A Review of Religion, Politics & Culture

# Commonweal

SEPTEMBER 22, 2017

## AN ORDINARY SUNDAY

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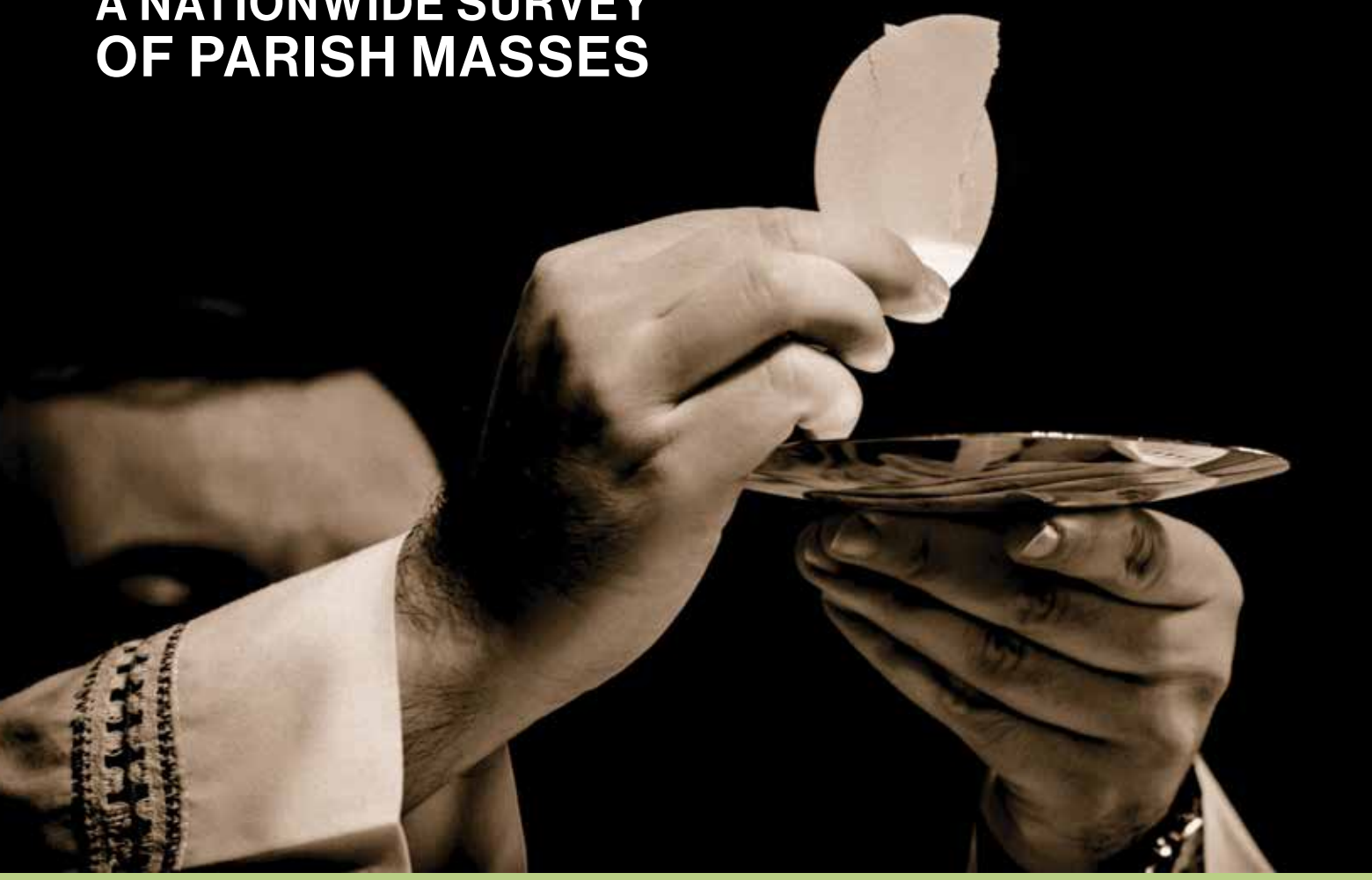

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# LETTERS

## *Euthanasia, LGBT Catholics*

**QUESTIONS AT THE END**

Gilbert Meilaender's essay ("More Bathos than Pathos," August 11) on the *New York Times* article detailing the assisted suicide of John Shields, "At His Own Wake, Celebrating Life and the Gift of Death," is a masterful summary and criticism of a death scene and the assumptions behind it. The entire event is embarrassing.

Meilaender presents the debate over euthanasia as the tension between self-determination and compassion. He appropriately (particularly for Catholicism) dismisses the notion of individual self-determination. But his discussion of compassion, which he recognizes is at least as complicated as self-determination, rests on our equality "grounded in the fact that we do not make each other." That obviously is true, but he then quickly moves to the claim that no one "should give ultimate authority over your life to me" and then the observation that "there may be some suffering that must be accepted and endured—suffered—because we can find no way to relieve it entirely." In the face of this situation, we must "maximize care."

He correctly asserts that it is not the task of medicine to "judge whether our life still has meaning and purpose." But nor is it the task of medicine to define maximum care. This is the role of the community, both religious and social, the individual's loved ones, and the individual him- or herself (self-determination cannot simply disappear). This is the venue where the shape and limits of compassion are worked out.

In this venue it has already been recognized that the efforts of medicine can themselves be limited; medicine is not a good in itself. Traditionally, in extreme cases medicine could do little but to "keep company with us in our dying." But contemporary medicine can do much more now, both to cure or alleviate what not long ago would have been fatal illnesses and to address symptoms of complicated illnesses. The latter alternative often prolongs life functions without being able to cure or alleviate the larger problem. Medicine thus is a tool that intervenes between the gift of life and its inevitable end.

With this tool, we have become co-creators of our passage through life and are not as passive regarding the conditions of our death as our forebears were. These emerging medical abilities require us to re-examine what it means to "keep company with us in our dying." A sincere compassion ought to require us to fully confront how we prolong dying by our medical ministrations.

Consequently, we must re-examine what euthanasia is. Twenty-five years ago, it was understood by many that to withdraw treatment was to kill the patient. That denial of the role of medicine in increasing the suffering of both the dying patient and family has been subsequently recognized as inappropriate in a wide variety of situations. Alongside that discussion, from Janet Adkins to Mr. Shields, it has been asserted by patients that a diagnosis can itself be the basis of intolerable suffering. What ought to be the role of the community, the individual's loved ones, and the individual himself or herself in the face of such a diagnosis? What are the signs that confirm a diagnosis or indicate significant progress of the disease? At what stage do these issues matter? If Meilaender wants to ease the

*continued on page four*

# Commonweal

SEPTEMBER 22, 2017 • VOLUME 144 • NUMBER 15

public discussion of euthanasia, he might address these questions. Is simply telling the patient to tough it out and seek redemptive value in that distress enough?

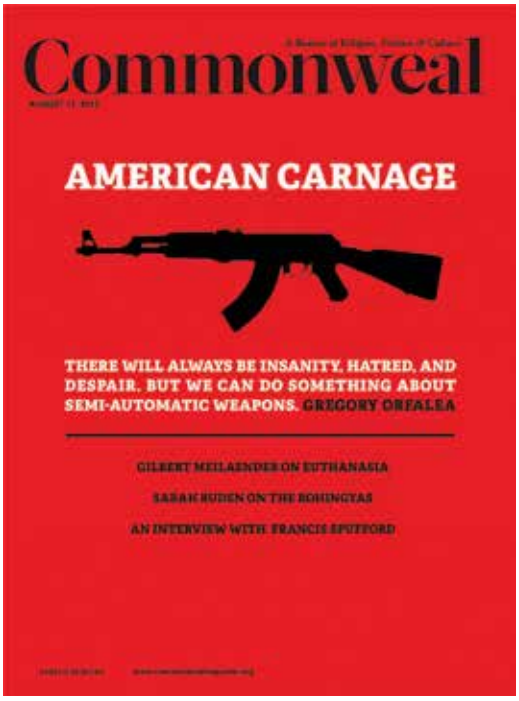
HAROLD W. BAILLIE
*Professor of Philosophy*
*University of Scranton*
*Scranton, Pa.*

**GILBERT MEILAENDER RESPONDS:**
I am grateful that Professor Baillie has taken the time to think about and respond to the views I developed in my article. And I suspect that, given a little more discussion, he and I would agree in considerable measure about the issue I took up. Here is just a little of that further discussion.

Baillie is bothered by my statement that there may be suffering that must be endured if we can find no right way to alleviate it. (I did not, by the way, say that suffering patients should seek "redemptive value" in their suffering, although he attributes that view to me.) Perhaps if Baillie had come across my statement in discussion of a different moral problem—say, the permissibility of torture—he would not have been so bothered or quick to object. So I would like to think that, at least in principle, we may have no insuperable disagreement here.

When I say it is the task of medicine to maximize care, Baillie seems to be mentally underscoring the word maximize. But I am not. I am saying that we should maximize care for suffering patients. That means we must first ask what makes for genuine care. In my view, for reasons I developed briefly in the article, euthanasia does not. But neither does beginning or continuing treatment that is either useless or excessively burdensome for the patient. To discontinue—or never begin—such treatments is not to aim at the death of the patient. It is to aim at maximizing care, as best we can, while acknowledging that death may come somewhat sooner as a result.

Finally, though, I come to a matter on which Baillie and I may differ somewhat. While I do not think it is the task of medicine alone to determine what it means to maximize care, I do think physicians play an important role here. To be sure, patients should participate, to the degree they are able, in discussion of their treatment. But physicians are not simply highly trained technicians who should use their skills to serve whatever ends a patient requests. Physicians too must be central participants in the discussion about what constitutes good (and morally right) medical care. Only then can the encounter between physicians and patients, and the profession of medicine itself, be moral undertakings.




**ARE THEY LISTENING?**
A few issues surface from David Cloutier's review of Fr. Jim Martin's book *Building a Bridge* ("The Ignatian Option," August 11). Cloutier's statement that the church's teaching is "about sex" is true—unfortunately. That limited understanding dismisses any concern for the positive and life-giving nature of same-sex relationships. Catholics whose life choices have been strongly influenced by the Great Commandment and the sacramental life of the church have arrived at conclusions different from official church teaching.

Moreover, homosexuality, as we understand it today is a rather recent public phenomenon, and will require much further discussion in the church. The movement towards Christian unity, fostered particularly by John Paul II, will require serious discussion of issues that divide us. It is a volatile issue, not just one among many as Cloutier infers. It focuses on how we come to understand ourselves. Like heterosexuality, homosexuality is understood by most as a permanent element of identity. It is about relationships linked to personhood, the deepest level of which is expressed by God's very nature, the Most Holy Trinity: mutuality, faithfulness, and sharing of the fruits of relationship.

For the magisterium to function as a teacher, must she not also function as a learner? At the end of the nineteenth century, the American medical community first understood homosexuality as a pathology, an illness. After listening for a few more decades, it changed its mind.

As a seventy-year-old lifelong-celibate gay Catholic, I disagree with the church on this issue, whose authority I respect and love. In my late twenties, realizing that I could no longer date women, I "came out"—to my friends and family. I am sure that my mother's and grandmother's daily prayer life, predicated on attitudes of unconditional love and welcome, determined my move to positive self-acceptance. This was not true of many gay Catholic friends, some of whom eventually died of AIDS.

No, this is not an issue like any other. More than "tough conversations," it will require serious listening on both sides. But for those who unequivocally support church teaching, it will require listening to the painful narratives of gay Catholics, who also respect church authority, an authority we hope is capable of nonjudgmental listening.

PHILIP SCHMIDT
*Toronto, Ont.*
*Canada*

*From the Editors*

# The Deluge

In the coming weeks and months a more complete picture of the destruction wrought by Hurricane Harvey will emerge, but the initial estimates of the damage are staggering enough: the greatest single rainfall ever recorded in the continental United States, more than 150,000 homes destroyed across southeast Texas, the cost likely to be greater than that of Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy combined. A week after the storm more than sixty deaths have been confirmed, though that number, along with the number of the displaced and homeless, will likely rise. Events like these don't discriminate, and indeed Harvey is a reminder that everyone—rich, poor, native citizen, immigrant—is at nature's mercy. Houston, which was hardest hit, is the nation's fourth-largest city and one of its most diverse, and the countless instances of people hurrying to help strangers as well as neighbors, sometimes at their own peril, are an inspiring reminder of how in times of calamity Americans pull together.

At the moment, a similarly collective spirit seems to be guiding recovery efforts. Loose talk of a U.S. government shutdown, which would have prevented funding in the aftermath of the storm, has subsided, and with it the clamor for money to build a border wall. The Trump administration is seeking some $14 billion in initial recovery aid, and fiscal conservatives in Congress have temporarily muted their calls for cuts in federal spending to pay for emergency expenditures. Still to be legislated is an overall aid package that's expected to far exceed the $50 billion allocated after Sandy in 2012; Congress has pledged to avoid the regional and partisan acrimony over funding that hobbled recovery efforts for that storm. Meanwhile, President Trump has expressed his intent to avoid repeating the mistakes George W. Bush made with Hurricane Katrina, and if he can avoid further conflating the magnitude of the response to Harvey with his own self-perceived stature, then perhaps a milestone in leadership will have been reached.

There must also be some acknowledgment of why the Gulf region, Houston in particular, is so vulnerable to such disasters. No city can be expected to withstand a fifty-inch deluge, but it's long been known that Houston, at risk of inundation even after ordinary storms, experiences some of the highest rates of property loss from floods in the United States. Geology and geography are partly to blame; the city is low-lying, laced with bayous, underlaid by poorly draining clay, and routinely in the path of storms blowing up through the Gulf. But human behavior explains the rest: rapacious development made possible by Texas's notoriously lax zoning and environmental regulations has led to untrammeled sprawl, with homes built in floodplains, water-ways rechanneled to accommodate shipping and oil-refining, water-absorbing grasslands paved over, and some of the widest freeways in the world. When it rains, there is simply nowhere for the water to go. And the severity and frequency of heavy rainfall are on the rise. This was Houston's third five-hundred-year flood in three years, and experts agree that the rising sea levels and warmer ocean temperatures attributable to climate change will make "extreme rain events" far more common. (This past winter, for the first time ever, the water temperature of the Gulf did not drop below 73 degrees.)

Natural disasters like Harvey underscore once again the importance of a functioning government capable of mustering the financial, logistical, and humanitarian resources needed to respond to a large-scale crisis. They also can force a rethinking of short-term priorities. Before the storm, Trump and some Republican lawmakers were seeking major cuts to the Federal Emergency Management Agency and thinking of leaving the National Flood Insurance Program unfunded; these proposals are now stalled. But the storm also presents an opportunity for re-envisioning longer-term priorities. These include commonsensical zoning, safety, and environmental regulations, especially in areas vulnerable to storms and floods. Strategies for "managed retreat," a gradual abandoning of endangered coastal regions, are also necessary; some local governments already are doing this, but more towns and cities need to. But most important is a collective commitment to acknowledging and addressing the effects of human-induced climate change. Texas's congressional delegation shares the current administration's hostility toward climate science and its willful imperviousness to facts. As heartening as it is to see the people of southeast Texas starting to recover from this disaster, it's alarming to consider how little their elected officials are doing to protect them from the inevitable: the next catastrophic storm. ■

*September 6, 2017*

*Jo McGowan*

# Unpaid Bills

## THE MEDICAL CRISIS FACING INDIA'S POOR

This August, sixty children died within forty-eight hours in a government-run hospital in Uttar Pradesh, the largest state in India. Hospital staff say the children died because of a lack of oxygen, while government officials claim the deaths were due to a range of understandable medical causes. Technicians at the hospital had informed the medical officer of dwindling supplies of oxygen a week earlier, and had filed a second notice the day before the crisis began. But nothing was done.

Opposition leaders lost no time in traveling to Gorakhpur to stand outside the hospital and make statements condemning the government's callous ineptitude, while the government turned its wrath on the company supplying the oxygen, saying that "a probe would be initiated" to determine why it had failed in its duty to deliver a timely supply.

That probe won't take long. The oxygen company had not been paid for months and a bill of 7 million rupees ($110,000) was pending. Notices were repeatedly ignored, and the company had warned the hospital in writing on August 1 that it could not continue without payment. When the acute shortage hit, the district magistrate, under whose authority the hospital functions, finally swung into action, procuring emergency supplies from somewhere at 1 a.m., but it was too little, too late. Of the sixty children who died, at least fourteen of them were infants in the neonatal intensive-care unit.

