantly by white citizens strolling into a dry-goods store where the proprietor cheerfully waits on them. A visiting southerner's slave wanders in but is soon yanked out by his master, who apologizes for the intrusion. "No intrusion," Solomon rather superciliously replies, never dreaming that the slave's lot in life would have anything to do with his own. But when the captured

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Northup is put on exhibit in Louisiana, it is not in the open-air slave market that has become such a cliché but in the interior of a store not unlike the one in Saratoga.

As for pathos, early on we get a close shot of Northup's violin—so close that the instrument's wood and strings form a near-abstract image. Simultaneously, we hear Northup tuning up for a Saratoga dance where he plays with gusto and receives applause and pay. Much later, we get another close-up of the violin; only this time we hear it being smashed to pieces by its despairing owner.

McQueen and Ridley spare none of the characters. When Eliza, a slave separated from her children, first arrives at the Ford plantation, Mrs. Ford looks at her compassionately and sweetly urges "some food and rest." Then she adds in equally dulcet tones, "Your children will soon be forgotten." Mind you, she is supposed to be one of the more humane slaveowners.

McQueen doesn't spare the audience either. Physically attacked by an overseer for displaying too much intelligence, Northup gives the sniveling little sadist a sound thrashing—just the sort of movie violence that makes audiences cheer. But seconds later we see Northup standing alone, awaiting what he knows must come: severe punishment, perhaps death, for striking a white man. We've had our fun cheering on the hero's rebellion, but now we must watch as he suffers the consequences of this rebellion. Our facile moral satisfaction evaporates.

The cast of this American-British production includes some of the best actors on either side of the Atlantic, and nearly everyone comes through. Star power never interferes with the immediacy of great historical recreation. (One exception: Brad Pitt's performance as a kindly Canadian is so clumsy that it temporarily breaks the integrity of the film.) If McQueen's direction and Ridley's writing make *12 Years a Slave* harrowing, it is Chiwetel Ejiofor's performance as Northup that endows the movie with hope. Much of the time Northup is an onlooker, and even when forced into action he must hide behind a mask of stolid humility. But whenever the camera draws close to his face, we see the mental wheels turning, the besieged patience, the courage undimmed.

Though it's Ejiofor's picture, you might find your dreams invaded by Michael Fassbender's Epps, the most disturbing movie maniac since Robert Mitchum's rapist in the 1962 *Cape Fear*—and disturbing in much the same way. In both characters mania isn't so much outright psychosis as a kind of twisted rationalization. Epps is in love (or lust) with Patsey, his prettiest and hardest-working slave, and this one-sided attraction ignites a nightmare logic that Fassbender's no-holds-barred performance invites us to follow even as it repels. *Isn't it degrading for me, a white man, to love a black woman? Of course. But isn't Patsey, by being so attractive, forcing me to love her? Of course. Therefore I must persecute her unmercifully.* In a culture corrupted by slavery, obsession combines with self-righteousness to produce cruelty.

Two reservations. First, although most of Ridley's dialog is sinewy, a few scenes in which slaves talk among themselves—particularly one in which Solomon justifies his strategies to Eliza—sounded stilted to me. For these private conversations, the writer borrowed the tone, and sometimes the actual words, of Northup's book, which itself is somewhat stilted, but in a touching Victorian manner that possesses its own eloquence. What works on the page, though, doesn't always work on the lips of actors. Second, the real Northup was rescued by the white northern family that once owned his ancestors and shared with them their surname. The black Northups stayed on very good terms with the white Northups. In the movie, although the rescue itself is superbly staged, some viewers might be puzzled as to who exactly is behind it.

The critical consensus seems to be that *12 Years a Slave* is the greatest theatrical movie about American slavery. Of course it is. What's the competition? More to the point, it is among the greatest films ever made, in any country, on any subject. Don't miss it. ■

Christmas Critics

Thomas Powers

For the used-book business this is the worst of times and the best of times—worst because stores are closing all over the United States, and best because the internet makes it possible to sell and purchase old books online. In a sense, books no longer go out of print but are easily found, easily ordered, and quickly delivered. A search for a title and an author's name will get instant results on the online marketplace AbeBooks.com. How long this happy state of affairs will last I can't say, but I am sure it will last through Christmas this year and next. This means you need not limit Christmas gifts to books of the moment but can reach out to pick up almost anything that has appeared in the past hundred years.

The books I'm recommending here I more or less bumped into by accident, usually when some reviewer or essayist or author of a memoir took the trouble to cite something good. The *Wall Street Journal*'s Saturday review is a good place to prowl, with its weekly "Five Best" list: cookbooks, noir novels of the 1940s, reportage of the Vietnam War, classic books of espionage—the range is wide and there is always something to catch your eye. When a title catches mine, I look it up online. I check the condition of book and dust jacket, choose a copy from a mom-and-pop store if I can spot one, and sometimes buy it in that instant. But most of the time I put it on my saved-for-later list. A week or so fermenting there is usually long enough to test the depth of my interest.

That's the mechanics of acquisition. Try it the next time anybody says you should consider this or that—one of the titles below, perhaps, just to get the hang of it. This is one of the great things the computer has done for literature—not on a level with ease of rewrite, but close.

Before writing something about Larry McMurtry (*The Last Picture Show, Lonesome Dove*) recently I read his early (1968) collection of essays about Texas, **In a Narrow Grave** (Simon & Schuster, $14.99, 208 pp.). (On AbeBooks.com you can find a first edition for a couple thousand dollars, or a paperback for $1 plus $3.98 shipping.) McMurtry had a lot to say about the competition—the Texas writers any newcomer would be measured against. In passing he mentioned J. Evetts Haley's "superb biography" of the legendary early trail driver and rancher Charles Goodnight—a man McMurtry has often mentioned in print over the years. He added that "it is a pity [Haley] has contracted so virulent a conservatism" and called him "the Captain Queeg of Texas letters."