My organization for disabled children has worked in a government hospital in India for the past seven years. We've seen firsthand the inefficient, callous, and unfeeling care that the poor receive. (Only the poor use government hospitals.) But we've seen the same treatment meted out to hospital staff, who are given almost no support and are expected to perform heroic tasks in impossible conditions.

A typical pediatrician sees between eighty and a hundred children in an out-patient clinic every day. The doctor has no time to get information about allergies, drug interactions, or complex causes. With no secretarial staff, records are not maintained anyway. Each child is a new case without a history. Given the sheer number of patients, no doctor could be expected to remember anything about the last time a particular child had come.

Forty percent of doctors' positions are unfilled; essential equipment is generally out of order; the pharmacy is usually out of the medicines the doctors prescribe, and nursing and ancillary staff are frequently on strike—not getting paid in over a year can have that effect. If a patient dies and his family is well connected with the local mafia, doctors may be beaten up. It is not uncommon for two patients to be in a single bed, and all the patients have the underlying problems of poverty and malnutrition complicating their illnesses.

Acknowledging the years of neglect of India's hospitals is critical to understanding the colossal failure in Gorakhpur. This was not an isolated case of one district's apathy. It was the natural result of a deliberate dismantling of India's public-health system. In 1990, for example, a government order froze all fresh recruitments to public hospitals. When hospital staff retired or died, they were not replaced. Meanwhile, babies kept being born and the system couldn't keep up. A public-health system that had once been respected and effective (albeit crowded and full of delays) sank into a mire of chaos and malpractice.

*Woman with AIDS in a hospital in India*

PHOTO: © JOHN ISAAC / WORLD BANK

It is now generally considered wise to avoid government hospitals like the plague (the same is true of government schools). Only the poor, with no other options, resort to the free care these hospitals provide. Meanwhile, private hospitals, often unregulated, are springing up in every neighborhood and back alley. Those that are well run are havens for medical tourists from abroad and unaffordable for most Indians.

India's health statistics continue to cause concern (in the district where this scandal occurred, the infant mortality rate is nearly 70 out of 1,000; India's goal is 25) and as long as health is just another business opportunity, this is unlikely to change. The program we run in the Doon Hospital is also funded by the government, and our grant has been frequently delayed—once by two years. We keep things going because we believe passionately in the service we offer and because private donors step up to close the gap. Not so for small-business owners trying to make a living. You can't blame the oxygen company for finally refusing to supply the government for free. And you can't blame the poor for continuing to trust the public-health system. They have no choice.

But we can, and should, blame the government for its complete disregard for human life, especially when corrupt officials routinely squander public funds on their election campaigns and then go abroad for their own medical treatment. Not that different, I suppose, from U.S. lawmakers who vote to repeal Obamacare while enjoying fabulous taxpayer-funded health insurance themselves. ■

*E. J. Dionne Jr.*

# No Friend of the Worker

## TRUMP'S REVEALING TALKING POINTS

It is increasingly difficult to escape the sense that American workers find themselves exploited by our politics—and particularly by our president.

If wage earners could turn all the warm words they have heard into dollars, they would be rich. But they never receive the rights or benefits that are supposed to come their way. Decade after decade, we engage in more or less the same arguments about economic justice, yet over the past fifteen years or so, the condition of laboring men and women has, by many measures, gotten worse.

In his campaign, President Trump promised the world to American workers, including a better and more generous health-care system. Having broken his health-care pledges, he now claims that he will live up to his vows on jobs and wages by...cutting corporate taxes.

Remember all those stories in 2016 about Trump being a different sort of Republican? It turns out he's the same old trickle-down conservative, only meaner: he also preys upon racial feelings and anti-immigrant sentiment, which is often cast as part of his "populism." There is absolutely nothing new about Trump's insistence that what's good for corporations will be good for American workers. Here's what he said recently in a speech in Missouri: "We must reduce the tax rate on American businesses so they keep jobs in America, create jobs in America, and compete for workers right here in America—the America we love."

Now if Trump hadn't pretended to be some kind of populist hero in 2016, his recitation of old Republican boilerplate would not be particularly interesting or troublesome. But it is maddening to see this man described as some great innovator when it comes to the interests of the left-out and forgotten.

If you want to know how old Trump's talking points are, consider a debate broadcast by CBS Radio on April 11, 1948, between Sen. Robert A. Taft, lovingly known as "Mr. Republican" among conservatives of his day, and Walter Reuther, the legendary leader of the United Auto Workers union. (And by the way, wouldn't it be great if the media still broadcast debates of that sort?)

"Prosperity here depends upon a large percentage of the proceeds of our wealth being invested in new tools, new investments," Taft insisted. "It takes about six or seven thousand dollars to create one new job at good wages today." Those "job creators" have been central to the GOP's ideology for a long time.

Reuther was unpersuaded. "Unfortunately," he asserted, "most everything that Congress has done in the past six or eight months has moved in the direction of giving more to the people who already have too much and taking away from the people who need more."

"Senator Taft," Reuther said at another point, "that is the same kind of economic theory that we practiced under Harding and under Coolidge and under Hoover."

*President Truman and labor leader Walter Reuther in the Oval Office*

Taft, to his credit, did not pretend to be someone he wasn't. He believed in the ideas he was pushing. But anyone who expected Trump to take the American worker to a new place should be profoundly disappointed. As for Reuther's description of conservative economics, it seems as relevant now as it was sixty-nine years ago.

Trump moves us backward in other ways. Jared Bernstein and Ben Spielberg explained on the *Washington Post*'s "PostEverything" blog that the president is using his executive power to undercut regulations on workers' pay, financial security, and job safety, and also their right to form unions. Here again, Trump's actions belie his words.

Trump seems to think that if he goes after immigrants, picks fights about his border wall, regularly recites the words "law and order," and assails "political correctness," workers won't notice any of this. He'll keep attacking academic and media elites to distract from his service to financial elites. And there is so much focus on the scandals genuinely worthy of public attention that the substance of Trump's economic policies will be confined to the back pages of newspapers or the nether reaches of the internet.

Will it work? I'd insist that it's always safe to wager that over time, American workers judge politicians by looking at their paychecks, their working conditions, and the economic prospects of their families. Trump will discover the limits of his flimflam. It was Walter Reuther who said: "There's a direct relationship between the ballot box and the bread box." I still think he was right. ■

*Michael W. Higgins*

# A Dry Time for Catholics

**LETTER FROM CANADA**

In 1967 I was a seminarian with the Scarboro Fathers (the Canadian version of the Maryknollers) and spent part of the summer in Montreal during its spectacular Expo 67. It was a heady time. Canada was celebrating its centenary and there was a sense the country had crossed a threshold, had reached a coming-of-age as a nation. For a brief time we allowed ourselves to be, well, rather immodest.

Canada's current and ever-so-modest celebration of the 150th year of its founding is a return to form, typical of its penchant for low-key observances. There were more articles on the significance of the event in the *New York Times* than in most Canadian dailies. Journalist and author Stephen Marche put it nicely when he observed that most Canadians love their country, but "they just love it quietly. They don't want to make a big fuss." Today Canada looks good on the global stage, with a prime minister who is photogenic, bilingual, progressive, and disarming, and who has won praise for his positions on gender equity, immigration and refugee acceptance, human rights, and climate change. The country has its faults—the monstrous maltreatment of its native peoples being the principal one—but on the whole, its image as a pacific, welcoming, and inclusive society has never been stronger. The fifty years since the centennial have seen demographic expansion, economic diversification, and exponential growth in institutions of higher education. In 2017, there's even a vibrant national unity, as the separatism that periodically marked some of the intervening years (see: Quebec) has disappeared into its romantic cocoon.

For Catholicism, however, the past fifty years have mostly been ones of severe institutional decline. In 1967, for instance, the highly regarded cardinal archbishop of Montreal, Paul-Émile Léger, head of what was then the preeminent archdiocese in the country, resigned to assume a new ministry as a missionary to the lepers of Cameroon. In 2017, the cardinal archbishop of Toronto, Thomas Christopher Collins, head of today's preeminent archdiocese in the country, is committed to the restoration of the ancien régime in Catholic ecclesial life. These fifty years have seen the disappearance of Catholic institutions from hitherto deeply Catholic Quebec (New France has opted to follow Old France in its slavish adherence to the 1905 doctrine of *laïcité*—with its rigorous exclusion of religion from the political world), the rise and fall of national leadership in Catholic social teaching by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB), the marginalization of the Catholic voice in the political arena, and the collapse of interest in Catholic affairs in the secular media. Further, there's the precipitous drop in religious practice among Catholics, the aging of religious personnel, the clustering of parishes, the selling of churches, the enduring stain of clerical sex abuse, and the aftershocks of the Residential Schools crisis (a cultural genocide stemming from the late nineteenth-century policy of "assimilating" indigenous children by removing them from their homes and housing them in institutions run by the United, the Presbyterian, the Anglican, and the Roman Catholic churches).

Statistical data underscores the reality that a church that once commanded 46 percent of the country's population and was an unassailable presence in education and health care is now a muted force. Although it retains the largest percent-

CNS PHOTO / EVANDRO INETTI, POOL

*Pope Francis talks with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and his wife, Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, during a private audience at the Vatican on May 29.*

age of religious adherents in the country, this is the result mostly of immigration from more traditionally Catholic countries or thriving missionary territories.

How did it come to this? Catholicism's golden era was coincident with the Second Vatican Council and its immediate aftermath. Many Canadian thinkers were either advisors at the council, teachers in Rome, foundational shapers of a resurgent Catholicism, or episcopal actors on the conciliar landscape: Gregory Baum, J.M.R. Tillard, R.A.F. Mackenzie, David Stanley, Bernard Lonergan, the aforementioned Léger, and Maxim Hermaniuk were among the more prominent.

In addition, Catholic lay intellectuals like Claude Ryan, Douglas Roche, and Marshall McLuhan were helping to define faith in a changing political climate and in light of a new global interconnectedness. Canada's premier Catholic novelist was the redoubtable Morley Callaghan, whose controversial *A Time for Judas* (1983) prompted nothing short of awe from the well-read and progressive senior prelate, Cardinal Gerald Emmett Carter. New post-conciliar publications flourished, faculties of theology were bursting, Catholic clergy and laity were suffused with energy and hope. And the secular media paid attention.

But the publication, soon after the centennial, of the papal encyclical that condemned all forms of artificial birth control changed the national mood. *Humanae vitae* ushered in turbulence, ecclesiastical discord, and acute polarization—less pronounced, in typical Canadian fashion, than elsewhere perhaps, but there nevertheless. The Canadian bishops published their Winnipeg Statement on conscience, refused to censure dissenting theologians, and struck a *via media* approach. Pope Paul VI's response to the statement was simply: *L'accettiamo con soddisfazione* ("we accept it with satisfaction").

The attitude of the bishops was an irenic one. With rare exception they eschewed denunciation and reprimands, opting to exercise a pastoral solicitude that recognized the complexity of people's lives, the primacy of conscience, and the maturity of adult decision making. This stance, and their subsequent leadership on social-justice matters, secured the reputation of the Canadian hierarchy as a progressive body, less radical than the Dutch, more open than the Irish and the Polish, more liberal than their southern neighbor. This would change.

The pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI overturned the makeup of the CCCB—as they did elsewhere in the universal church—and by the 1990s the Vatican had redirected the pastoral emphases of the episcopal conference, diminished its bureaucracy, undermined its authority, and seen to the methodical replacement of independent-minded bishops by clerics placing a premium on deference. The hard edges of the Canadian bishops disappeared and so did their temerity, vision, and outspokenness. They retreated into the citadel, a metaphor Northrop Frye would apply to Canadian historical reality itself. Increasingly isolated, they withdrew from public debate, save for teaching on sexuality. Yet they consistently failed in efforts to persuade the government to alter its liberalizing direction on every matter related to sexual morality—abortion (Canada has not had any kind of abortion legislation on the books since the late 1980s, when the failure to achieve national political or social consensus on the existing legislation prompted the Roman Catholic Prime Minster, Jean Chrétien, to dispense with any kind of law at all), same-sex marriage (one of the first nations to approve it), gender equity, and physician-assisted suicide—resulting in the complete peripheralization of their moral voice. The bishops rightly critiqued Parliament's penchant for enhanced autonomy for the individual and the consequent chipping away at shared communitarian values, and they persistently struggled to make arguments grounded on an inclusive anthropology. But their track record for prophetic witness and credible authority has withered away in the eyes of *both* disillusioned progressive Catholics and dispirited traditionalist Catholics.

As the influence of the CCCB has plummeted, Catholic faculties of theology at universities have struggled with threats to their raison d'être. Currently there are only three remaining Catholic institutions in all of Canada where the graduate study of Catholic theology is possible: Laval University in Quebec City, St. Paul University in Ottawa,

and the Toronto School of Theology federation, which includes the University of St. Michael's College and Regis College. The seriousness and commitment, both ecclesial and scholarly, remain—though enrollments are but a fraction of those in earlier years. With seminarians now trained in their safe enclosures and making only periodic appearances on secular campuses, the role of theology as a critical discipline essential to the life of the church has become an almost exclusively lay imperative.

But for many postconciliar Catholics the deepest disappointment with hierarchical leadership has been its stance on women and ministry. At one time the undisputed international leader on the empowerment of women in the church—thanks to avowed feminists like Remi De Roo of the Diocese of Victoria and to interventions at several Roman synods on the charisms and evolving roles of women—the Canadian episcopate listened carefully to women of faith, appointed female theologians as consultants, and advocated publicly for enhanced positions and greater inclusivity within the clerical structure. But this enlightened and gradualist approach was beaten down by papal intransigence, if not hostility, and by the reluctance of the newer bishops to adopt policies or positions at variance with pontifical perspectives. The result has been a silent departure of multitudes from the institution, a departure defined not by anger, animosity, or resentment but by a sadness grounded in a sense of their own irrelevancy. Deborah Pecoskie, a Catholic educator and former chair of the board of governors of St. Jerome's University, has observed: "I believe that society as a whole in Canada has contributed more positively to the lives of Canadian women than the church has done. I believe that the church holds an ambivalence between our civil society and our spiritual lives.... The Catholic Church is effectively squandering the opportunity to be a visible faith leader for *today and for the future*" (my italics).

How to end the squandering and bring new energy to the task at hand is a challenge of promethean proportions, especially given the bracing facts. Average Sunday Mass attendance in *la belle province* is 7 percent. Catholic schools have virtually disappeared in Quebec (only private ones remain). Magnificent church architecture is either being recast to accommodate the insatiable need for condominiums or preserved for historical purposes at considerable expense by means of heritage grants.

Meanwhile, Catholic publications of record in English-speaking Canada have gone under, including *Catholic New Times* of Toronto, *Western Catholic Reporter* of Edmonton, *Grail* of Waterloo, *Compass* of Toronto, and *Canadian Catholic Review* of Saskatoon. The much-revered Benedictine weekly, the *Prairie Messenger*, of Muenster, is slated to disappear at the end of this year.

The vanishing of such publications represents a significant impoverishment and continues to imperil the very possibility of a thriving public platform for the Catholic voice. There remain some outlets representing exclusively Catholic concerns, like the Salt + Light television network, the focus of which remains predominantly devotional and catechetical, and the politically and theologically conservative online project *Convivium* with its distinctly Neuhausian flavor. But there is no Canadian parallel for *Commonweal* or *America* in the United States, the *Tablet* in the United Kingdom, or *La Croix* in France. And the failure of the twenty Catholic universities in the country to develop a national pool of Catholic public intellectuals, of leaders prepared to engage ideas outside the ramparts of an insular or desiccated Catholicism, further hobbles the possibility of a Catholic presence in the media and in the chambers of influence. It was not always thus. Publications like *Le Devoir* influenced policy, Catholic scholars held national presence, Catholic thinkers and artists were shapers of the Canadian sensibility. It is a dry time these past few decades. The country cannot rely on Charles Taylor alone.

But not all is desolation. As Canada looks to the next fifty years it should not be shackled by either despair over institutional statistics or nostalgia for a time and order beyond recovery. Today there are active retreat houses and parishes that are genuinely flourishing and offering effective ministerial collaboration. There are bishops of vision and hope, like the ecumenist archbishop of Regina, Dan Bolen, or the pastorally charismatic Paul-André Durocher, archbishop of Gatineau. There are international symbols of humanitarian integrity like Jean Vanier; spiritual writers like Ronald Rolheiser, who commands a readership second to none; icons of holiness like Susan Moran, founder of Out of the Cold food and shelter services, and Martin Royackers, the martyred Jesuit in Jamaica; social visionaries like Mary-Jo Leddy, a nationally revered leader on refugee initiatives that have helped make Canada a haven to the displaced worldwide; and creative artists like David Adams Richards, tracking the sometimes calamitous and sometime luminous, but always deeply human, Christian narrative of redemption.

Catholicism in Canada's sesquicentennial year is not a sepulchral entity, not merely a shell of its former glory. It remains the largest religious body in the nation. Catholics occupy key positions in the corporate world, and on the political front, both Trudeau and the leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Canadian Opposition, Andrew Scheer, are self-identifying Catholics.

Still, Canadian Catholicism needs to be reshaped for the future. It needs to galvanize the indifferent, it needs to reclaim the lost, and it needs to create the conditions for a vital leadership. The signs are not auspicious. But they are there—modest, as befits the country's character. ■

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# An Ordinary Sunday

## *A Nationwide Survey of Parish Masses*

Thomas Baker, John Schwenkler, Catherine Wolff, Luke Timothy Johnson, Katie Daniels, Elizabeth Kirkland Cahill, Dominic Preziosi, J. Peter Nixon, Sam Rocha, Tom Blackburn, David Carroll Cochran, Jim Pauwels

### ST. DAVID THE KING
**PRINCETON JUNCTION, NEW JERSEY**

*Thomas Baker*

Not to brag, but when people in our area shop for a parish, my parish is the one that wins. At least, that's what former parish shoppers tell me. Maybe over at our competitors, they hear the same thing from those who fled our parish, but I choose to believe otherwise.

We have four well-attended weekend Masses in a modern, sunlit, semi-circular church that holds about six hundred people. Collections are the envy of parishes several times our size. Baptisms outnumber funerals by a wide margin. Outreach programs attract plenty of volunteers. In recent years, as central New Jersey has changed, so has our parish: Asian and Filipino families mix with the long-established Italian and Irish émigrés from Brooklyn and Jersey City. Every week, seeing these friends and strangers coming forward for the Eucharist, the bond uniting us seems something of a miracle, and I am grateful for the place.

So, on most weekends, it seems to me like the state of Sunday Mass is not so bad. And yet I realize my parish is an unusual and healthy one, and that the more than seventeen thousand other parishes out there include many without the resources and talent we have. In the pages that follow, you'll see reports on a wide variety of Catholic Sunday experiences on two weekends, one in June and one in July. It's too small a sample, of course, to draw quantitative conclusions—but not, perhaps, to get an impression of how Catholic Sundays are faring.

All of these parishes are making an effort, sometimes valiantly, to do what they can with what they have. True, you will see some off-putting curiosities: Stepfordish altar boys in one place, culture war disguised as prayer in another. Still, none of our intrepid correspondents felt like walking out, or saw any true monstrosities: no harangues from the pulpit, no *cappae magnae*, not a single clown. There are churches with what sound like decent crowds, and even some tears of joy and engagement, and yet also a great deal of what looks, on the surface at least, like routine and indifference. There are multiple reports of many Catholics sitting way in the back, literally and perhaps spiritually near the exit.

Is the current state of things one of "well-intentioned mediocrity," as J. Peter Nixon writes, or are we somehow muddling through? In a recent authoritative study of parish health, more than 90 percent of Mass-going Catholics said they were satisfied with their parish. But of course, that number is deceptive. My mentor in marketing research taught me that dying products often show high customer satisfaction, since the dissatisfied are long gone. Only 24 percent of Catholics say they went to Mass last week, less than half the rate of fifty years ago. Young adults largely don't ever go, and haven't for years. Latino Catholics show losses of Catholic affiliation that rival their Anglo counterparts. The sexual-abuse crisis has, by many reports, weakened attendance still further. A third of all baptized Catholics have left the church.

Looking ahead, even maintaining this status quo is likely to be difficult. An aging and contracting priesthood means that even healthy parishes like mine will face a crisis of leadership sooner rather than later. You'll see warning signs of that growing, self-inflicted shortage in these reports—a priest driving two hundred miles to visit a rural church, a parish grateful to have half of a pastor's time, a Spanish Mass said by a priest who doesn't know Spanish. And in the Northeast and Midwest, diocesan budget cuts and consolidations make those of us in the parish business feel like the manager of the surviving local Sears: it's only a matter of time before it's our turn.

*Mass at St. David the King*

BOB GARVER

So, despite all the dedication and prayer, these are snapshots of a project in desperate need of renewed attention, maybe even innovation. Our editor asked me to write not just as a skeptical *Commonweal* observer but as, God help me, a liturgical practitioner, a deacon who preaches at my parish regularly and observes things from both sides of the sanctuary, as it were. What can those of us in the parish business possibly do?

Amid all the diversity of culture, taste, and language, the secrets of successful Sunday liturgy are not very secret. The research about what keeps people coming has been clear for years. An atmosphere of respectful, genuine welcome. Good preaching. That's it. I know there are many other things that have to happen at a liturgy, a thousand matters of rubric and potential conflict. But people seem to be able to overlook all sorts of flaws if you can deliver on those two promises.

Not that either is easy. "Welcome" is a matter of attention over time to subtle details, and the elimination of the wildly mixed signals most churches send. In our parish, architecture helps. As soon as people walk into the gathering area—a large foyer before people get into the church proper—there are usually plenty of conversations going on, staff members talking with parishioners as they walk in, friends catching up, grown children back for a visit. Even if you yourself don't get a personal greeting as a stranger, it seems as if people like being there. On your way through, you can eavesdrop, decide if you like the way people treat one another, and start figuring out if this is a place where you might fit in.

Sometimes the welcome is much more explicit, and it needs to be. People are told with some regularity, in homilies and at the great gatherings of sometimes-Catholics called Christmas and Easter, that this is where they belong no matter what condition of soul or life or marriage or sexual orientation they find themselves in. And God bless him, the pastor—who over twenty years in the parish has had a long time to indoctrinate his staff in what matters—really believes it.

Don't people come to Mass needing a glimpse of the divine? Yes, that hasn't changed. But in the world of Catholics as they are now, the sign of the divine they seem to need first is an imperfect but unconditional human welcome. Only after that can the rite and the Eucharist do the rest of their work, hopefully not too impeded by our failings in execution.

As for preaching, this is unfortunately a matter of luck more than determined parish-wide effort. You have the priests and deacons you have. In my parish not only is the pastor a good preacher but so are the retired priests who are our regular weekend visitors. What seems to touch people in preaching is easy to describe although hard to do: a homily that presents Jesus without dilution or sentimentality, recognizes the existence of doubt and pain, and avoids triteness

and condescension. Can preachers also deliver the "learning and wit" Luke Timothy Johnson hoped for (in vain) in his parish visit? I suppose that would be a great bonus.

Music, in these reports from the field, still seems to be a source of as much division and disappointment as joy. Some of us are looking for, as Elizabeth Cahill writes, "beauty, order, balance"; others, me sometimes included, respond to the more openly tacky and emotional. We're a culturally diverse church, and a musically eclectic liturgy that makes everyone a little dissatisfied is probably inevitable in most parishes. A lot of the popular songs people say they hate, from "Canticle of the Sun" to "Be Not Afraid," aren't bad as much as brutally overused. In my parish, I know for a fact there are songs I dislike that are important to others, so I grin and (mostly) bear it. As for me, I'd love to hear more Ola Gjeilo, and sing "For All the Saints" every Sunday. On the other hand, I'd never heard of "Sign Me Up" until John Schwenkler mentioned it below in his report, but having checked it out, I think it's now on my list.

This is not a time in which the larger church is investing much time or energy in the liturgy. Our bishops' primary recent activity in this area is their Roman Missal translation, so perhaps we should simply be grateful that is all they have done. Yet at the parish level, there is plenty to try. We could do much, much more to reach out to and reinvite those who have left. Preaching education and formation is available out there, although not on nearly a large enough scale. It's worth experimenting with liturgies in unusual locations, and at unusual times, to reach the underserved and the parish-allergic. Young adults themselves—and not the way-too-Catholic ones who usually take the lead in such projects—need to define and set the tone for whatever efforts are directed to their peers.

Yet all this assumes that we still have the same goal: churches with people in them. You might think that's obvious, but one of our problems may be that people aren't always at the center of the vision. Last year I was studying church websites, and was surprised to notice a frequent pattern in the ones from Catholic parishes: so many of the photographs, whether of church exteriors or interiors, didn't have a single person in them. It is almost as if we are still tempted to think people might be drawn to an empty church more than a full one, and maybe that God is our audience, not humans. If we are wondering what we can do that will bring people closer to the Mass that has sustained Christians for so long, it starts with realizing that people are both our audience and one of the reasons other people stay. Welcoming imperfect, reluctant people to the table, again and again, is what makes a real Christian jubilee. For that, the song says, people might sign up.

**Thomas Baker** *is* Commonweal*'s publisher.*

## ST. EUGENE MISSION
### TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA

*John Schwenkler*

*Hallelujah!* sings the psalmist. *Praise God in his holy sanctuary. Praise him for his great majesty. Give praise with blasts upon the horn, with tambourines and dance, with strings and pipes. Give praise with crashing cymbals; praise him with sounding cymbals.*

The Mass is a holy event of great solemnity, centered on the Eucharistic sacrifice through which God's people are fed. It is also an occasion for the exultant *praise* of God described in the psalms—that practice of communal worship in which the prophet Miriam, joined by the Israelite women, *took a tambourine in her hand and went out dancing*, proclaiming *Sing to the Lord, for he is gloriously triumphant;* the worship of David and the house of Israel as they *danced before the ark of the Lord with all their might, with singing, and with lyres, harps, tambourines, sistrums, and cymbals.*

Practices like these—of praise and worship, of dance and song, of music played on piano and horn, tambourine and drum—are the life of Sunday Mass at the small mission parish that my family calls home. Saint Eugene Mission in Tallahassee is a microcosm of the global church: the first Mass in the morning serves the Spanish-speaking community, and at the Mass we attend the community is mostly black, a mix of Florida natives and immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean. The church is small, its walls mostly unadorned, its windows a rickety frosted glass through which passersby can hear our worship when it reaches its peak.

On this particular Sunday that peak takes a while to come. This is partly because it's early July in Florida, which means it is close to 90 degrees outside by eleven o'clock in the morning, and the church's air conditioner can't quite do what's needed to make the space truly comfortable. Meanwhile, we are missing our regular music director and several key members of the choir, the piano isn't properly amplified, and our drummer is late in arriving. So as our worship begins and we sing, *Sign me up for the Christian jubilee; write my name on the roll*, the atmosphere is still short of jubilant. *I want to be ready when Jesus comes*—yes, but we are not ready *yet*. Nothing is working as it's supposed to. It is hot and we are sleepy; much of the congregation has yet to arrive. Our worship is mostly routine so far—we join in the chorus but are less than expressive in what we sing.

But the liturgy is there to give us a routine, and the highs and lows in its rhythm provide us the time to find ours. As the readings are proclaimed, someone fixes whatever had gone wrong with the piano. The drummer arrives; the pews are gradually filled. The priest, a member of our pastor's missionary congregation, preaches on the simplicity of Jesus' message and the promise of rest to those who take on his burden: *You have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little ones; my yoke is easy and my burden is light*. Once it is time for the Sanctus we have found the spirit of the crowd that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem, their shouts echoing the words of the psalmist: *Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!*


THOMAS CURRY

*The choir sings at St. Eugene Mission.*

The piano is loud; drum and cymbals sound; the congregation sways and claps as we sing. *Hosanna!*

There are some for whom this would seem like too much cacophony for the solemnity of the liturgy. And no doubt there are things we could do better: our church is drawn from the world, after all, and just as the air-conditioning is inadequate and our instruments sometimes fail us, so we ourselves will fail to find the appropriate posture for worship in the holy sanctuary of the almighty God. But it is just in this context that the activity of worship helps—to captivate us, to overwhelm our distractions, to bring us actively into an attitude of praise and thanksgiving.

*Jesus, I come*, we sing during communion. *Bless the Lord, O my soul*, when it is finished. "And all that is within me, bless his holy name." A tear runs down the choir director's face. *For he has done great things: bless his holy name*. The piano and drums play the chorus alone, then the choir sings it unaccompanied. The choir director moves out in front of the congregation and gestures forcefully, bidding them join in. *Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name.* The final chord is drawn out awhile. Silence settles on the church, save for the soft murmur of an "Amen."

The Mass has now gone on for well over an hour—my daughters are squirming, but this is one of the many welcome differences from the businesslike and *efficient* approach to liturgy at the parish we attended before this one. We are here to worship: it will start when we are ready and end when we are done. Why keep watch for only an hour? Why not ninety minutes or more?

Visitors are asked to stand and introduce themselves: a Spanish-speaking family from Orlando; some college students from Florida A&M University, where our church serves as the Catholic student center; a family visiting from Brazil. Those who are celebrating birthdays come forward for a blessing, and the congregation sings and claps for them. We are reminded that there will be refreshments in the church hall after Mass: not the coffee and donuts I grew up with, but black-eyed peas with salsa and fried dough, and fruit punch and watermelon for the children. We are also to bring food and drink next Saturday evening for a grand dinner in honor of the seminarian who has served our church this spring and will be returning soon to complete his studies in the Congo. The lifeblood of this parish is its prayer and worship; these spill over into a spirit of fellowship that all are welcome to partake in.

The Mass is ended. Now the tambourines are out. *Rejoice heartily*, we were told by the prophet Zechariah in today's reading. *Shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem!* So let us go forth like little ones, clapping our hands and singing as we did when we were young. Let them hear us on the streets. Our light is small, but it was not given so that we would hide it. *Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.*

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## CHURCH OF THE NATIVITY

### MENLO PARK, CALIFORNIA

*Catherine Wolff*

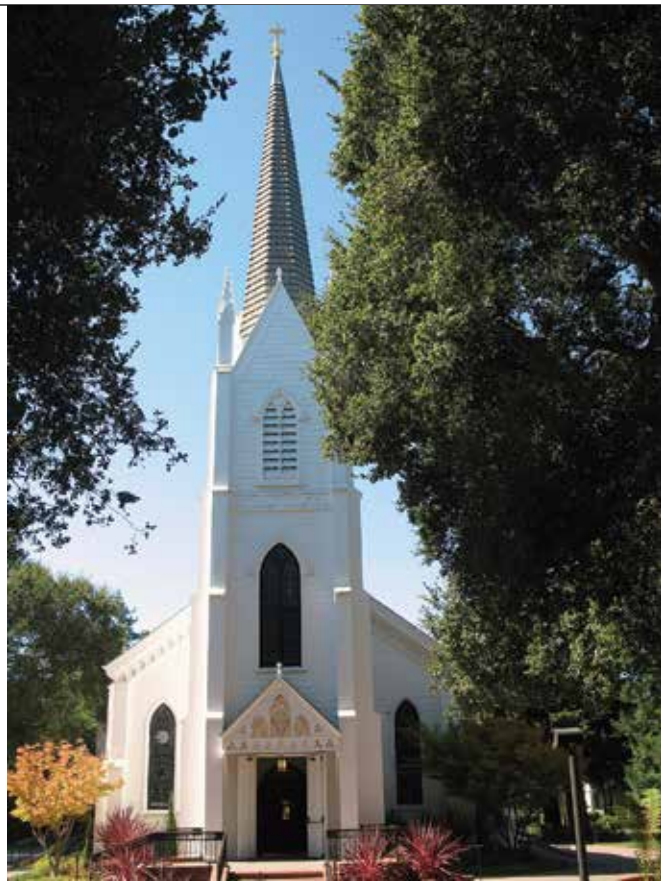
I've driven by the Church of the Nativity in Menlo Park, California, for twenty years now, inevitably struck by its quaint prettiness: if they had a little church on top of wedding cakes, this would be the one. Built in the 1880s, it is on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places, and deserves to be. Its chapel—pure white in and out, with an exquisite rose window and arches traced in dark wood and pews with little entry doors—makes it feel vaguely Anglican.

I've avoided this church for as long as I have driven past it, though. If you look it up, what you'll find is that the pastor is the brother of a former CEO of Intel, and that the graduates of its grammar school eventually go on to attend prestigious colleges. The Sunday bulletin invites you to join the Infant Jesus of Prague Prayer Society and the weekly prayer hour for priestly vocations, and offers Confession with an Opus Dei priest. For me, a social worker from a progressive, questioning family full of Jesuits, such a church was suspect. And I was wary of the local Opus Dei households, said to turn up at 8 a.m. Mass. Wary, but curious, I made my way there one Sunday morning in June.