So I went online and got a copy of **Charles Goodnight: Cowman and Plainsman** (University of Oklahoma Press, $24.95, 504 pp.), and can report that McMurtry was holding back with

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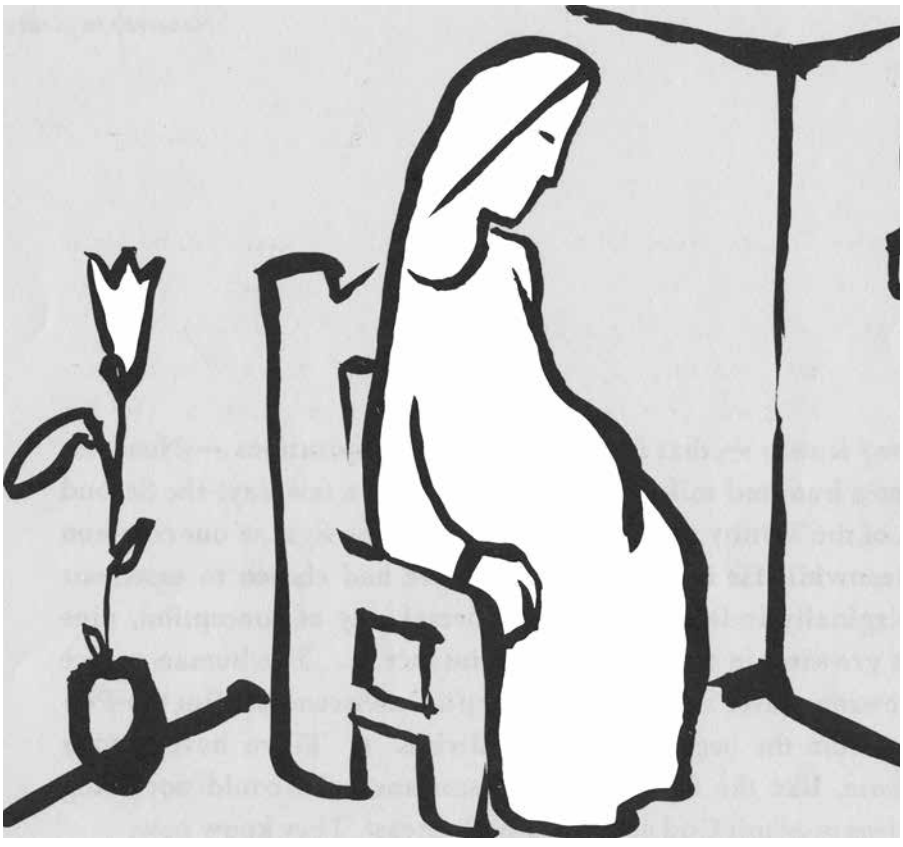
"superb." Haley's life of Goodnight would be a plausible choice for any list of Great American Books for its vivid and sustained treatment of place, character, weather, the mule's capacity for smelling distant water, the moods of cattle, drought, and the extraordinary ordeal of Goodnight's partner, Oliver Loving, when attacked by Indians in West Texas. The subject is interesting and the writing is compelling. When I checked, fifty-three secondhand copies in various editions and conditions were available online.

If you would like a break from quarrels over money in Washington, I recommend **Across Atlantic Ice: The Origins of America's Clovis Culture** by Dennis A. Stanford and Bruce J. Bradley (University of California Press, $27.95, 336 pp.), a book you're not likely to find at the corner bookstore—if you're lucky enough to live near one. The authors are paleoarchaeologists, and on the cover is a photograph of an eight-inch long "laurel leaf biface"—a particular kind of prehistoric knife. This one, amazingly, was dredged up by a scallop boat in two hundred forty feet of water about forty miles off the coast of Virginia in 1970. In the dredge with it was the skull of a mastodon. The captain of the *Cinmar*, Thurston Shawn, took careful note of the exact position of the find, which would have been at sea level during the "last glacial maximum," about twenty-three thousand years ago. That would be roughly ten thousand years earlier than the traditional date given for the arrival of humans in North America across the Bering Strait. Even odder, the "laurel leaf biface" design was typical of toolmaking in Spain at the time and quite different from the earliest tool-making style of Native North Americans, called "Clovis" after the site in New Mexico where the first thirteen-thousand-year-old spear point was found in the 1920s. Interpreting this awkward artifact is the task of this beautifully illustrated book, which, after another few decades of controversy, may change what schoolkids learn about the first arrival of humans in the New World. The authors' many personal asides about their careers and colleagues simultaneously relieve and illuminate the rigors of the argument.

The **Memoirs** of Kingsley Amis, out of print but available online, may suit someone on your gift list. Amis, a writer who was slow to learn how to make use of his very considerable ill temper, is well-known for his midlife about-face from schoolboy leftism to conservatism, roughly in the way of a man cutting loose after a lifetime of trying to be good. Mild political noises can occasionally be heard in the *Memoirs*, but what Amis really detests is any cheap willingness to let the fraudulent pass as real—in literary reputations, for example. Amis writes about people he knew, with special emphasis on the ones he liked and admired—the poet Philip Larkin, the comedian Terry Thomas, the historian of the Great Terror Robert Conquest, the Russian poet Yevgeny Yevtushenko, the literary biographer Peter Quennell, the Hungarian dissident Tibor Szamuely, among many others. Sir John Betjeman, a favorite, won Amis's heart when he said of the excellent dry martinis served in London's Tate Gallery Restaurant: "I don't think one is really quite *enough*, do you?"

Betjeman's end was difficult. He had Parkinson's disease. Amis went and read poems to him—things like Sir Henry Newbolt's "The Nightjar." I didn't know the poem but liked it when I found it online. And I didn't know Betjeman either, so on Amis's recommendation I hunted up one of his books, **Slick but Not Streamlined**, with an introduction by W. H. Auden. Out of print, but available online for twelve bucks, delivered to my door. How can you beat that? My sister Chica would have loved to find that under the tree, but she's dead now. I'll have to think of somebody else.



JEAN CHARLOT

Thomas Powers, *a former* Commonweal *columnist, is the author of ten books and is currently working on a memoir of his father, who was born in Kentucky and went to school in Illinois, Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, Missouri, California, and Texas before he was eighteen.*

Tina Beattie

One of the frustrations of academic research is that the distinction between reading for work and reading for leisure becomes blurred. This year, having finished a major research project, I decided that I would rediscover the pleasure of reading as an end in itself, and maybe even recapture that blissful childhood experience of burrowing into a corner with a book and losing myself for hours on end.

Our modern combination of excessive work and commodified leisure is one of the themes explored in **How Much Is Enough? Money and the Good Life** (Other Press, $24.95, 256 pp.), by Robert Skidelsky and Edward Skidelsky (see "Less, Please" by Gary Gutting, *Commonweal*, December 12, 2012). Robert is an economist known for his work on John Maynard Keynes, and Edward, his son, is a philosopher. Keynes features prominently in the book, not least because in an essay written in 1930 he argued that capitalism should encourage "the money-making and money-loving instincts in individuals" in the short term, since that would hasten the day when people had enough for their needs and would be able to work less and enjoy more leisure. In other words, capitalism would eventually become self-defeating. In challenging this idea, the Skidelskys draw on a wide range of intellectual sources including Aristotelianism, Catholic social teaching, Confucianism, and the Hindu scriptures.

The Skidelskys argue that modern Western societies have lost the concept of the good life, which has shaped the values of every previous culture. Central to the idea of the good life is the ability to distinguish between needs and wants. While the satisfaction of needs is an attainable and worthwhile goal, religious and ethical traditions recognize that human wants are insatiable, and those who pursue them become ever more enslaved by dissatisfaction and greed. The authors argue that, in embracing an ideology that is predicat-

ed upon economic growth and wealth production fueled by the unleashing of "wants," modern societies are unsustainable in both ethical and environmental terms. They offer a persuasive and lucid account of the "good life" as one in which sufficiency, satisfaction, and leisure become worthy aims to pursue in common with others whose values we share (they think religion might be indispensable for this), while greed, envy, and avarice are once more recognized as the vices they are.

This panoramic vision inevitably glosses the ways in which individual lives are affected by changing economic values. **The Spinning Heart** (Steerforth, $15, 160 pp.), a novel by Irish writer Donal Ryan, movingly explores the consequences of the global economic crisis in a small Irish community. Revolving around the lives of those affected by the business collapse of a local builder who had embraced the property boom, it is a finely nuanced exploration of the human cost of global economics. If the Skidelskys risk a rather complacent view of sufficiency and leisure, informed more by the values of a comfortable elite than by the daily lives of those on the margins, Ryan shows us how fragile those lives are in the face of the economic juggernaut that has swept over us. He weaves a tapestry of stories about lives in crisis, revealing the loves and losses, memories and fears of characters whose anxieties come sharply into focus around a kidnapping and a murder. The novel offers a profound insight into the destructive consequences of the economic values criticized by the Skidelskys.

Two other books I read this year offer different perspectives from which to reflect upon the challenges facing us. John Feehan is an Irish environmental scientist with a keen interest in theology. His book **The Singing Heart of the World: Creation, Evolution, and Faith** (Orbis, $26, 240 pp.) is an inspiring exploration of modern science and the ways it requires a "metamorphosis" in our understanding of creation. Feehan argues that, far from supporting scientific atheism, science makes it "deeply reasonable" to believe in a purposeful universe evolving over vast aeons of time, and to have faith in a supernatural God as the only truly rational response to the wonder of creation. Rural Ireland forms the background to Feehan's book, so that it felt serendipitous to be reading *The Spinning Heart* at the same time.

The death of Seamus Heaney led me back to savor his poetry as a rich accompaniment to the visions of Ireland in the books by Ryan and Feehan, but another poet also captured my imagination when I discovered Mary Oliver. Her collection **Thirst** (Beacon Press, $15, 80 pp.) was written after the death of her beloved partner, and in the exploratory awakening of faith in God. The best poems are a passionate and vivid celebration of life, with symbolic roots deep in the miracle of nature. The opening poem, "Messenger," declares the poet's vocation: "My work is loving the world." How does one love the world? By gratitude and rejoicing, by giving

> shouts of joy
> to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy
> dug-up clam,
> telling them all, over and over, how it is
> that we live forever.

I did not read these books snuggled in a dark corner. I read them on holiday in the wilds of Scotland. If we want to continue to enjoy such experiences, we would do well to heed the subtle warning but also the call to grace that, in various ways, resonates between and among these four books.

JEAN CHARLOT

Tina Beattie *is professor of Catholic Studies at the University of Roehampton in London. Her latest book is* Theology after Postmodernity: Divining the Void (A Lacanian Reading of Thomas Aquinas)*, published by Oxford University Press.*

Catherine Wolff

One of the joys of having so many friends and family members who are writers is living in a house bursting with books. They arrive in waves from publishers seeking reviews; as gifts from their authors; they grow like mushrooms—and I love mushrooms!—in the corners of every room. Tempted as I am to recommend those I give as presents year after year (such as Marilynne Robinson's *Gilead*, Robert Ellsberg's *All Saints*, Ronald Rolheiser's *The Holy Longing*), I'll offer instead some very recent books that have already earned a home on our bookshelf.

In **The Evolving God: Charles Darwin on the Naturalness of Religion** (Bloomsbury, $29.95, 192 pp.), J. David Pleins provides a new understanding not only of Charles Darwin, but also of the relationship between science and religion.

In contrast to Richard Dawkins and others who have portrayed Darwin as one who simply lost his faith in the course of his scientific research, and who use him as a "sledgehammer to beat religion," Pleins offers a nuanced view. Darwin continued to struggle throughout his life with theological questions, complicated by his growing awareness that "evolution was not just about physical forms but had religious and moral trajectories." Pleins traces this development—one might say evolution—in Darwin's thought through close (and impressively documented) readings of his writings, from his diaries aboard the *Beagle* to his late letters, and through accounts of the domestic and public debates over Darwin's ideas.

It is both touching and intriguing to read that Darwin's only regret toward the end of his life, what he called his "great sin," was that he had failed to do "more direct good to my fellow-creatures."

Christopher Davis's novel **The Conduct of Saints** (Permanent Press, $28, 272 pp.) takes place in 1945 in recently liberated Rome, "a whore of a city, capable of anything." It's thick with the atmosphere of the time and place, from the oppressive opulence of Vatican interiors to the starving children begging outside the walls, a place where cigarettes, sex, and information are valuable barter, where memories are open wounds.

American Msgr. Brendan Doherty, a Greene-style whisky priest with a tendency to go rogue in the pursuit of justice, is instructed by Pius XII to "reassure those who hesitate" about Alessandro Serenelli's claim that the child he had murdered, Maria Goretti, had come into his dreams to forgive and heal him. Brendan's unofficial and quixotic mission is to save the life and the soul of the murderous fascist Pietro Koch. Both investigations cause dark events in his own past to resurface through drink, and prayer.

As Davis's fictional and historical characters navigate this moral morass, there are no saints, just survivors, if they

are lucky. Brendan's advice to Koch serves for all: "To be heard in heaven we must be without what men call dignity."