The church was half-full of mostly gray-haired, dignified, well-dressed white people, along with one Asian, one Latino, and a sprinkling of children. It made me wonder where the rest of our Catholic family was. The priest was a man, of course, but so was the altar server, the cantor, the lector: no women on that side of the altar, where the table was set high above the congregation. The music was low-key, a cantor and a pianist leading the congregation in traditional hymns and Mass parts in Latin, but they all sang in full voice, particularly an enthusiastic guy in the pew behind me who broke with Catholic timidity—or is it decorum?—belting out the songs and prayers.

The readings were delivered without expression, although some were fiery: Jeremiah on persecution; the Psalmist on insult and shame. Thereafter came passages on original sin, and on fear, which the priest (wisely, considering the even grimmer alternatives) chose to speak about. I was grateful at first: that day, as on so many recent days, I have felt fear—not immediate fear for myself, but for my grandchildren, for our mother earth and our riven country, for the insufficiently documented people in East Palo Alto who are living in terror of ICE raids.

The priest began his homily with a hurried, mumbled anecdote about people who had confided in him that they were afraid of a certain group in East Palo Alto, and how they really shouldn't be, and then quickly went on to speak of fear in our personal lives, in our families, and the way



*Church of the Nativity*

it can constrict us and prevent us from living full lives. He was kindly, colloquial, quoting Franklin Roosevelt and the *National Catholic Register* and Fr. Flanagan. It was comforting as far as it went, but its focus was entirely domestic, and left unaddressed the wider sense of dread so many carry at this time. I wondered if the lovely people around me did not feel such dread—what would that lack of anxiety be like? They looked untroubled, at home in their skins, at home in the world. Who wouldn't be, living in Menlo Park?

I have often wondered what the people around me in church were thinking, feeling, praying for, especially when I have been at Mass in a foreign land. Looking around at the pretty church and the handsome people at Nativity put me in mind of the many times I have attended Mass in far-off places: the gray bombed-out church in West Berlin full of hunched old women; the entrancing ancient mosaics and reverent pilgrims of Santa Maria in Trastevere in Rome; the schoolhouse-Mass in Ireland with sheep grazing in the cemetery outside; the jam-packed cathedral in Nairobi pulsing with song.

That morning at Nativity, I was indistinguishable from the rest of the congregation; after all I am white, older, and, for that occasion, well-dressed. Indeed, I felt comfortable there: I saw some familiar faces; I speak the language; it is not far from my home. And yet I knew I was too comfortable. The experience I had approached in a curious, vaguely contentious spirit had turned out to be anodyne, acceptable, pleasant. I'd been more moved by the old women in Berlin, felt more in common with the pilgrims in Rome, been more

SANFRANMAN59

inspired by the musicians in Nairobi. Half the time I've had no idea what was being said in these far-off churches, nor could I join in the responses without embarrassing myself. I did not look like the other congregants, and was often acutely aware of how unaccustomed I was to worship so fervently as those around me. You'd think I would have retreated into an anthropological stance, but no, it was in these circumstances that I have felt the vitality of the universal church, the excitement of its extraordinary human diversity. I have felt in our common prayer a kinship with everyone who has ever worshiped in this way, a sense of being in a time-out-of-time—in God's time.

I did not feel such inspiration at Nativity. And yet, and yet—sitting there, praying along with these attractive, dignified people, I wondered about the lives they brought to the altar, the fears they harbored, the burdens they carried, or, for that matter, their good works and the charity they bestowed on others. I had to admit that I knew nothing about them, really. And fortunately, they did not know that I had brought to their church that day a certain contentiousness based on what I'd presumed to know about them...and had found a measure of comfort, of commonality. It was the way everyone joined wholeheartedly—as though they were Protestants!—in all the prayers and all the songs, in English and in Latin. They gathered me in, and I prayed and sang along, amazed that I remembered all the words: *Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis, and Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, factorem cœli et terrae, visibilium omnium et invisibilium*. For a while there I was part of one of the many choirs in the Communion of Saints, and grateful for that.

But then the final hymn concluded, and half the congregation, led in stentorian tones by my friend behind me, launched into the long version of the Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel, pleading for his defense against Lucifer, the cruel and ancient serpent who seduces the whole world with his multitudes of wicked spirits who "blot out the name of God...his wicked dragon pours out, as a most impure flood, the venom of his malice on men of depraved mind and corrupt heart, the spirit of lying, of impiety, of blasphemy, and the pestilent breath of impurity, and of every vice and iniquity. These most crafty enemies have filled and inebriated with gall and bitterness the Church, the spouse of the immaculate Lamb, and have laid impious hands on her most sacred possessions. In the Holy Place itself, where the See of Holy Peter and the Chair of Truth has been set up as the light of the world, they have raised the throne of their abominable impiety."

They lost me there, and I joined the rest of the congregation already moving out the door, smiling and chatting in the sweet June morning.

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## ST. THOMAS MORE
### DECATUR, GEORGIA

*Luke Timothy Johnson*

Decatur, Georgia, is older than Atlanta but has become part of the larger city's urban sprawl. It is a gem of a town, relaxed and easy-going. The humorist Roy Blunt, returning to his hometown after decades spent in more sophisticated haunts, pronounced Decatur to be just about the perfect sort of place to live. St. Thomas More parish sits on the edge of Decatur, with its vaguely Romanesque/Mediterranean buildings dominated by an elementary school. My wife and I attended Mass there when we first moved to Atlanta, since the church was only a stone's throw beyond the Atlanta city-limit sign and we lived less than a stone's throw on the Atlanta side of the sign.

In those days, diocesan priests ran the parish, the entire setting seemed grimly functional, and the Sunday Eucharist offered little to those seeking some sense of liturgy or an occasional on-point homily. Having had more than enough of bricks-and-mortar suburban parishes, Joy and I fled to the downtown Basilica of the Sacred Heart, on whose excellent worship and impressive social ministry I reported in the last iteration of these liturgical dispatches ("Celebrating Mass," January 30, 1998).

I was prompted to visit St. Thomas More for the 9:30 a.m. Mass on July 9 partly because it was convenient, but also because I was curious about what changes might have been made since the parish a few years ago was placed in the hands of the Society of Jesus. The Jesuits have become a more visible presence in Atlanta, especially because of their successful launching of a Christo Rey high school. Two Jesuit priests form the heart of a ministerial staff that otherwise includes a balanced mix of male and female laypeople.

My pre-Mass impressions were positive. The church showed an architectural upgrade that greatly improved the façade. On entering through a set of arches, I made my way into a large foyer that clearly serves as a gathering place around a baptismal font. Around the walls of this space are frescoes representing classic icons. To one side is an adoration chapel, fronted by a sign-up sheet for volunteers to maintain perpetual adoration. On the other side is a hallway leading to first-rate restrooms (don't snicker) and a family room for restive little ones. The foyer is well-stocked with literature that, unsurprisingly, bears Jesuit features: the feast of St. Ignatius, brochures for the Ignatian House of Spirituality (north of Atlanta), and for Christo Rey High School, ministries for social justice. Coming in from an already steaming Southern day, I was grateful for the super-efficient air-conditioning that easily handled the body-heat of a considerable congregation.


*People leaving Mass at St. Thomas More in Decatur, Georgia*

A final positive, even enthusiastic observation: I took careful note of the congregation as it streamed in, and was impressed not only by the size of the crowd—well over three hundred—but by its youth. This was not a remnant gathering of the old and the halt. I may have been the oldest (and haltest) worshiper present. This was predominantly a congregation of young married couples with many children in tow: mostly Caucasian, but also African-American and Asian, proportionate to Decatur's demographics. "Of course," I thought to myself, "this parish has a school, and these are the parents of students." But then I looked more closely, and realized that most of the children were not even school age; they were infants in arms and toddlers. There were some older congregants, but the overwhelming impression was of youth and fecundity. This is not, in short, a parish that depends on its geriatric members; it is a parish like those in the suburbs long ago, flush with new life and energy.

As far as I could tell, nothing had changed in the church's interior, and sad to say, little of the life and energy of the congregation was reflected in the liturgy itself, after the glad smiles and handshakes of the opening greetings. Same missalettes as before, same selection of less-than-musically-or-theologically-profound hymns, same lack of an organized choir, same dispirited accompaniment by piano, organ, and (for some reason) guitar. People seemed to join in the spoken and sung responses, as much as they were able when not wrangling toddlers, and they seemed happy enough with the way things were at St. Thomas More's Eucharist, and in light of that fact I am still pondering whether a certain sort of complacency is really such a bad thing.

Since my flight years ago from St. Thomas had been precipitated by one of the truly bad sermons delivered by the then-pastor on Christmas Eve, I was hopeful that the Jesuit presence, while not infecting the liturgy with the gravity and grace expected of, say, a Benedictine, might compensate with a better class of homily. So after hearing the readings from Zechariah 9:9–10 and Romans 8:9–13 competently delivered by lay readers, and having listened to the pastor's reading of Jesus' invitation to come to him and take up his yoke, from Matthew 11:25–30, I settled back when the pastor left the pulpit and walked down to the pews, ready for the intellectual feast that Jesuitical learning and wit had prepared.

I can state unequivocally that the sermon, while not an intellectual or spiritual feast, was better than the one that, years earlier, had driven me from St. Thomas. The pastor dealt only with the Matthean passage, and the upshot of his remarks was that, while Jesus was a good Jew and loved the law, he never let the law get in the way of love, as the Pharisees did. With explicit reference to Pope Francis's own emphasis on mercy over legalism, the pastor drove home the point (one he confessed he and the vicar seemed to make in every sermon) that love and mercy are supreme. Thus, the congregants should not obsess about observance and concentrate on love.

Now, apart from the easy caricaturing of the Pharisees (an unfortunate staple of Christian preaching), there was certainly nothing dreadfully wrong in the pastor's message. But I kept wondering if the pastor (a man near my own advanced age) might be speaking to people whose problem may not be a scrupulosity about regulations so much as a disregard (or even ignorance) of them. But, the pastor insisted, he was the one hearing confessions, so he must know his audience. And perhaps it is too much to expect a congregation this youthful and this caught up in childcare either to demand or to appreciate Jesuitical learning and wit.

The congregation recited the Apostle's Creed rather than the Nicene Creed as its confession of faith. The Prayers of the Faithful had the (now) predictable emphasis on social justice and (more touchingly) the sicknesses and deaths of named members of the parish. The Eucharistic Prayer was spoken until its final doxology and answering "Amen." The Lord's Prayer and the Kiss of Peace were standard. The eucharistic ministers were evenly split between men and women. Congregants received Communion under both species. Final prayer, final blessing, and mercifully only one announcement, before we returned, singing, to the Decatur sunshine, parish bulletins in hand, refreshed once more by the mystery of a sacramental presence that can lift our poor humanity through the humble instruments of our flesh to moments of divine indwelling and transformation.

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CALEB WEAVER

## MOTHER OF GOOD COUNSEL
### HAZARD, KENTUCKY

*Katie Daniels*

At the only Catholic church in Hazard, Kentucky, Sunday Mass starts at 11:30 a.m. But for the parish-life director, Pat Riestenberg, the day starts much earlier. In the early-morning stillness, she moves around the parish hall, getting the church ready for the one day a week when the building will buzz with activity.

A former math teacher from Ohio, Riestenberg moved to Hazard to volunteer for a year or two, and decided to stay. Now on her twenty-seventh year at the parish, she lends her quiet resolve to all its elements, managing the finances, teaching Sunday school, coordinating volunteers, and ensuring there are always extra canned goods on the church's pantry shelves for anyone who needs help. Ever since the church's longtime pastor retired last summer, Riestenberg must ensure that the life of this small, now-priestless church goes on.

It's a unique challenge. In a diocese where only 3 percent of the population is Catholic and in a state where 25 percent of children live below the poverty line, Riestenberg and the parishioners of Mother of Good Counsel must sustain a community in a region with few Catholics, and in a corner of Appalachia that much of the country has left behind.

Part of that task means commemorating the community's milestones. On this Sunday in June, a seven-year-old boy is making his First Communion, and a parishioner is turning seventy-five. To celebrate, both families have brought white-frosted sheet cakes. Thirty minutes before Mass starts, people begin to arrive, congregating in the parish center to chat and catch up. Because driving to Mother of Good Counsel, the only Catholic church in three counties, can take some families almost an hour, many parishioners arrive early to socialize in the parish center, something they can't easily do during the week.

At eleven-thirty, the parishioners move into the church. Someone has turned on the church's lights, suffusing the room with soft warmth. Thick wooden beams arc across the ceiling, making the room feel secure and cozy. Down the center aisle and behind the wooden altar, a clay carving of the Miner's Madonna hangs on the wall. The relief shows Mary balancing an infant Jesus on her lap, her head tilted downward like she's listening. Behind her, a metal cart loaded with coal sits at a mine entrance; a pickaxe and a miner's helmet peep out from under her feet.

As the congregation settles into its seats, Riestenberg stands in front of the lectern, closer to the people, and welcomes everyone. The parishioners are a mix of older locals and young families with squirming toddlers. With only seventy-four families in the parish, Mother of Good Counsel is a tight-knit community. The church is also surprisingly diverse. Even though Perry County's population is 96 percent white, there are parishioners here from Syria, Lebanon, Taiwan, Mexico, and India; many work at a nearby hospital. In a town where the nearest dining-out options are a Long John Silver's or a Hardee's, the church's annual international dinner featured, among other dishes, homemade pollo con queso, spaetzle, and Filipino pancit noodles."And the best part was that I didn't have to cook a thing," Riestenberg told me with a grin.

Riestenberg strums the opening hymn on an acoustic guitar. A Franciscan brother and a female cantor lead the singing, as Fr. Michael Chowning, OSM, walks down the aisle. He was the resident pastor here for twenty-three years before he retired, and he's back to say Mass for this weekend. Since Chowning retired, a volunteer Glenmary Home Missioners priest drives almost two hundred miles from Cincinnati to say Mass because there aren't enough priests in the diocese to send a permanent replacement.

Chowning and the little boy receiving First Communion walk toward the altar together, the priest in his vestments, the little boy in a nice plaid button-down. The boy maintains a solemn expression, and keeps his hands clasped firmly in front of him.

The lector stands at the lectern and reads excerpts from the Book of Jeremiah and the Letter to the Romans in a clear, steady voice with a hint of a twang. Behind her, four stained glass windows frame the altar, two on either side. The windows face west and at sunset, the last light of the day streams through, dousing the walls with gold and violet light.

Mother of Good Counsel was designed to resemble the small stone chapels that dot the Italian countryside. The original building, built in 1939, was a low rectangle with a rounded bell tower on the roof. But it's still a Kentucky mountain church; the thick stone walls are built of gray limestone dug from a quarry a few miles outside of town.

Near the windows are hand-whittled Stations of the Cross plaques. One of the church's former pastors commissioned them from a "good Baptist gentleman," says Chowning, a local man who had never heard of the Stations of the Cross before he was asked to carve them.

Chowning stands to read the Gospel. "Even all the hairs of your head are counted," he says, his low baritone voice rumbling. "So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows." He reads slowly and unselfconsciously, with the easy cadence of a good storyteller.

"Jeremiah is also a young man, called to be a prophet. And he tried to get out of it," Chowning says as he starts his homily. He looks at the little boy, and gestures for him to come to the front of the church. Together, the priest and the boy walk to the right of the altar, to the baptismal font. It's really more of a baptismal hot tub—a spiral staircase leads down into a pool several feet deep. A stone wall juts

*Miner's Madonna*

out above it; water can trickle down the rocks to fill the pool.

Chowning points to the pool and asks the boy if he remembers when he was baptized the year before. The boy nods. That was the first sacrament of initiation, Chowning explains, half to the little boy and half to the congregation. Now you're going to receive the second.

The boy sits down, and the priest turns to face the church. He circles back to the first reading. Jeremiah complains but he never loses his love and trust in God, Chowning says. "I hope this boy never loses that." He pauses and asks the congregation to acknowledge how God has accompanied them, and how he challenges them. "I'm never finished being a disciple," he says, looking up at the parish he served for much of his life. "I'm never done following the Lord. It's a challenge the Lord gives to all of us." He folds his hands and lets the church rest in a moment of silence.