Tom Kizzia's **Pilgrim's Wilderness: A True Story of Faith and Madness on the Alaska Frontier** (Crown Publishers, $25, 292 pp.) would strain credulity if it were a novel and not a thoughtful, carefully documented account of Papa Pilgrim, who sought in remote McCarthy, Alaska, freedom from the constraints and distractions of modern life. A staunch believer in the literal truth of the Bible, he declared that he and his family would "live by faith until the Lord returns."

Pilgrim headed a family operation that produced its own goat milk, hunted bears, and made creative use of any available piece of machinery. His fifteen children borne by Mama Country Rose were charming, strikingly well-behaved, excellent musicians. They were also illiterate and subject to beatings and sexual predation, which Pilgrim justified by reference to Scripture.

It wasn't long before Pilgrim took on local and park-service authorities, and long-simmering conflicts between pioneers and environmentalists emerged. As he pursues the story to its dramatic conclusion, Kizzia unearths a bizarre history. For anyone who has come under the sinister influence of a powerful spiritual leader, a prophet in his own mind, this tale will be chillingly familiar.

In **Julian's Gospel: Illuminating the Life and Revelations of Julian of Norwich** (Orbis, $38, 656 pp.) Veronica Mary Rolf illuminates "a woman's version of the gospel…. Julian's own very personal story of seeing and hearing and coming to understand the living, dying, and risen presence of Jesus Christ."

Julian's revelations, written to draw fellow Christians into a shared experience of God's love, were, like Julian herself, little known until the twentieth century. Rolf explores Julian's world to find out who she was and to better understand her writings. This book is a piece of prodigious scholarship on the world of medieval Norwich—a place of war, plague, natural disaster, and simmering heresy—as well as the life available to a woman such as Julian, how she would have come to maturity, the role she'd have played in her family, her religious belief and practice.

Rolf then brings her knowledge of Julian's circumstances to bear on the revelations themselves in order to "illuminate the eventual transformation of the visionary by the vision." Through Rolf's rich meditations on Julian's revelations, readers are drawn into our own engagement with these lessons of God's love.

Catherine Wolff *is the editor of* Not Less Than Everything: Catholic Writers on Heroes of Conscience, from Joan of Arc to Oscar Romero *(HarperOne, 2013).*

Alyssa Rosenberg

No one says growing up is easy, and four of the novels I've read this year reiterate just how challenging the journey from youth (or youthfulness) to maturity can be. More than mere coming-of-age tales, these books also manage to situate often painful emotional experiences within the context of larger societal concerns.

When, in Meg Wolitzer's **The Interestings** (Riverhead, $27.95, 480 pp.), protagonist Julie Jacobson is initiated into the most intriguing group of summer campers at Spirit-in-the-Woods, she finds a way to escape her mundane suburban routine and forge relationships lasting far beyond the summer. Rechristened "Jules," she goes on to become a social worker and marries a sonogram technician, while remaining close with troubled best friend Ash and the wildly successful Ethan. But the passage of years prompts self-examination and reevaluation of those friendships: Is what I'm giving, Jules begins to wonder, worth what I'm getting in return?

The complex economies of lifelong friendships isn't Wolitzer's only subject in this novel, her best to date. She also examines the difference between espousing principles and actually applying them, and the challenge of convert-

ing creative impulses into meaningful artistic endeavor. And in its detailed portrait of the decades-long friendship between Jules and Ethan, the book has something rarely seen in popular fiction: an authentic relationship between a woman and man, intimate but not romantic or sexual.

Jules's moment of clarity comes when she realizes it's not important to be "the dazzler" anymore—that she can "cease to be obsessed with the idea of being interesting." Decency, steadfastness, integrity: these are the qualities that count. To embrace them is not to surrender her youthful ideals, but to grow into a life only dimly visible from summer camp.

In Rachel Hartman's **Seraphina** (Random House Books for Young Readers, $17.99, 512 pp.), once-warring kingdoms of dragons and human beings coexist peacefully, if not always in true mutual understanding. But this fantasy novel—published on a young-adult imprint—has far more sophistication than either that summary suggests or the genre might be expected to yield.

That's because Hartman doesn't settle for easy bromides about familiarity breeding tolerance. The differences between the species—humans as emotionally layered, dragons as coldly logical—spark tensions and spur contests of loyalty based on affinity and biology. "I believed, perhaps erroneously, that our peoples would simply grow accustomed to each other, given the cessation of warfare," the human Queen Lavonda muses about the treaty she has signed with dragonkind. "Are we oil and water, that we cannot mix?"

It's among the questions the title character, a young musician in Lavonda's court, must contemplate, making *Seraphina* an effective investigation of larger real-world issues even as it manages to retain its coming-of-age appeal.

Far from a fantasy land of queens and dragons is the gritty milieu of Louise Erdrich's National Book Award–winning **The Round House** (HarperCollins, $27.99, 341 pp.), in which a Native American household is disrupted by the

rape of the mother. Looking back on the attack, her son Joe—who was just thirteen at the time—tries to explain how deeply it has affected him and his family: "Women don't realize how much store men set on the regularity of their habits. We absorb their comings and goings into our bodies, their rhythms into our bones.... We were waiting for my mother to start us ticking away on the evening. And so, you see, her absence stopped time."

Erdrich is sharply perceptive in depicting the considerable obstacles this Ojibwa family faces in finding justice. Just as keen is her take on the traumatic toll of sexual assault, not just on victims, but on the people who love them. Though the mother's experience remains at the center of the narrative, the continuing impact on Joe—a good boy who desperately wants to be a good man—is what propels it toward its climax.

While Erdrich's protagonist is rooted in place, tradition, and memory, the heroine of Rachel Kushner's **The Flamethrowers** (Scribner, $26.99, 400 pp.) is a drifter. But then the book itself ranges far and wide as well, capturing the enthusiasm of Italian futurism and the ugliness of colonialism while remarking on art, history, politics, and class, and delivering no small amount of romantic intrigue. Yet this sweeping novel about an aspiring artist named Reno, her love affair with a more established sculptor named Sandro, and their circle of New York friends is at its best when it's focused on how hard it can be to acknowledge the rawness of your own ambition.