Riestenberg's guitar eventually breaks the silence, this time for the hymn, "Make Me a Channel of Your Peace." As Chowning leads the Our Father, everyone reaches out to their neighbor to hold hands. For a minute, it looks like the church is playing a game of Twister as people turn their upper bodies and stretch out their arms to reach the people in the next pew. At the sign of the peace, everyone breaks and shakes hands. The priest walks up and down the aisle, shaking hands with each person he passes.

The little boy goes first for Communion. After he gives him the host, Chowning gently steers him toward the chalice, which the boy holds carefully with both hands. Chowning blesses each kid in the Communion line, although one dad has to rush his enthusiastic toddler outside. The door swings shut, but not before a gleeful "Wheeee!" echoes through the church.

With a flurry of closing prayers and guitar chords, suddenly the Mass ends, and the priest and the new communicant walk down the aisle, the boy no longer so solemn. The pair reach the church door, and in the instant before they swing it open, the two figures—one short and one tall, one young and one old—pause, side by side. Then the boy moves first, or maybe it's Chowning, and then the doors are open and Riestenberg is passing around second slices of cake to everyone, and there's talking and laughing and a round of Happy Birthdays, until one by one the parishioners get into their cars and drive away, turning back to wave one last time at Riestenberg and Chowning. And the little stone church in Hazard is quiet again.

**Katie Daniels**, *a former* Commonweal *intern, is a graduate of Boston College.*

## ST. MARY OF THE ANNUNCIATION
### CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA

*Elizabeth Kirkland Cahill*

Churches in the hot muggy Southern coastal city where I live tend to become somnolent with summer's heat and humidity. Those residents who can do so generally escape to the mountains. The tourist hordes that God has seen fit to visit on my stately city pretty much stick to the beaches or their hotel rooms, at least on Sunday mornings. Parish life slows to a crawl.

Not so this summer. For the first time in eleven years, our parish church, which was the first Catholic church in the Carolinas and Georgia, has been assigned its own pastor. Well, half a pastor: our new man is also presiding as pastor and building a brand-new church in another, growing part of the city, so he will be with us part-time. A parochial vicar has also been appointed, a familiar face who leads a small congregation under the auspices of the Personal Ordinariate of the Chair of St. Peter, which is the quasi-diocesan structure created by Pope Benedict in 2012 for Anglican communities that seek a home in the Catholic Church. They are talented and dedicated priests, both of them, and the consensus among the parishioners I have spoken with is that after years of having a parish administrator whose tenure was characterized principally by the disinterest implied in the title, we have won the lottery.

So whatever the opposite of the doldrums may be—elation? excitement? glee?—such was the mood of the Mass I attended on July 9. There was a joyful energy in the church, keeping time with the hum of the necessary (and inadequate) air conditioning. As my husband and the two of our four children who were at home that weekend settled into our usual pew (third from the front, left side of the center aisle), I looked around, and it seemed as if my fellow parishioners' smiles were a bit brighter than usual. Life in this place was about to change, and for the better.

In the twenty-two years since I converted to Catholicism (I grew up an Episcopalian), I have experienced the Mass in a variety of settings, from the pomp and circumstance of a Jesuit priest's funeral at St. Ignatius Loyola in Manhattan to the stark simplicity of the liturgy in a Trappist monastery. I recall one of my Episcopal priest-mentors once telling me, when I complained that I missed the beautiful language and music of the Anglican liturgical tradition (*is* there a greater linguistic expression of liturgical worship than the Book of Common Prayer?), "Well, we Episcopalians may have cornered the language, but the Catholic Church really knows how to do the Mass." I have found this statement to be largely true. But I will note also that in my experience of parish liturgies in particular, there seems to be a chronic tension between the

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*St. Mary of the Annunciation*

streamlined efficiency of a well-said Mass and the claims of reverence and sacredness, which call for time and attentiveness.

Architecturally, our church points us toward the latter, enshrining ideals of beauty, order, and balance. Nearly a hundred and eighty years old, it is a Greek revival building, its cornerstone laid in 1838 when the church was rebuilt after a terrible city-wide fire. It is open and balanced inside, lots of white marble, a graceful balcony, stained glass windows made in the famous Mayer Glassworks of Munich. Of the many paintings that grace the church—and they include a curious portrait of St. Peter with six toes on his right foot—my favorites are the two trumpeting angels that flank the main altar painting of the Crucifixion (originally painted in 1814 by John S. Cogdell, and restored by the painter after the 1838 fire). Each robed angel, standing on a little cloud, holds up a curved brass instrument and turns toward the crucified Christ—a reminder to me each week that our work as Christians is to trumpet the good news and give glory to God, not to seek to be the central event ourselves.

Perhaps it is the beauty of the church, or just Southern traditions of respect, but our parishioners tend to dress for Mass. Many of the men wear coats and ties, the women dresses or dress slacks. The children, too, have clearly been given a good helping of spit and polish. Everyone looks, well, nice. The out-of-town visitors who join us for Mass each week—and for most of the year they are many, as our church is smack in the middle of the heavily touristed historic district—model a more informal sartorial ethic. No matter, we welcome them to the table of the Lord and to the abundant spread at the coffee hour afterward, known informally in the parish as the "collation."

Our Altar Guild is talented, faithfully creating little islands of loveliness against the white altar. On this particular Sunday the flowers seemed to catch the contagion of joy spreading throughout the church: bright-yellow lilies, deep-pink roses, strategically placed white mums, pink snapdragons, and a profusion of greenery.

The music was, as it usually is, traditional and elegant. We sang "Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven" and "Come Down, O Love Divine" at the processional and recessional respectively (and here I must note approvingly that in *this* church, everyone stays through the singing of the final hymn, unlike my parish in suburban Connecticut where the pews emptied rapidly the minute the priest's foot hit the vestibule). The choir leads us in chanting the Kyrie and Gloria in Latin from the *Missa de Angelis*; the Communion chant is also in Latin. This week's Communion motet was Mozart's *Ave Verum Corpus*; another week it might be Palestrina's *Sicut Cervus* or Orlando di Lasso's *Exaltabo te*. Ours is not a Marty Haugen church. Such a traditional musical canon may not be for everyone; in this setting, in this city, it is most right and just. But to be clear: we are not striving to be a concert hall—the lovely harmonies of Byrd or Tallis are given contemporary texture by the squawks and squeals of the many young children whose families keep our historic parish fresh and young.

The choir is usually decimated during the summer, but this particular Sunday they were fortified with some former members who had heard the good news of our rebirth and were returning to the loft. The singers sounded as good as I had ever heard them; they, too, seemed infused with optimism and energy. Hassler's *Cantate Domino*, the Offertory motet, had it right: "Sing to the Lord a new song and praise his name, for he has done marvelous things. Make music to the Lord with the harp and the sound of singing."

The quality of the spoken word varies. On this particular morning, the lector was reading the lessons a shade too fast, and (perhaps as a result) scrambled the text a bit. On the other hand, our parochial vicar effortlessly mastered the needlessly complex subordinate clauses that characterize the opening, offertory, and final prayers of the current missal translation—those sinuous clauses that trip up many priests whose first language is not English (or Latin!). The homily, a reflection on Matthew 11:25–30, was articulate, humorous, theologically sound, and relevant—no surprise with this particular priest, who has been with us many times before. Musing on the recent Independence Day celebrations he had observed with his wife and two young children (as a priest who was married with children at the time of his entry into the church, he is that rara avis in the Catholic Church, the officially sanctioned noncelibate priest), he reflected ruefully on the cultural mandate toward self-determination, suggesting that personal autonomy is tantamount to our new national religion (with Frank Sinatra's "I Did It My Way" as the national anthem). He quoted from Justice Anthony Kennedy's opinion in *Planned Parenthood vs. Casey*: "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." He skillfully drew a contrast between that spurious call to autonomous self-definition and the Gospel lesson in which Jesus urges his followers to take his yoke upon them. The purpose and construction of a yoke was described in accessible terms. And he reminded us of the paradox of faith: that we find true freedom by binding ourselves to Christ. Our vicar thinks deeply, communicates effectively, and teaches well.

Many years ago, I was drawn toward Catholicism by a yearning that I could neither name nor satisfy. At its best, the Mass creates a space and a moment in which that yearning can fleetingly, mysteriously be satisfied by the liturgies of Word and Flesh, enriched by the sensory experiences of architecture, decoration, music, and all the other physical aspects of our communal worship. We are not a perfect people and our Mass this particular week was not flawless. But there is goodwill and hope in this little parish, and a sense that the Holy Spirit continues to make a dwelling in our midst, a dwelling carved out by love and faith.

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STEVEN PISANO

## SACRED HEARTS & ST. STEPHEN
### BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

*Dominic Preziosi*

Brooklyn is still sometimes called the borough of churches but it's generally more synonymous with the hipster-millennial culture both celebrated and lampooned in the media. The tension is reflected somewhat in religious census data showing that out of the borough's 2.6 million residents, 23 percent identify as Catholic and 22 percent as unaffiliated (the third largest group, at 18 percent, are Black Protestants). The socio-economic shifts of the past two decades are evident far more concretely in the dozens of churches and parish buildings converted to condominiums and secular private schools, a phenomenon prompting wagers on how long Brooklyn's ecclesial nickname will apply.

I currently belong to a parish that by many measures is thriving, aided perhaps by the same gentrifying forces that have sped closures, consolidations, and sales of church property in other parts of the borough. We joined it the spring after 9/11, leaving Sacred Hearts & St. Stephen, the old neighborhood parish where my son was baptized. Neighborhood parish: a romantic notion, redolent of the city's European immigrant past, of holy-day processions through the surrounding streets, of peasant traditions carried from distant southern-Italian villages and exerting their mysterious influence on contemporary worship. Yet it was just those qualities, held in a clannish, crabbed ownership increasingly tinged with Bush-era jingoism and xenophobia, that encouraged our exit. For years I'd thought about going back, if only for one Mass. On a warm Saturday afternoon in late June, I finally did, walking a few short blocks to attend the 5:30 vigil.

The atmosphere, in every sense of the word, has brightened considerably. On the way into the church I was smilingly presented a bulletin with some inserts, a magazine-sized missal, and a smaller but thicker paperback hymnal. Signs outside proclaimed "All Are Welcome," in keeping with recent diocesan messaging, but the warm greetings I received from the handful of people on hand seemed genuine. It was disarming. Based on those old experiences, I'd come with my guard up. Did I really want to lower it?

The building itself is representative of the late nineteenth-century style of urban church architecture. It's an imposing structure, towering over the surrounding brownstones and row-house apartment buildings, which at one time were home to first- and second-generation Irish- and Italian-Americans who worked the nearby waterfront, then to their descendants who entered the trades and office-worker class, and then, increasingly, to upper-middle-class professionals lured by the safe streets and well-regarded public schools. Its steeple dominates the sky beyond my living-room window, and indeed is said to have served as a beacon to ships entering New York Harbor. (The Sacred Hearts & St. Stephen website details a rich and colorful history, including the establishment of the associated school by Frances Cabrini in the 1890s, and the merger of the two parishes when construction of the nearby Brooklyn-Queens Expressway necessitated demolition of Sacred Hearts in the late 1930s.)

A grand set of high stone steps leads to a central arched

entrance flanked by two smaller doors. Another high set of steps inside leads from the vestibule to the sanctuary, which while striking in its vast, ornate excess manages to feel intimate. Since the sale of its nearby school a decade ago, the church has undergone refurbishing; the interior is well lighted when it once was shadowed, the walls, columns, and soaring ceilings painted in colors that dispel the gloom I'd recalled. The tabernacle is centered high and prominent behind the altar, which in a lingering old–New World touch is fronted by banks of electric, coin-fed votive candles. The pews and floors shine brightly, while the kneelers, appealingly upholstered in burgundy, move silently on their hinges. Restored stained-glass windows alongside the western side of the church filter the light of the lowering sun, which falls in soft bands on the life-sized plaster icons: Our Lady of Sorrows pierced by a dagger, the Infant of Prague, Cosmos and Damian, Our Ladies of Mt. Carmel and the Letters, Frances Cabrini, Maria di Lauro, and Pope John Paul II with staff and mitre. Also, St. Joseph, whom one woman had just thanked "for helping out with that thing with Louie," as I overheard her reveal to a companion.

I sat toward the front, set the bulletin and missal and hymnal down, and waited for the pews to fill, if only a little, around me. Soon there were maybe half-a-dozen other people, no one close by, yet the murmuring and whispering suggested a larger crowd, and turning around I saw that the back half of the church was almost full. So it goes. But the mood seemed good—none of the scowls or grimaces or blank stares I'd recalled. Yes, the gathered skewed thoroughly older, and white. There were perhaps two or three families with school-aged children. There were no teens or young singles (or even young marrieds) as far as I could tell.

Mass began promptly on time with a procession—Ghanese celebrant, female altar server, bow-tied lector—out of the sacristy, down the eastern aisle, and then up the center aisle. The opening hymn was "Canticle of the Sun" (two verses), and its performance felt oddly canned, like those anodyne renditions you hear sometimes in religious programming. Few attendees seemed to be singing, yet the vocals were loud and full, and I thought there must have been a recording playing over the speakers. But up in the loft were a live organist and a cantor; maybe a harmonizer was being used to create the choral effect.

Hymn complete, celebrant at the microphone, we were invited to introduce ourselves to those around us: another gesture of welcome, but with so many pews separating me from others I couldn't even catch anyone's eye. Things unfolded in familiar fashion from there, although the sung Gloria from the Mass of Christ the Savior had that same canned, Karaoke-like sound.

Then came the readings. I tend to prefer a relatively straightforward style, expressive but not emotive, reserved but not wooden. The bow-tied lector proceeded as if reciting a sponsor's message in a 1930s radio broadcast—an interesting choice for the verses from Jeremiah. He modulated his tone for the reading from Paul, then dutifully gave way to the celebrant for the Gospel verses from Mark. There was a lively, reassuring tone to his delivery, if at times it felt pitched in a way to appeal to children. The homily that followed began as a rousing address about the persecution to which believers are subject, and ended as a comforting bedtime story; "sparrows" were mentioned often. But at least there was no reference to the Fortnight for Freedom, and its brevity could be said to have compensated for its shortcomings. Not that some of the people around me would have noticed: they read their bulletins or busied themselves with its inserts, including the liturgical word-find seemingly meant for children.

The recitation of the Nicene Creed was spirited. The intentions included a prayer for all who suffer religious persecution ("Christians, Jews, and Muslims in this country"). Then the Mass hastened toward its conclusion through the Second Eucharistic prayer, during which the entire congregation made use of the plush, silently unfolding kneelers (at the parish I belong to, almost everyone remains standing). The sharing of peace was energetic, though with so few people around me I was able to reach just a single outstretched hand. Only one species of Communion was offered, with a separate pair of Eucharistic ministers dispatched to the back half of the church, speeding everything along further still. That, of course, is part of the attraction of the summer Saturday vigil, and things seemed set to wrap up in a tidy forty-five minutes, except that the pastor himself then materialized to deliver the announcements. He came off as a friendly sort, his round silver glasses and neat white mustache contributing to his warm, grandfatherly demeanor. But he spoke a little too lengthily on his threat to discontinue the use of bulletin inserts (had he seen people doing the word-find?), even as he exhorted parishioners to keep up with the news by..."reading the bulletin." That everyone joined in reciting this last bit along with him suggested it is something of a weekly routine. Then the Karaoke machine was cranked up for two verses of "Lift High the Cross," for which nobody stuck around.

Almost a decade ago, novelist Colm Tóibín spoke of the solace he found in attending Mass at another nearby parish, having become familiar with it while writing his novel *Brooklyn*. Among other things, he recounted his walks through the surrounding streets after Mass ended. I find myself thinking of this often, and was prompted to do so again after leaving the Saturday vigil. The parishioners may not have stayed in their pews for the final hymn, but there they were on the front steps of the church, sharing greetings and chatting with one another. Then they gradually parted ways, disappearing in different directions, crossing streets, rounding corners—still a presence in this changing neighborhood, yet, I couldn't help but feel, someday to be swallowed up by it.

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**Dominic Preziosi** *is* Commonweal*'s executive editor.*

## MOST HOLY ROSARY CHURCH
### ANTIOCH, CALIFORNIA

*J. Peter Nixon*

The triangular steeple of Most Holy Rosary Church rises high over its surroundings, slicing like a shark's fin through the suburban sea of homes, apartments, and retailers that constitute the city of Antioch, California. Once the heart of a vast cattle ranch and later a community of miners, factory workers, and fisherman, Antioch now serves as a bedroom community for an increasing number of families priced out of the overheated real-estate markets of San Francisco and Oakland.

The Order of Preachers (a.k.a. the Dominicans) have been running Most Holy Rosary since the mid-1860s, when the discovery of coal and copper in the area led to a rapid expansion of the population. The current church is the third since the parish's founding. It was completed in 1966, a year after the closing of the Second Vatican Council.

There was a flurry of church construction in the diocese in the decades following the council and most new churches followed a similar pattern: seating in the round, a high vault over the altar, and a liturgical aesthetic that was resolutely modern. At their best, these churches were well designed to facilitate the "full, conscious and active participation" in the liturgy called for by Vatican II. But many have not aged well and often resemble what the Jesuit liturgical scholar John Baldovin once described as "slightly out-of-date living rooms."

While Holy Rosary is typical of this genre, the parish has tried to bring together both modern and traditional elements in its worship space. The church's most striking architectural feature is a high wall of uncut stone behind the altar on which hangs a large, traditional crucifix. A similar blending of old and new can be found on the rear wall, which is also covered in stone and displays Stations of the Cross brought over from the older church built in 1905.

The Sunday 10:30 Mass is one of three English services (the parish also offers two Masses in Spanish). With teens (it is hoped) drawn to the 5:30 p.m. Life Teen Mass and middle-schoolers en route to soccer matches favoring the 8:45 a.m. option, it's not surprising that the 10:30 attracts a quieter and slightly older crowd.

The congregation reflects the growing diversity of the region. A parish that was once home to large groups of Irish, Italian, and Portuguese immigrants now welcomes many from Mexico, the Philippines, Nigeria, and elsewhere. A glance at the children wriggling in the pews confirms that the future of Catholicism in California lies with those whose roots are in the global South.

Like many parishes in the area, the *ars celebrandi* at Holy Rosary sometimes draws as much from the style of Protestant megachurches as from traditional Catholic forms. The most potent example of this is the huge screens on either side of the sanctuary, on which are projected song lyrics and prayers. The use of such screens has become ubiquitous among parishes in the diocese, even those whose more traditional architecture does not easily lend itself to this kind of visual projection. The screens certainly have their detractors (among whom this author is one) who argue that they assume a worshiping community with minimal knowledge of its own prayers and distract from the action at the altar. It seems clear, however, that the arguments of those who believe the screens make the Mass more accessible have carried the day.

While Catholics have only ourselves to blame for the state of our liturgical music, it seems clear that here, too, we are learning lessons from our Protestant brethren. Most of the songs at this Mass, such as Josh Blakesley's "Come to Jesus" and Curtis Stephan's "Go out, Go out" follow the conventions of contemporary Evangelical "praise music," with its emphasis on simple, repeated lyrics designed to make it easier for congregations to sing along. Among parishes in the area, such songs have migrated from the "Teen Mass" to become mainstays at other liturgies.

Those who are skeptical about this kind of ecumenical borrowing would find a reassuring solidity in how the essentials of the Roman Rite are executed at Holy Rosary. Western Province Dominicans are generally not known for their liturgical experimentation and our presider at this Mass—a visiting priest from the Oakland Priory—favored an understated "say the black, do the red" approach. Both lectors, a man and a woman, were well prepared and proclaimed the readings clearly and effectively.

The homilist was a relatively young Dominican who was newly assigned to the parish in the wake of the death of a beloved older priest and former pastor, Fr. Vicente.

*Most Holy Rosary Church*

The homily honed in on Jesus' words in the Gospel about revealing the Father, linked this to the exemplary Christian witness of the deceased priest, and suggested that everyone in the parish—both individually and collectively through the parish's ministries—could find ways to "reveal the Father" to others. For a parish that was still in mourning, it was an effective way for the new priest to honor his predecessor and call the community to continue his work. On another Sunday, the decision to forgo a deeper exegesis of the texts would have been a missed opportunity. In this case, however, the homily's simplicity and brevity seemed appropriate.

The only truly discordant note in the Mass was the process for distributing the consecrated bread and wine to almost a dozen lay eucharistic ministers. Because the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) requires that such ministers "not approach the altar before the priest has received Communion," they gathered in a semicircle at the foot of the sanctuary, creating a somewhat distracting wall of bodies. The congregation then watched while each minister received Communion and then waited once again while the priest—the only person in the sanctuary allowed to transport the consecrated elements from the altar—placed a bowl or chalice in the hands of each minister.

To be fair, this ungainly ballet is not unique to Holy Rosary. Like the screens and the music, it can be experienced at almost any Mass in the area on Sunday. While Vatican directives aimed at defending the distinctiveness of priestly ministry have made things more awkward and time-consuming than they need to be, it is hard to imagine a dozen people crammed into a narrow space behind an altar being able to move with the gracefulness that ritual action requires.

Taken as a whole, there was nothing particularly memorable about this Mass, but nothing particularly objectionable either. If we, as a congregation, were not notably enthusiastic, we were certainly attentive and engaged. Regardless of our human failings as liturgical actors, God was present and at work. We left that morning having encountered Jesus Christ in the Eucharist and strengthened to do his work in the world. On a blistering hot Sunday in Ordinary Time, is it reasonable to ask for more?

But if the reader detects a faint whiff of despair in this author, she would not be mistaken. Many of the words I write in the summer of 2017 could have been written in 2007, 1997, or 1987. Similar concerns about the well-intentioned mediocrity of contemporary Catholic liturgy have been voiced by critics as theologically diverse as Archbishop Rembert Weakland and Pope Benedict XVI. Ideas have been generated and programs have been proposed, but we seem to be stuck in a rut. Things may not be getting much worse. But they are not getting better, and one wonders what it would take for things to improve.

**J. Peter Nixon**, *a regular contributor to* Commonweal, *works in the health-care industry and lives in Northern California.*

## IGLESIA DE LA ASUNCIÓN
### BELLINGHAM, WASHINGTON

*Sam Rocha*

The featured front sign reads "Church of the Assumption / Iglesia de la Asunción," with the 12:30 Mass parenthetically marked "Español." The cornerstone reads "Church of the Assumption 1920." I enter through one of the three doors facing the street, the foot of the cruciform church. I bless myself at the grey marble holy font in the narthex and enter the nave. There is no air conditioning, but the muted lighting of the church is cool and shade-like and the smaller stained-glass windows are cracked open. I genuflect and take my seat in the dark, heavy wooden pew toward the front of the back half of the pews.

The somewhat narrow hall-like shape of the nave allows me to observe the four side altars from my seat, dedicated to Our Lady of Le Vang and Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, to my right, and Saint Lorenzo Ruiz and Our Lady of Guadalupe, to my left. I thumb through the *Flor y Canto* songbook waiting for Mass to begin. Before the opening procession, a man in a black button-down shirt takes the mic and informs the faithful that there is a second collection in support of Fr. Francisco's school in Uganda. "Nos ponemos de pie" brings us to our feet.

The music ministry plays "Tomen Agua Viva," intoned by a man on the right-hand side of the pulpit, with accompaniment from a baby grand piano and rhythmic tambourine, situated behind the main altar. Bright-red digital numbers on a device above the cantor podium on the right-hand side of the church show the selection number from *Flor y Canto*. The procession comes in through the left-hand side of the sacristy, with all the extraordinary ministers walking in pairs. The celebrant is, I presume, the aforementioned Fr. Francisco, an African priest from Uganda. He takes his seat on the right side of the altar, angled to face it. Not quite *ad orientem*, but similar.

It is immediately clear to me that the celebrant does not speak Spanish and is reading the Mass using his facility with church Latin to say the Mass in phonetic Spanish. The giveaway is the hard "ch" sound used on the letter "c." "En el nombre del padre, del hijo y del espíritu santo." "Y con tu espíritu." (I am reminded that the Spanish version of the Mass required no new translation.) We sing "Señor ten piedad" for the penitential rite and the Gloria and sit down for the Liturgy of the Word. At this point I count between 150 and 175 people. The lectern is on the left-hand side of the church and, like the pulpit on the right-hand side, it is set back from the main altar. A woman reads the first reading and the cantor sings the psalm. I notice that the altar and floor surrounding it are made of identical grey stone.

*Iglesia de la Asunción*

A mother and daughter approach the lectern for the second reading and the mother, wearing a turquoise blouse, proclaims the word with confidence. The Gospel acclamation is sung in the typical, rhythmic alleluia of Latin America. The Gospel procession consists of Fr. Francisco carrying the gospels with two altar servers, both boys, carrying candles. The priest reads in his Latinate style, which in this case is a bit more laborious. A woman sitting behind me says the word "agobiado" aloud to try and cue him as he sounds it out, but he is out of earshot. "Gloria a ti señor Jesus." The priest and altar servers return to their seats.

The same man who gave the opening announcement approaches the lectern with some notes in his hand. He reads a translation of Fr. Francisco's English homily in Spanish. The homily begins wishing everyone a happy Fourth of July and, referring to the responsorial psalm, he notes that we praise politicians and athletes but sometimes forget to praise God. Citing St. Paul, he criticizes those who treat the sacraments as mere routines and give higher priority to birthdays and vacations, adding that we must think of the poor who Jesus tells "come to me." The homily ends with the common liturgical greeting and the congregation replies, "y con to espíritu." During the penitential rite and throughout the readings and homily, families arrive and sit, numbering well over two hundred people at this point.

We recite the creed, and the lector for the second reading reads the petitions. One of the petitions is for the nation to care for the poor and the needy. The petitions for the sick and the dead name them individually. The offertory song is "Entre Tus Manos." The collection is taken up by children and youth, mostly, and a mother and two children bring up the gifts, led by the cross-bearing altar server. Responses to the Eucharistic acclamations are cacophonous in volume and pace. The "Santo" is sung and everyone kneels for the prayers of consecration. At the elevation of the bread and the cup, the bells ring out three times, drowning out the voices and pew-sounds made by children for a few moments. The congregation is at 250 people now, many of them families. The congregation anticipates the Great Amen, but the acclamation is sung as well, as the kneelers are raised and pound the pews.

The Our Father is sung and the congregation hold their hands in the orant position, many holding hands. The sign of peace is lively and friendly. A couple approaches me from behind to give me peace, noting that I am "solito" (all alone, in an affectionate diminutive tone). The Lamb of God is rhythmic and the congregation remains standing for the final Eucharistic prayers. The Communion song, "El Pan de la Vida" begins and the Eucharistic ministers line up behind the altar where Fr. Francisco distributes Communion. The hosts are in a crystal paten and the chalice is silver. Four lines for the Body of Christ are set up with two lines for the

Blood. No ushers direct the communion line, but it moves fairly quickly, especially as it reaches the back of the church, where many do not approach to receive Communion. About 60 or 70 percent of the congregation takes Communion, the rest remain in their pews.

After Communion, the man in the black shirt takes the podium and goes through the week's announcements. The first is about a collection of socks for charity, the second is about the local department of health doing talks in Spanish on well-being, and the third reminds the faithful again about the second collection for Fr. Francisco's school in Uganda (this makes sense to repeat, since many were not there at the first pre-Mass announcement). At this point the liturgy is wearing some children down and many run around and cry, a sign of life and a future. The last announcement is to thank Fr. Francisco for his effort to speak in Spanish, which receives a thunderous and heartfelt applause.

The second collection follows as Fr. Francisco, in English, thanks the congregation for their generosity and says that the Ugandan children pray for them and that he also prays for them. The final blessing follows and the recessional song is the up-tempo "Demos Gracias al Señor." The congregation claps in various patterns, some on every other beat, several on every beat, a few emphasizing other beats. The song goes on well after the procession has finished and the church begins to empty. The faithful greet each other and talk as they leave through the door I entered. At this point I notice that several women wear black mantillas. Several of them, along with others, pray at the side altar, and bring offerings of flowers. At the altar of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Mexican faithful pray, light candles, and several venerate Our Lady with kisses.

I walk to the altar and see the wooden statues of Saint Joseph the Worker, to the right, and Our Lady of Fatima, to the left. In the four corners of the ambulatory, surrounding the crucifix in the center, are the paintings of the four Evangelists. Toward the end of the nave, on the left-hand side, there is a large red candle and a door to a reposition chapel, where several are praying. Next to the altar, on the left side, there is a large baptismal font with a cruciform glass structure atop a brown and white marble base. Further to the left are doors that open into a vestibule that leads into the parking lot and parish grounds. Many congregate here, with lively conversation that spills into the parking lot.

I grab a bulletin and notice that, like the welcome sign outside, it is mostly bilingual. I walk out into the parking lot area and see the rectory and a seemingly vandalized statue in a landscaped flower garden. From this side view the church shows its age a bit more than the side I entered from. The iconic image I approached when I entered now seems more worn and in need of roofing. At the front a group of families greets one another in Spanish asking what part of Mexico they are from.

**Sam Rocha** *teaches at the University of British Columbia.*

## OUR LADY QUEEN OF THE APOSTLES
### ROYAL PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

*Tom Blackburn*

Several years ago at 2:30 on a Saturday afternoon I watched a traffic jam develop in the parking lot of St. Mark's Church in Boynton Beach, Florida. I asked the pastor if it was a wedding or a funeral. Neither, he said: It was just the usual crowd coming ninety minutes early to claim their pews for the 4 p.m. anticipatory Mass. I was in awe. As we say in Florida, we never did that up North. Saturday afternoon can be as busy at church as the mid-morning Mass on Sunday, even in my own parish. Who knew?

I usher at noon on Sundays and don't get around as I once did. On June 25, I chose a 4:30 p.m. Saturday Mass so I could get my first taste of this Florida custom. I went to Our Lady Queen of the Apostles in Royal Palm Beach to make it a twofer because it also was my first excuse to get inside a building that was dedicated in 2009 and enjoys considerable local acclaim.

The first thing I did was to arrive early, but it proved unnecessary. Our summer population is half the winter population, and year-rounders are less addicted than snowbirds to Sunday-morning golf. The church was less than half full. OLQA rests among gated communities west of Palm Beach, and the crowd was composed largely of retirees, all dressed like retirees—from polos and chinos down to Bermudas and flip-flops. There was a decent sprinkling of parents with kids.

The second thing I did was enter by the side door, because that's where others were entering. But that proved the wrong thing to do; architects want you to use the main entrance. But even from the side OLQA makes an immediate statement. It is certainly not old-fashioned, but neither could it answer to the name "modern." What it most reminded me of—and I don't mean this pejoratively because I've lived in one—is a suburban split-level house with a big living room. The ceiling has faux beams, but it doesn't soar. This is Florida; you have to air-condition the space you build.

The nave is huge but manages to be homey. The altar is spacious, on a platform three steps high in the middle of one of the lengthwise walls. It faces eight modules of pews that fan out, widening as they gently rise toward the back. The modules range from eleven to fifteen pews deep. The aisles are wide enough for wheelchairs to pass in opposite directions.

I settled into a pew about halfway back on the left side. There was a group of ten or twelve obvious regulars a couple of pews in front of me. I tried to pick out individuals among the twelve Apostles who appeared with Mary in the painted-glass scene over the altar. The figures were realistic, but their

*Our Lady Queen of the Apostles, Royal Palm Beach, Florida*

LARRY QUICK / CREATIVE IMAGES PHOTOGRAPHY

grouping was less formal than it would have been in older art. John had a book open. Thomas (I hope it was) had his forefinger raised to make a point to another Apostle, who didn't seem to be paying a whole lot of attention.

A lector in a pleated white skirt and with just a hint of a New York accent greeted us, and Mass began. There were two altar boys of grade-school age and a deacon along with the presider. The music had a bigger impact than the entrance procession itself: There was one voice with one guitar singing Marty Haugen's "Gather Us In." The amplifiers must have been on Rose Bowl setting. I sang but couldn't hear myself, looked around, and didn't see many lips moving. I couldn't see the performer. The choir loft runs the length of the back wall of the nave, and there is enough sound equipment up there to cover any contingencies. Whoever was up there was good, but the sound level made it a strictly solo performance. No one could sing loud enough to join in. It turned out that he was going to sing the Kyrie, Gloria, and Creed as well as the offertory, Communion, and recessional hymns.