With her Nevada roots and relative inexperience, Reno lacks the confidence so on display among the cosmopolitan set, feeling it's her place to listen rather than speak at dinner parties attended by glamorously grungy intellectuals and established artists. Her shyness and passivity extend even to her interactions with Sandro, who suggests the very projects she should pursue. It is only when the relationship and her art both reach a state of crisis that she sees how worrying about impressing other people has stalled her progress.

A common criticism of this kind of story is one that's also been directed at Lena Dunham's HBO sitcom *Girls*: that the struggles of such young women are fresh only to the people experiencing them. But Kushner embeds a tart rebuke to those who would dismiss the novel on those grounds. When Reno's acquaintance Gloria mocks the outfit of a young woman at a gallery show, Reno realizes what the older woman is missing. "It's new to her, I should have said but didn't," she thinks. "She's on her timeline, Gloria, not yours or anyone else's."

So too the rest of the characters populating the books discussed here: young people on their own timelines. Give them a few more years to get things wrong; it's an essential step in learning how to get things right.

Alyssa Rosenberg *is features editor at* ThinkProgress *and the television columnist for* Women and Hollywood. *Her work has appeared in the* New York Times, *the* Atlantic, New York, Slate, *and elsewhere.*

Sarah Rich

Amy Leach's debut collection of nature essays, **Things That Are** (Milkweed, $18, 192 pp.), imagines how constellations like Ursa Major and creatures like apple-green caterpillars might perceive their experiences. To some readers, such philosophical flights may come across as oppressive impositions on the cosmos. Can't we let the stars have their privacy? But I enjoy her almost-too-clever writing, filled with lyrical puns, and I found these thoughts about possible thoughts anything but presumptuous.

Grounded in sometimes unreal-sounding science and history, Leach's "guessing games" seamlessly combine basic lessons in biology, botany, and astronomy with nimble imaginative leaps. Like the eponymous patent clerk in Alan Lightman's *Einstein's Dreams*, many of these essays depict alternate worlds. In this collection, sirens and

green dragons share a universe with jellyfish and whirligig beetles. Postulating a world where sound waves don't decay, she writes, "The world, full of past sound, would be like the sky, full of past light. The world would be like the mind, for which there is no once." She makes good on her offer to exchange a "mad currency" with her readers: "I'll buy you rain, you buy me snow, and we'll go in together for sunshine for the grass and the clover and the delicious prickly thistles." Gleeful lapses into absurdity abound in *Things That Are*.

Leach's invented words in particular create a delightful effect. "Is beauty not a form of philanthropy," she writes, "and are the stars not the most beautiful fireflakes?" The reader thinks she knows what this word, beginning with a familiar "firef-," will be, and is pleasurably startled by its unexpected end. Fireflies, buzzing in the air, seem oddly weighty in comparison to delicate, swirling snowflakes. Both are bright, evocative, and strangely beautiful together, joined by Leach as an uncanny way to describe the stars. Expect many similarly powerful and playful constructions in these pages.

Monologue of a Dog (Harcourt, $22, 112 pp.), by the Nobel Prize–winning poet Wislawa Szymborska, also provides artful combinations of fact and fantasy. An apt introduction to an unmatched contemporary poet who died last year, Szymborska's accessible free-verse poems combine whimsy with metaphysical depth. In one, she wonders why she is who she is and not someone else: "I might have been myself minus amazement, / that is, / someone completely different." Later, she posits that the soul is an entity that comes and goes of its own accord: "We have a soul at times. / No one's got it nonstop, / for keeps. [...] We need it / but apparently / it needs us / for some reason too." The poem "ABC" explores human relationships at their ultimate close: "I'll never find out now / what A. thought of me. / If B. ever forgave me in the end. / Why C. pretended everything was fine."

Many of Szymborska's best poems manage to convey the weight and mys-

tery of human suffering. One such poem looks at a photograph of people who died on September 11; another takes us walking through a cemetery with graves for children. Devastation and awe are explored in this collection with raw honesty and reverence. Translations are side by side with her original words, so you can test your Polish—or as I did, simply marvel at the sounds. Don't skip Billy Collins's introduction, either. It's as good a description of Szymborska's poems as there can be.

Another book that effectively mixes earth and ether is the graphic memoir **Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo, and Me** (Gotham, $20, 256 pp.) in which cartoonist Ellen Forney explores her experience of bipolar disorder. Placing herself in a tradition of "crazy artists," Forney finds solace in good company, and wrestles with concerns about medication and its potential effects on her creative output—that is, her livelihood and identity. The results are hilarious and intimate. But be warned, graphic-novel newbies: *Marbles* makes for a wild first experience of the genre. While many graphic novels maintain a stable artistic style throughout, Forney's assumes a wide range of styles—from Sunday-funnies exuberance to minimalist depictions of depressive moods—to match the author's experience of her own highs and lows. This book's inconsistency is part of its mercurial magic. If you are interested in the intersection of autobiography and sequential art, give *Marbles* a try. Forney's fortitude and hope left me feeling refreshed.

Sarah Rich *is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School. She works in the sociology department at Yale University.*

Paul Elie

"Never deny; seldom confirm; always distinguish." That formula for disputation—Flannery O'Connor by way of Thomas Aquinas—was in mind often in 2013, a year in which I devoted a lot of attention to distinguishing.

After the *New York Times* ran an essay of mine about Christian belief and contemporary fiction, the disputations began. How could I say there are no believing novelists, or novelizing believers? Why, there is X, of course, Y pointed out. Z wrote to the paper to say, "What about me?" Then came file attachments and plus-size printed manuscripts from A, B, C, D, and E… most of the way to Z again.

Now, I hadn't said there are no believing novelists, or novelizing believers. In an essay of a couple of thousand words, thick with examples, flagrant in the naming of names, I set out my strong sense that there is relatively little current American literary fiction set in the present in which the central questions of Christian belief are taken up dramatically. I spent most of the essay distinguishing between the fiction I say is missing and the kind we do have: set in the past, or treating religion as a cultural inheritance, or gesturing toward those questions through the faintest of signs and whispers, or engaging people of cloth and collar as agents of the quirky and inexplicable. And so on.

At the end of the essay I suggested where, lacking such fiction, we should look instead, beginning with nonfiction. Year in and year out, there are nonfiction books set in the present in which the central questions of Christian belief are taken up dramatically, and 2013 has been an especially rich year for such books.

Thomas Cahill's *Heretics and Heroes*, Nathan Schneider's *God in Proof*, Diarmuid MacCulloch's *Silence: A Christian History*, Theo Hobson's *Reinventing Liberal Christianity*: those four alone would make a banner year—and those are just the books, all published recently, that I've only just started reading.