If we'd been able to sing along, we could have followed the words on five-by-four foot screens flanking the altar, or on the smaller screens along the side aisles. The readings also appeared on the screens. Liturgists usually want the readings to be proclaimed and the congregants to put down their worship aids and listen. Tell that to people with hearing problems. Personally, I've no problem with audio-visuals; I ignore them. But the screens are so big they couldn't be missed, and I noticed that listening to St. Paul's run-on sentences while following them in print actually made it easier to get his point. That's a non-scientific datum, but I pass it on to liturgists for what it might be worth.

The homily also was accompanied by a slide underlining the conclusion. Fr. Brian Campbell obviously prepared it long before he vested. He has a rep to uphold. He is in a rotation with three or four other homilists who provide commentary on upcoming Mass readings in the diocesan edition of the *Florida Catholic*. Saturday he used Florida's many water bodies as metaphors to discuss both St. Paul—on Adam making the waters turbid though sin—and the Gospel—which says that what's concealed will eventually become clear when the waters are stilled. He asked God to calm and cleanse us. He was vivid enough that I was able to quote buckets to my wife when I got home. She said, dryly, that I could have read it in the *Florida Catholic*. Sure

enough, his homily was in print, although he added some topical asides in his live appearance.

There were mics on the ambo and altar. Neither put out as much sound as the music sound system, but neither did Fr. Campbell or the lector have to fuss with them. I thought of comparing the Mass experience with watching a movie in a viewing room for critics. All that was missing were soft swivel chairs. The church's AV system showed us what we heard and made it audible. It sang for us. I suspect that, if asked, it would bring coffee.

But then, suddenly, everything changed. With the Sanctus, lights above the congregation dimmed. Maybe they also brightened on the altar. It happened in a snap. But with just that change in lighting, a family dining table became an altar of sacrifice. The canon proceeded with as much focus, concentration, and sanctity as any unreconstructed pre–Vatican II reverence-seeker could want. For Communion, the lighting switched back.

Since the Second Vatican Council we seem to be indelicately poised between the Mass as a family meal, like Passover, and the Mass as sacrifice, continuing Calvary. What serves one seems to pull against the other. I think OLQA has a real answer. Maybe the lighting maneuver is widely used, but the balance of meal and sacrifice impressed me even more than the church itself.

On the way out, I looked around the narthex, which I should have seen first. It is a long hall, sacristy to the right, gift shop to the left, and a baptismal font big enough for full body immersion in the center. A built-in adoration chapel and life-sized statues of St. Teresa of Calcutta and St. John Paul II—which must have been planned and ordered for the church before either was canonized—tell you where the pastor's heart is. He is Fr. Z. Andy Rudnicki, who is still there. He was a parochial vicar in my parish years ago in his early priesthood. From the bulletin I learned that OLQA dedicates the month of October to reinforcing everyone's spirituality, and as we left the Mass ushers were handing out copies of the small *Mass Journal* that Matthew Kelly's Dynamic Catholic group promotes to help folks develop spiritual life.

Fr. Rudnicki is able to summon eight ushers and at least six extraordinary ministers of Communion, without overlapping, for the Saturday afternoon Mass. Coffee is served in a covered pavilion opposite the main entrance on Sundays. That suggests Our Lady Queen of the Apostles is a welcoming place. I felt I could get used to it very quickly.

I guess I'll have to wait until after Thanksgiving to experience a real Saturday anticipatory Mass scramble. It's quiet now in Royal Palm Beach because so many folks are up north, sending postcards that say, "Sleeping under blankets." But Our Lady Queen of the Apostles is a fine place to be if you are stuck here for the summer.

**Tom Blackburn** *is happily retired after fifty-three years as a journalist.*

## NATIVITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY
### MENOMINEE, ILLINOIS

*David Carroll Cochran*

Since my wife and I have both worked with priests in the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa, we decided to avoid any awkwardness by crossing the river to a neighboring diocese for Mass. Our two teenage sons came along, placated for having to rise earlier than usual by the promise of donuts on the way home.

We chose a rural parish, one of the red-brick Gothic Revival style churches that still dominate the skyline of small towns across this part of the Midwest. The church was built in the 1870s, has fewer than two hundred registered families, and offers one Mass on Sunday morning. It is clustered and shares a pastor with a larger parish several miles away.

The church sits on a hill with a view of the rolling farmland around it. On one side, as if to emphasize the ratio of current-to-past parishioners, is a small parking lot and much larger cemetery, while on the other side, down the hill, are a bar and a firehouse. A large tower with spire anchors the entrance-side of the building, an apse extends out of the altar-side opposite, and tall stained-glass windows run the length of both sides between them.

Arriving ten minutes early to look around the church, we were among the first ones there. We entered under the choir loft and sat in a pew about halfway up the center aisle. While the church may be tall, it is not large. Its wooden floors and pews creak pleasantly, and the pew backs still have hat clips every few feet. The walls are white plaster with Stations of the Cross oil paintings between the windows. The gaze is drawn to an ornate high altar at the back of the apse, tabernacle at its center. In front of it is a simpler altar-table, flanked by a pulpit on one side and chairs for the priest, deacon, and servers on the other. The back walls are crowded with statues of angels and saints, a crucifix with bright red marking Christ's wounds, and a Divine Mercy painting.

We'd intended to blend in by sitting where we did, but our choice backfired: almost everyone else took seats toward the back of the church, leaving us, a few older women, and a latecomer or two in sole inhabitance of the front half of the nave. Closer inspection at the Rite of Peace and Communion yielded a congregation profile. Numbering around seventy, it skewed older and middle-aged, though with a few younger couples mixed in. There were only three or four young children, and our kids doubled the number of teens present. Casual dress predominated. Like the figures in the church's statues and paintings, all were white.

Mass started right on time. A young female cantor welcomed the congregation and announced that we would have a guest celebrant. My wife and I shared a smile as we recog-

*Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

nized the recently retired priest from our own archdiocese, who had also crossed the river for Mass that morning. What followed was a serviceable liturgy—familiar, meaningful, and heartfelt, but not especially moving or spirit-filled. An ordinary Mass, though not in Ordinary Time, as it clocked in at a brisk forty-five minutes.

Led by the cantor in front and an organist and small choir in the back loft, the music was solid, though the cantor struggled a bit with the Responsorial Psalm. There was the usual selection of songs, ranging in style from "Canticle of the Sun" for the processional to "Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow" for the recessional. The congregation's singing was dutiful but not enthusiastic.

A female reader did a great job with the first and second readings—clear and measured, her tone appropriate to the text—while the deacon was reverent but a bit more rote when reading the gospel. Delivering his short, six-minute homily without notes, the priest was warm and genuine. Picking up primarily on Jeremiah in the first reading but bringing in the Gospel's call for fearless witness to Jesus, his focus was prophetic service to the poor in the world today, invoking Martin Luther King Jr. and Pope Francis. An amusing story from his past added a bit of humor, even if its connection to the homily's actual message was less clear.

The priest was efficient but sincerely prayerful presiding over the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the deacon was an unobtrusive presence. There were plenty of friendly smiles and warm handshakes at the Rite of Peace. The Blood of Christ was not offered to the congregation during Communion, something I had not seen in some time. This meant the priest and deacon were sufficient to distribute the Body at the front, while a female eucharistic minister went up to the choir loft.

Aside from the absence of the Blood of Christ at Communion, what really stood out to me in an otherwise typical Mass were the altar servers: three pre-teen to early-teen boys who seemed transported from pre-Vatican II days. Rather than the bed-head and ill-fitting albs over shorts and sneakers you might expect at a summer Mass, these guys had the long dark cassocks, white surplices, short combed hair, neat shoes, and precision movements of early 1950s altar boys. During the Liturgy of the Eucharist, they came around and knelt directly in front of the altar facing the priest with their backs toward us, and, after ringing the bells at each elevation, they bowed in unison all the way down until their foreheads rested on the floor. While almost all the congregation would take the Eucharist in the hand, they each took it on the tongue and then held a long-handled paten under each transfer during distribution to the rest of us. Tonally at odds with the rest of the Mass, the servers were impressive but also a little distracting, in a Stepford-wives-kind-of-way; I half expected to see them powered down and put back in storage until the following Sunday.

Normalcy, however, was restored on the way out: the bulletin I was handed looked exactly like every other bulletin I've ever seen. Perhaps it's the simple church bulletin that provides the true source of Catholic unity and continuity in a rapidly changing world. Included among the tight grid of small ads on the back, instantly recognizable in its layout, was one for our local liquor store, reminding me that we were running short of some necessities for the week ahead. But first, donuts.

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**David Carroll Cochran** *is professor of Politics and director of the Archbishop Kucera Center at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa. His most recent books are* Catholic Realism and the Abolition of War *(Orbis) and* The Catholic Church in Ireland Today *(Rowman & Littlefield).*

## ST. MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL
### WHEATON, ILLINOIS

*Jim Pauwels*

Nearly every Sunday and Holy Day throughout the year, our family worships and serves liturgically at the same suburban parish in the Chicago archdiocese. And so we considered doing something completely different for this secret-shopper-style exercise: going into the city and attending a Spanish-language Mass, or an African-American community, or a campus Mass or a young-adult-focused community. Maybe even a Latin Mass. But in the end we chose another suburban, middle-class parish: St. Michael the Archangel in Wheaton. We reasoned that suburban parishes are where a large plurality—perhaps a majority—of Chicago-area Catholic worshipers are likely to worship from weekend to weekend. As a snapshot of Sunday Mass around here, it didn't seem a bad choice.

St. Michael's parish history dates well back into the nineteenth century, but the faith community made news about fifteen years ago when an apparently troubled college student who'd attended the parish elementary school set fire to the church, rendering the building unusable. The parish community pulled together and managed to raise $13 million to build a replacement—an extremely impressive fund-raising achievement and surely the envy of many parishes around here, including our own, that have undertaken capital campaigns in recent years. So the look of this new building was one item of interest.

Another had to do with the parish's location. It is less than a mile from the campus of Wheaton College, one of the nation's premier seats of Evangelical higher learning (its most famous alumnus: Billy Graham). Would that proximity influence St. Michael's liturgical approach in any way, either by borrowing from Evangelical preaching style and music, or alternatively by emphasizing Catholic identity?

We chose the 10:30 a.m. Mass, reasoning that it was likely to draw young families: late enough to roll teens out of bed, early enough that toddlers won't be starving for lunch halfway through. Our own parish needs to appeal

*St. Michael the Archangel*

more to young families, so St. Michael's ability to attract millennial parents and their children was something else we were curious about.

We arrived about ten minutes early to soak in the space and the ambience before Mass began. Not knowing our way around, we entered through a door that led into what seemed to be a small library area, then down a hall into the narthex. While it may not rise even to the level of venial sin, nobody greeted us. The parish website lists a ministry of hospitality, parenthetically adding that these are the ushers, but we managed to make the passage into the worship space without anyone actually saying hello. As cradle Catholics, our expectation of being greeted by ushers is not very high in any case.

The worship space itself is impressive, and may deserve to be called beautiful. By no means is this one of those low-slung, merely functional Catholic churches that were built in the second half of the twentieth century across American suburbia. St. Michael's is capacious and light-filled, with a high vaulted ceiling. The sanctuary is large and deep, with an altar and ambo worthy of the space. The tabernacle is against the marble-like back wall in the middle of the sanctuary, with an enormous crucifix hanging over it. The pews fan outward, with capacity for perhaps a thousand worshipers. There is also a Marian shrine and a statue of St. Michael, sword in hand and devil underfoot, that I think few children would be able to resist. Stained-glass windows in the sanctuary and along the walls admit a good deal of natural light.

Among the most notable features is the magnificent pipe organ. We chatted after Mass with the director of music and liturgy, Chris Orf, whose play proved that he is equal to the challenge of putting this Porsche of an instrument through its paces. He informed us that it was funded by a donor—an exceedingly generous gift. The organ is used for concerts and is featured on several commercial recordings. The ranks of pipes themselves, in the front near the music area and along the back wall, constitute a major element of the church's decor.

And there were some notable features about the Mass itself. The presider, the parish's pastor, was also the homilist. I really liked his homily. He has an understated and conversational style of preaching that allows the content, which was pretty strong on this particular morning, to do the work. The Gospel included the passage, "Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest." His homily focused on the difficult burdens, of sin and relationship, that many of us carry, and urged us to trust Jesus to lighten them for us. An anecdote about a woman who hadn't spoken with her sister for thirty years before she died, and the burden that this feud placed on her, really struck me.

Something else about this priest: he moves through the text of the ritual at a brisk clip. All my life, I've heard stories of priests who could sprint through the pre-Vatican II Mass in less than twenty minutes. This didn't race by quite that quickly, but the entire liturgy, end to end, came in at about fifty minutes—pretty fast for a large, well-attended weekend Mass. One of the parishioners revealed afterward that his record is forty-three minutes.

By contrast, the woman who proclaimed the first and second readings didn't rush. In fact, she did a very good job all around. One of the little "tests" I had set beforehand was the proclamation of the first reading. It begins on a high note of exhortation: "Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion, shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem!" After a lifetime of hearing such passages recited with all the passion of someone reading the phone book, I was pleased to hear the words proclaimed with the verve the passage calls for. Her enunciation was good and her preparation evident—all in all, an excellent example of how this volunteer ministry can be done.

The hymns and acclamation selections for this day were a blend of traditional and contemporary. The singing was led competently by a cantor whose well-trained voice was big enough to fill the large space. She, and we, were accompanied by the music director, who moved back and forth between the organ console and a fine grand piano. The tempos were pretty quick, I thought—but every church musician has strong views about tempo. Also, the organ was very loud during the congregational pieces. I understand that when one drives a Porsche, one wants to rev the engine, but in this case, the volume made it nearly impossible for us to hear the congregation's singing. And, though this is perhaps a minor thing: in addition to the hymnal, worship aids were made available to us. But the worship aids didn't provide notes and lyrics—they simply referred us to the hymnal number of each song. While that may be useful, it also involved killing some trees whose lives might have been spared by some combination of hymn boards and announcements.

The church was full and the crowd young—not a young-adult crowd, but a young-family crowd. There were definitely more young families at St. Michael's than we'd be likely to see in our parish on a given Sunday morning. That might be attributable to the fact that St. Michael's has a school (our parish doesn't), or it could be an indication that this faith community's pastoral approach is working. St. Michael's also seems slightly more traditional than contemporary, what with its organ and hymns, its stained glass and statues, and its preaching on sin, to say nothing of its perpetual adoration chapel and the fact that reconciliation is offered nearly every day of the week—an astonishing commitment to that sacramental discipline. St. Michael's does some things our parish doesn't, and some things I wouldn't want ours to do, but based on our visit, its approach is working for its community. ■

**Jim Pauwels** *is a husband, father, and deacon. His day job is in corporate America. He lives, works and ministers in Arlington Heights, Illinois.*

# Portrait of Our Time

## *An Interview with Lawrence Joseph*

Anthony Domestico

"The intent is to make a large, serious / portrait of my time." These lines come from Lawrence Joseph's poem "The Game Changed," and they distill Joseph's essential and rare contribution to contemporary poetry. The poems in his new collection, *So Where Are We?* (several of which have been published in *Commonweal*), are large. They are characterized by enormous shifts in time and space, moving from Peck Slip to the outer reaches of the cosmos, from Lebanon to Syria to Iraq, from the Big Bang to midcentury Detroit to our own world of technocapital.

Joseph's poems also are serious. They ask the kinds of questions that great poets ask: What do we mean when we say "I"? How is the "I" we use in poetry different from the "I" we use in conversation, different from the "I" we use in a courtroom? (This last question is particularly relevant to Joseph, who is the Tinnelly Professor of Law at St. John's University School of Law.) How is this "I" shaped by the pressures of history, and how does it push back against such pressures? Joseph explores these questions through the most exacting formal means. The compositional control—the varied and flexible syntax; the masterful control of line and stanza breaks, music and imagery, sound and sense—gives the poems their surplus of energy; their formed nature inspires their passionate, felt life.

Finally, Joseph's poems offer a portrait of our time. They are self-reflexive: quoting Wallace Stevens, Joseph has said, "Poetry is the subject of the poem." But they are just as concerned with thinking about our current moment—its politics, its economics, its nightmares, and its beauties. *So Where Are We?* fiercely investigates our location in "space-time," moving through different social spaces by moving through different kinds of language: the philosophical, the legal, the religious, the colloquial. The book combines formal excellence with an acute and prophetic moral vision. It's that rare collection of poetry that terrifies and sustains, one of the best any contemporary American poet has written.

I spoke with Joseph recently by e-mail.