The strongest of the books I have read have a noticeable boldness of form, a structural originality. They seem to prove the point about what art is and what it does: the very quality that makes these books literature is what makes them convincing.

Fred Bahnson was raised by missionaries in places from Nigeria to Montana, but also on his grandparents' farms in North Carolina. When he graduated from Duke Divinity School, he set out to build Christian community in a way that came naturally to him: by creating a community garden under the auspices of a Methodist church in North Carolina. Over time Anathoth, as it is called, became a place where people of different races and religions mixed as in few other places in the South (or in the North, truth be told). And it became a place where the biblical imagery of garden and field, of sowing and reaping, regained its everyday meanings.

JEAN CHARLOT

"We took Anathoth's mission from the book of Jeremiah: 'plant gardens and seek the peace of the city,' and here at the beginning of my fourth year I think we had that mission half right…. We planted so many things that churches from all over the South came to ask how they, too, could plant such gardens and seek the peace of the city. Anathoth had sprouted from an empty field, and on its best days it afforded a glimpse of the messianic feast." So it is with **Soil and Sacrament: A Spiritual Memoir of Food and Faith** (Simon & Schuster, $26, 261 pp.). The book, about Bahnson's efforts to open new portals in the soil, also becomes a soil of sorts where the reader's interior life can find space and light and nourishment with which to grow.

I spent Holy Week in London, and the theocon talking points about religiously denuded Britain seemed disproven wherever I turned: in more *Passion* and *Messiah* performances than I could hope to attend; in the British Film Institute's showing of Pasolini's *Gospel According to Saint Matthew*; in the live Passion (simulcast on large screens) at the foot of Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square; and in Francis Spufford's **Unapologetic** (HarperOne, $25.99, 240 pp.), which I found at the LRB Bookshop and read straight through from Friday to Sunday. I've been describing it to people as an account of Christian belief as David Foster Wallace might have written it, but that's not quite right. It's probably closer to Julian Barnes. It could have been subtitled *The History of a Twenty-First-Century Man's Deepening Attention to Religious Matters in 10 ½ Chapters*. But the publisher's own subtitle gets it pretty much right: *Why, Despite Everything, Christianity Can Still Make Surprising Emotional Sense*.

What makes this book a work of "unapologetics" rather than apologetics is the extreme indirection of its style. Spufford works through voice more than through straightforward argumentation. He begins with his own quarrelsome and contradictory inner life (describing himself as a representative person of today) rather than in established ques-

tions of religion's place in society. He rephrases familiar arguments about religious belief idiomatically, and does the same for Christian doctrines, beginning with original sin, which he expresses through a comic abbreviation: "HptFtU" (the expanded version is not printable here). Now, those are all familiar moves of the apologist—and it is Spufford's greatest achievement to make us forget that while we're reading his book. Here he is on the initial embrace of belief, which somewhere else he compares to falling in love:

> Do I feel better? It depends what you mean by "better." As my godfather asked suspiciously when a nurse said it to him, "Better than what?" I don't feel cuddled, soothed, flattered I don't feel distracted or entertained. My fancy has not been tickled. I have not been shown cool huge stuff by a very big version of Jerry Bruckheimer. I have not been meddled with, or reprogrammed, or had my settings tweaked. I have not been administered a cosmic antidepressant. I have not had my HptFtU removed by magic. I have not been told to take it easy because I'm OK and you're OK. Instead I have been shown the authentic bad news about myself, in a perspective which is so different from the tight focus of my desperation that it is good news in itself; I have been shown that though I may see myself in the grim optics of sorrow and self-dislike, I am being seen all the while, if I can bring myself to believe it, with a generosity wider than oceans. I've been gently and implacably reminded of how little I know a whole truth about myself.

Even as I typed that passage I realized who Spufford's most direct worldly ancestor is. It's Nick Hornby, he of the energetic memoirs about football fandom and record-store haunting—and that's just the beginning. In England, especially, Hornby is thought of as the progenitor of the male confessional, AKA "lad lit," and he cleared a space for Spufford to write the book he calls "a defense of Christian emotions."

Spufford's attention to emotion is original and remarkable. But what struck me especially about the book on Holy Thursday in London—and what strikes me about it on the front edge of Advent in New York—is that it is about the central questions of Christian belief, the questions that I argued don't figure much into contemporary American fiction. How does curiosity quicken into belief? Just what does the believer find herself believing? What about the sins of the church and Christian people, as beyond numbering as grains of sand? And Christ himself: What exactly is the nature of his challenge, and his example, after all these years?

Spufford asks these questions—asks them colorfully and dramatically. I would say his book, beautifully written as it is, reads like a novel, but it doesn't. It is unapologetically not a fiction. ■

Paul Elie, *the author of* The Life You Save May Be Your Own *(2003) and* Reinventing Bach *(2012), is a senior fellow with the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs. He blogs at everythingthatrises.com.*

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Book

W A K E U P, L A Z A R U S! Volume II: Paths to Catholic Renewal by Pierre Hegy, at Amazon.com. The Latin-American vision of "Missionary Discipleship" applied to 100 liturgies and 100 homilies.

Thomas Merton Centenary 2015

Lectures, retreats, conferences, local celebrations are encouraged to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Merton (January 31, 1915/2015). For info/suggestions, contact Jonathan Montaldo (merton2015@gmail.com). See also the International Thomas Merton Society website (www.merton.org) for events list and info about ITMS General Meeting June 4–7, 2015, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY—keynote speaker: Rt. Rev. Rowan Williams.

Seminar

Seminar with Sandra Schneiders, IHM: Catholic Religious Life in a New Millennium, July 13–19, 2014 at Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Ind. Sponsored by the Center for Spirituality. Open to all and of particular service to women and men religious, as well as those considering religious life. For detailed information, visit www.saintmarys.edu/spirituality or call (574) 284-4636.

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University Portland, Theology Chair

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Associate Chaplain, Sacred Heart

About Sacred Heart University: Sacred Heart University, the second-largest independent Catholic university in New England, offers more than 50 undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs on its main campus in Fairfield, Connecticut, and satellites in Connecticut, Luxembourg, and Ireland. More than 6,000 students attend the University's five colleges: Arts & Sciences; Health Professions; University College; the AACSB-accredited John F. (Jack) Welch College of Business; and the NCATE-accredited Farrington College of Education. The *Princeton Review* includes SHU in its guides "Best 377 Colleges—2013 Edition," "Best in the Northeast" and "Best 294 Business Schools—2012 Edition." *U.S. News & World Report* ranks SHU among the best master's universities in the North in its annual "America's Best Colleges" publication. SHU fields 31 division I athletic teams, and has an award-winning program of community service.

Job Description: The Associate Chaplain promotes the spiritual development of the campus community through worship, pastoral care, and various spiritual life programs.

Responsibilities include: Coordinate and preside at weekend and weekday liturgies following a youth Mass format, fostering active participation • Offer sacrament of Reconciliation on regular basis • Implement and facilitate Confirmation and RCIA programs • Provide sacraments and pastoral ministry on retreat programs including: Freshman Retreats, Senior Retreats, Winter Retreats, Peer Minister's Retreats, and Encounter with Christ Retreats • Provide pastoral care for faculty, staff, and students • Coordinate University Interfaith Thanksgiving Service, Baccalaureate Masses, and all special occasion Masses • Act as point person for all university prayer vigils • Plan routine opportunities for community prayer • Coordinate and schedule Small Christian Communities (Campus RENEW); provide training for Small Community leaders • Manage and approve all applications for the use of the sacred space of the university chapel • Coordinate the community's prayer in response to significant events in the life of the University and society • Coordinate memorial services and serve as the point person for University response to the death of students, faculty, or staff • Share devotional talks, make presentations regarding spiritual life; serve as a spiritual mentor • Coordinate and preside at university weddings • Recruit, train, and coordinate liturgical ministers for all liturgies • Communicate with liturgical music staff regarding youthful music that will foster full participation • Participate in Campus Ministry events and fellowships on a regular basis • Create and implement a student chaplain program for all sports teams, male and female • Interact with campus community at large • Other duties as assigned

Requirements: Must be an ordained Catholic Priest • MDiv or master's degree preferred in related area (e.g., pastoral theology, counseling, social work, or education) • Three years of Campus Ministry or Youth Ministry experience • Interpersonal / human relations skills • Verbal and written communication skills • Ability to motivate in religious areas and encourage faith sharing and community • Ability to nurture spiritual and moral values; promote interfaith understanding • Ability to perform duties with a sense of compassion, energy, openness, composure, and flexibility • Computer skills including various software applications such as: Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Publisher, Outlook, etc. • Time management skills and the ability to manage daily, weekly, and annual schedules and meet deadlines

Additional Information: Late nights and weekends are required.

Thank you for considering Sacred Heart University in your search.

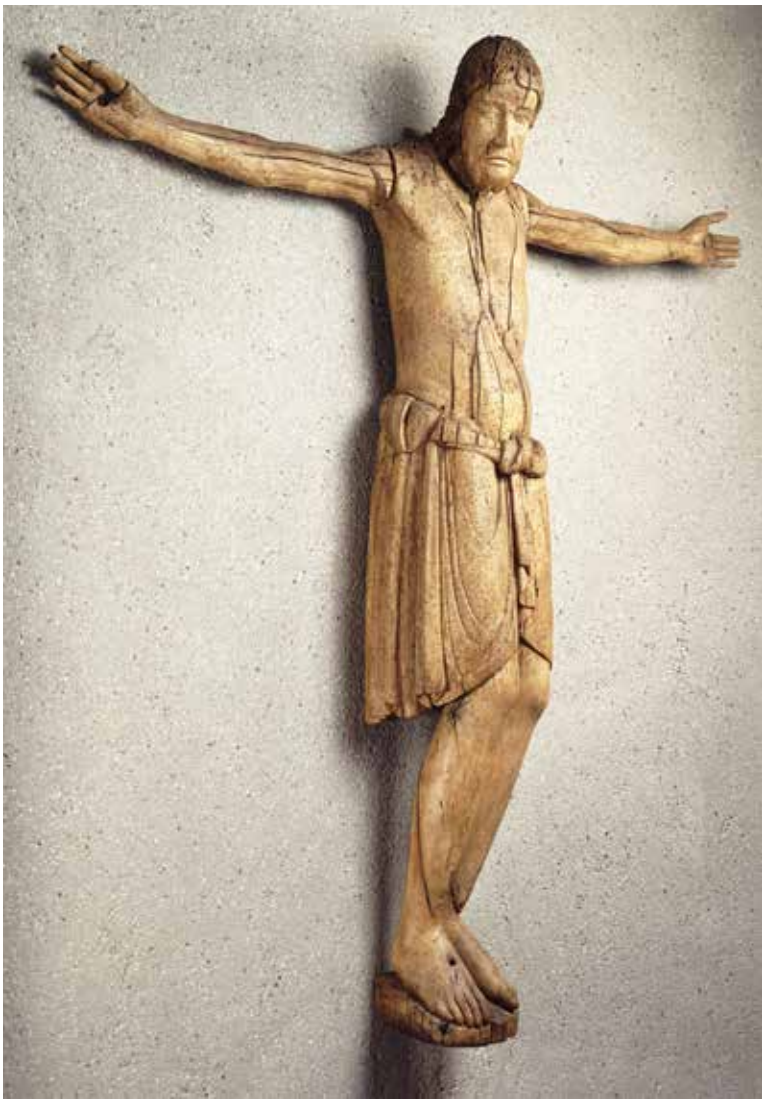
To Apply: http://sacredheart.interviewexchange.com/candapply.jsp?JOBID=43826

High-interest Loan

Leo O'Donovan

To the good fortune of visitors to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Hildesheim Cathedral in Germany is undergoing major renovation and has sent some of its most beautiful medieval objects to New York. The cathedral's great bronze doors and famed column cannot travel, of course, but two monumental pieces have made the trip—the lifesize Ringelheim Crucifix (c. 1000) and a bronze baptismal fount (c. 1226) with extraordinarily detailed iconography—and they abundantly repay a visit.

Entering from the Medieval Sculpture Court, you come first upon the font, six feet high and resting on four kneeling figures representing the Rivers of Paradise. A relief scene of the baptism of Jesus, standing in a beautifully stylized Jordan River, evokes the power of the sacrament. Opposite it, a Virgin Enthroned is accompanied by the patron saints of the cathedral.



Ringelheim Crucifix, ca. 1000. Photograph courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

At the center of the gallery beyond is the crucifix, actually the corpus from a cross lost long ago. Once you have seen it, you will never forget it. Originally polychromed, the now-bare linden wood suits modern taste (the arms, added a century later, are of oak), and even though this is a cross of triumph—Christ's eyes are open, and he seems more to stand before the cross than to hang on it—the rueful, questioning expression on his face speaks strongly to modern anxiety. To say that the figure compares to the slightly earlier Gero Crucifix in Cologne Cathedral is to suggest its artistic and religious power.

The crucifix was probably commissioned for the abbess of the convent in Ringelheim by her brother, Bernward, bishop of Hildesheim from 993 to 1022 and one of the greatest art patrons of the Middle Ages. In addition to commissioning the doors and triumphal column for St. Mary's Cathedral, Bernward planned and furnished the Abbey Church of St. Michael's, whose cornerstone was laid in 1010. Of the treasures in the Met's show he is the likely patron of the so-called *Golden Madonna, a Virgin and Child Enthroned*, from the early Middle Ages (both heads have unfortunately been lost); the delicate but powerful Bernward Cross in silver with gilding (Bernward himself may have made it); a pair of richly decorated silver candlesticks; and the "Precious Gospels," full of exquisite illuminations of scenes from the life of Christ and bound with handsome covers.

Bernward's successor, Godehard, was even more revered for his modest saintliness. Under Godehard the famous cathedral school continued to flourish, and so did artistic creativity in Hildesheim, as documented in the show by illuminated manuscripts, richly decorated crosses, portable altars, and highly imaginative reliquaries—one for the arm of a military saint, one for the skull of St. Oswald, and another created for the arm of Bernward after his canonization in 1192.

The city during this time—one of the larger in Northern Germany, with a population over five thousand—became increasingly famous for its bronzes, as you see at the Met in a commanding lectern in the form of an eagle and in an aquamanile, a vessel for washing hands, in the popular shape of a lion. But tensions were mounting between the laity and the bishops, and by 1249, when a city charter was adopted, the course was set for a shift of power from clergy to laity. The late Middle Ages would see few significant works of art entering Hildesheim's churches.

Reviewing this show about works of art so apparently distant from us, *New York Times* critic Holland Cotter commented that "you just have to be willing to stop, pay attention, spend time, to act as if objects from the past had something true to tell you about your life in the present, how to live it, what to feel about it." If you do this, you may even find that these remarkable objects are praying for you this Advent. ■

Leo O'Donovan, SJ, *is president emeritus of Georgetown University.*

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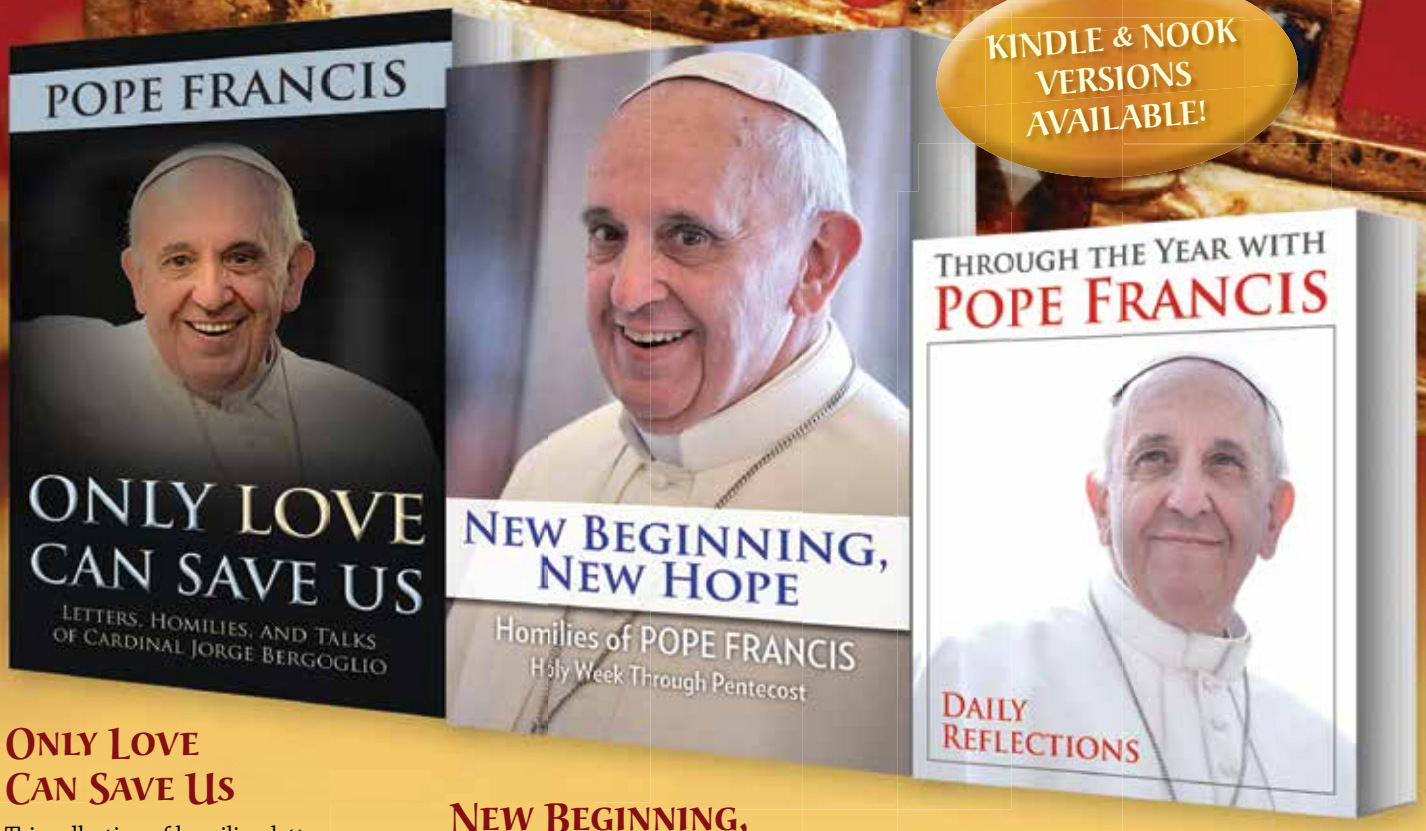

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— Pope Francis, World Youth Day, July 25, 2013

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