**Anthony Domestico:** *So Where Are We?* is clearly a shaped collection, with a balance and order to the book as a whole. Any number of echoes and patterns could be mentioned, but here's one: the final lines of the penultimate poem, "Back to That"—"you can say what you like / to that"—are then picked up in the title of the final poem, "What More Is There to Say?" What were some of the compositional decisions you had to make about the way the poems in this book fit together?

**Lawrence Joseph:** My sense of the poet is classical—the poet is one who makes poems. In each book, I develop and repeat certain general themes—time, place, memory, God, history, class, race, beauty, love, poetry, identity. The core identity is the poet making the poems, but others—the poet who is Catholic, who is an Arab American, who is a lawyer, who's lived most his life in Detroit and New York City—are continuously in play. "An Ancient Clarity Overlaid," which appears about a third of the way into *So Where Are We?*, begins with an *ars poetica*: "What is thought and felt, believed and dreamed, // reflected on, the plot worked out in constant depth, what isn't, for the time being, being written, is being worked on—how long will it be, the one long poem?" "Back to That" not only refers back to the poems in this book, but to those in other books as well. "What More is There to Say?" echoes a rhetorical motif—what, in a poem, is and isn't spoken—that runs through my work.

I've always believed that poetry must speak of realities as least as complicated as those spoken of in prose. I've read books of poems, even single poems, which are, for me, at least the equivalent of a short story or a novel. Martin Amis, in an interview with Saul Bellow in the early eighties, quotes Bellow asking, "Why not address 'the mysterious circumstance of being', say what it's like to be alive at this time, on this planet?" This has been and still is my ambition.

**AD:** At times, this book suggests, to quote Wallace Stevens, that "Poetry is the subject of the poem"—or, as you put it, "the poem / measure[es] out its own circle." But alongside this assertion is a consistently outward-looking gaze, an engagement with political economy and the War on Terror and technology. Are these twin commitments—the commitment to poetry as the subject matter of poetry, and the

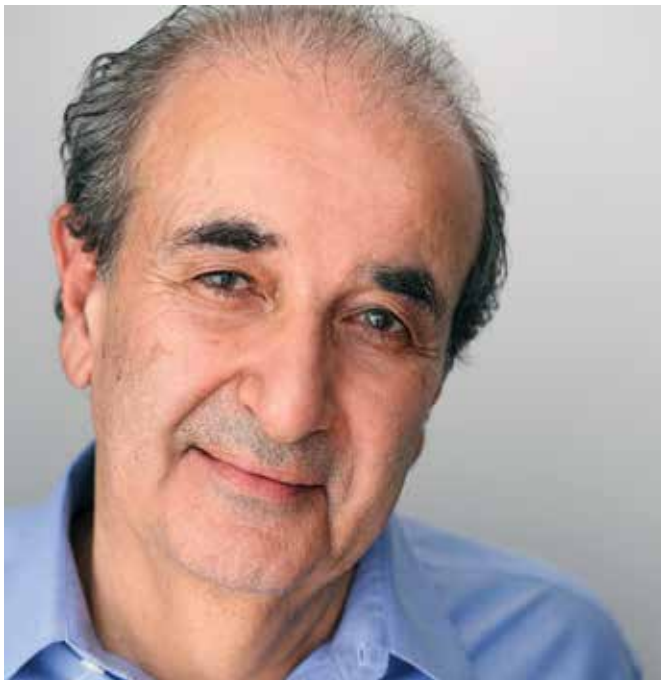
commitment to, as you've written elsewhere, "make a large, serious / portrait of my time"—in tension? Or are they in some way working in concert?

**LJ:** "Poetry is the subject matter of the poem"—it's the opening line of Part XXII of Stevens's "The Man with the Blue Guitar," written during the economic depths of the Great Depression. Every poem is, first of all, about poetry. In a 1942 talk, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words"—the United States had declared war on Japan, Germany, and Italy just months before—Stevens describes the tension between the making of a poem and the reality of the worlds we live in. He speaks of a poet capable of resisting the pressure of reality in a state of violence, knowing that the violence of the future may be even deadlier than the violence of today. The realities of the times in which the poet lives and writes constantly transform a poem's aesthetic space. The poet resists the pressures of reality, including the pressures of violence, in making, in forming, the poem. The tension is in the resistance—the poem is an act of resistance.

**AD:** So much of this book is about "epical, systemic violence." Yet this systemic violence is balanced by particular acts and images of love. After describing the world's "ravenous // cruelty," for instance, you ask, "But is there a more beautiful city—parts / of it, anyway?" To which you answer, yes, and it can be found in two bodies "light / with love, // heavy with sleep," or in the "voice of love." In the collection as a whole, or even more expansively in your vision of the world, how do you see the relation between love and violence?

**LJ:** The violence inherent in our systems and structures of power is a part of who we are—our thoughts, sensibilities, imaginations, language. We live in manifestations of it—permanent war, environmental destruction, poverty, racism, misogyny, the assault on labor, torture in our prisons, capital punishment—a corporate capitalist state controlled by oligarchical interests for their own private profit and gain. Against this, I place images of love, beauty, a sensuous language highly attentive to color and light. It's an aesthetic strategy, but, of course, it's also more than that. In the poem "On Nature" I write, "I, too, see God adumbrations, I, too, write // a book on love." My books are books on love. The poet casts an eye on what is horrendous, but his truest life is in what sustains, restores, heals. Love, the act of loving, beauty, are first, fundamental truths.

**AD:** In the poem "So Where Are We?" you talk about the Church of the Transfiguration on Mott Street, saying that "there is a God, a God who fits the drama / in a very particular sense." I love that idea: that there's a fit, even an aesthetic fit, between God and the world. To what extent do you see yourself as a religious poet—or, even more specifically, as a Catholic poet? I'm thinking less about your personal beliefs than in how you marshal the resources of the Catholic tradition—negative theology, for instance, which you echo in these lines: "What we felt— / something taken from us / we'll never get back—disarticulated, / no language for it, inwardly unstrung."



*Lawrence Joseph*

**LJ:** If by religious you mean: Do I address issues of the spirit, of the soul, in my work? Yes, definitely. As for being a Catholic poet, I was born in, and into, Catholicism—Eastern Rite Maronite and Melkite Catholicism. Not being Catholic has never been a choice for me—it's in my family, my ancestry, going back centuries. Catholicism, for me, is always here.

My parents, children of immigrants from Lebanon and Syria, were born in Detroit and attended Catholic grade and high schools. I did, too. I attended the University of Detroit Jesuit High School—my years at UD Jesuit corresponded almost exactly with those of Vatican II. A Jesuit hold on my Catholicism has lasted to this day. In grade school, I was aware of the social encyclicals, Leo XIII's *Rerum novarum* and Pius XI's *Quadragesimo anno*. In high school, we studied John XXIII's *Mater et magistra* and *Pacem in terris*. In the late sixties and early seventies—while studying literature at Michigan and at Magdalene College, Cambridge, and while writing poetry—I read Thomas Merton. Not so much the contemplative books or the poetry—though his poetry translations are among the best of his generation—but, mostly, his journal, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, and *Faith and Violence*, which addresses issues of systemic racism, violence, and war. *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton* remains a book as vital as ever for me—Merton's essays on Blake, Joyce, Pasternak, Faulkner, O'Connor, Louis Zukofsky, Simone Weil, Roland Barthes, the poets Fernando Pessoa, Cesar Vallejo, Rafael Alberti, the seven essays on

Albert Camus. Daniel Berrigan's witness at the time—his calling out American warmaking as criminal and as grievous social sin, his call for a moral revolution grounded on the Catholic faith—was powerfully felt. I read the *Catholic Worker*, the work of Dorothy Day.

Is there an aesthetic "fit" in my work between God and the world? The "I" in my poems has from the beginning identified himself as Catholic, and my books certainly can be read as presenting a Catholic theology "in a very particular sense." Catholicism is a faith morally identified with the human struggle for human dignity and justice. It is a vision of the world incarnationally rooted in the senses, a faith of and in spoken and written words—Scripture, "the Word of God," the Logos. It's also a communal faith—"the Communion of Saints." William Carlos Williams, in a chapter from *In the American Grain* on the Jesuit Père Sebastian Rasles, wrote that to be Catholic is to be moral, to be positive, to be peculiar, to be sure, to be generous, to marry, to touch, to give because one has, "where tenderness may move, love may awaken." Catholicism confronts the all-too-human questions of the existence of evil, the experience of transcendence, the mysteries of grace. The lines you quote—are they an expression of negative theology? Yes. The experience of an unbearable grief just may have something to do with God.

The "I" in my poems has from the beginning identified himself as Catholic, and my books certainly can be read as presenting a Catholic theology "in a very particular sense." Catholicism is a faith morally identified with the human struggle for human dignity and justice. It is a vision of the world incarnationally rooted in the senses, a faith of and in spoken and written words—Scripture, "the Word of God," the Logos.

**AD:** These poems are constantly thinking about abstraction and violence—more specifically, about how turning the particular into the abstract enables economic cruelty (think of bundled mortgages) and actual bloodshed (think of the label "enemy combatant"). What are some of the languages you find most useful for thinking about abstraction? Marxist theory is clearly one. Is theology another? I'm reminded again of that line about God fitting the world "in a very particular sense."

**LJ:** The sort of abstraction and abstract language that you speak of—a reified language that separates thoughts and ideas from their factual content—is hideous and destructive. The languages I place beside and against it are languages of perception and critique, fact and detail—types of langage certainly found in theology and in Marxist theory—and a language, "in a very particular sense," of "facts of feeling," sensuality, intimacy.

Then there's law, the language of law I've lived and worked in for nearly forty-five years. Legal language is rooted in realpolitik, in power. It includes distributive languages of labor and finance capital, languages of race and gender, war, crime and punishment, bodily injury, contractual transactions, individual rights. It maps our entire social space. It's a language of facts, abstract rules and doctrines, rhetorical tropes, analysis, argument. It's a language I know and have practiced, taught and written on, and I know how to use it for my purposes when I write.

Also important to me is a language of intensely focused moral witness and judgment, a "moralist language"—found, for example, in the writings of Albert Camus and Simone Weil, and in the work of one of the greatest American moralists, if not the greatest, James Baldwin. The truth of a poem is in its language, what its language tells us about the truths of life itself. Put that truth—put the language of poetry—against Andrew Bacevich's recent description of the language of "the powerful," who, as Bacevich forcefully says, "reveal truth only to the extent that it suits them," because the "exercise of power necessarily involves manipulation and is antithetical to candor." Poetry's language—as I say in my prior book of poems *Into It*—resists and is against "the turgid language of pseudo-erudition," the language of "false-voiced God-talkers and power freaks" who "think not at all about what they bring down."

**AD:** In the title poem of *So Where Are We?*, you describe a feeling that many of us will recognize: "Too much consciousness / of too much at once, a tangle of tenses // and parallel thoughts." And, as you've said, you imagine all of your books as forming one long poem. So I'm wondering: How has the experience of consciousness changed from your first collection, published in 1983, to now? And how has your own poetry changed, either formally or thematically, in response to this?

**LJ:** My first book, *Shouting at No One*, is set in Detroit in the seventies, and, among other things, tracks the breakdown of the Fordist paradigm of industrial capitalism. "In That City, In Those Circles," a poem in *So Where Are We?*, revisions that time, and another, "Here in a State of Tectonic Tension," presents physical landscapes and metaphorical

geographies of industrial and post-industrial Detroit. The techno-political economy of Fordism—Antonio Gramsci's word—changed the world. Born in Detroit shortly after World War II, I inherited the city's histories of labor and capital, class and race, violence and civil conflict. My father's and uncle's small grocery-liquor store in Detroit was looted and burned in the July '67 insurrection, fifty years ago. I was nineteen years old. I'd just finished my first year at Michigan, and worked the afternoon shift that summer at Pontiac Truck and Coach, dry-sanding paint-primered bodies of Chevrolet vans. When I came to New York City from Detroit in 1981, my practice as a lawyer included direct experience with the workings of finance capital. This coincided with the United States's escalating military involvement in the Middle East.

These histories have been and continue to be an integral part of my work. For almost thirty-five years, my wife Nancy and I have lived in downtown Manhattan. After the bombing of the World Trade Center, we were evacuated from our apartment, located a block from Ground Zero. We returned to it after six weeks, and we still live there. This and the United States's invasion of Iraq in 2003 are present throughout *Into It. So Where Are We?*'s title poem begins with the question—"So where were we?"—going back then to where *Into It* left off. The book takes on our continuous wars and warmaking, the economic collapse, racist hatred and violence, the oligarchic state's redistributions of wealth, the acceleration of cyberspace—digitalized time, digitalized space—by technocapital, which, as I say in "A Fable," the first poem in the new book, is now "permanently, digitally, // semioticized, virtually unlimited // in freedom and power, taking // billions of bodies on the planet // with it." For me, the challenge is as it's always been—to make poems that resist the pressures of reality. In times such as ours, the challenges are greater, the stakes higher than ever.

**AD:** This book, like your others, is interested in scale, in thinking about how the local (all those New York City landmarks, all those New York City streets) connects, or doesn't, to the global ("Ramadi, Mosul, Falluja, Tel Afar, Raqqa") and to the cosmic ("solar masses / spiraling into spacetime"). How do you think about the relationship between scale and poetic form?

**LJ:** The relationship between scale and form is a matter of composition, and composition is the act of making, of forming a poem through its combination of images, thoughts, voices, and sound patterns. The local, global, cosmic are imaginatively connected in what I think, see, feel. But, in a poem, what is presented as large or small, abstract or detailed, depends on the poet's perspective, how a poem's thoughts, themes, motifs, languages, are juxtaposed, associatively sequenced. Each poem presents its own issues of rhythm, meter, lineation, rhyme, syntax, its own world of formed language and thought. Poems written in stanzas allow for shifting perspectives in different ways than poems written in parts or in single blocks of metrically lineated language. *So Where Are We?*'s final words are, "Thickening, the mists, this early morning; repeated, sounds of foghorns we hear from afar."

The book ends with a visual image, a thought, sounds, repeated.

**AD:** Melville provides the epigraph to this book: "Not ignoring what is good, I am quick to perceive a horror,... and in the wild conceits that swayed me to my purpose, two and two there floated into my inmost soul." Why Melville? What is it that attracts you to him? Is it his metaphysical imagination? His grounding in New York City?

**LJ:** It's from the first chapter of *Moby Dick*—the ellipses mark several pages between the first and second parts of the quotation. It seemed to me an apt introduction to the book. The "I" in the poems doesn't ignore what's good, is quick to perceive a horror, and, in making the poems, is swayed to his purpose by "wild conceits"—"two and two there" floating into his "inmost soul." In the inmost soul! Melville's *Confidence Man* and *Bartleby the Scrivener* also make an appearance in my book of prose, *Lawyerland*. Melville lays down an American template. The lust for power, violence, hatred—slavery, imperial expansion, the destruction of nature, murderous aggression, injustice, greed, corruption—he absorbs it all and finds the language and forms of language he needs to fulfill his vision. Also, Melville was born a few blocks from where Nancy and I live, so he and I share more than metaphysical, and metaphorical, territory.

**AD:** The book ends with a poem titled "What More Is There to Say?" So let me conclude by asking: What more is there to say? What do you plan to work on next? Any plans to return, as in *Lawyerland*, to the novel form?

**LJ:** If you try to write about what's going on, you always have more to say. I'm always working on the next books of poems. To paraphrase Octavio Paz, a poet can't help writing poems, and knows it. I'm driven to write poems. I also write prose—essays, criticism, journal, diary, notebook entries, legal scholarship. I have one collection of essays and assorted prose pieces, and am putting together another. *Lawyerland* is a poet's prose book—what I needed to say I needed to say in prose. I'm not sure what generic category it is—in composing it, I found myself inventing my own prose form. Philip Roth defined a novel as "a piece of synthetic prose based on play with invented characters. These are the only limits." *Lawyerland* fits within that definition. I'm presently working on a book of prose that also fits within that definition, and have another one much in mind. ■

**Anthony Domestico** *is an assistant professor of literature at Purchase College SUNY, and a regular contributor to* Commonweal.

# *Two Poems by Donald Levering*

## UNRAPTURED

*for my mother*

Convinced she had already died,
she awoke confused,

still in this broken frame, nursed
for organs' failure, wracking thirst.

Why her Lord returned her here,
she could not fathom.

Had she not been raptured?
Why did He not keep her

once she'd surrendered,
transcended pain?

Annealed in His arms,
she'd felt as glorious and strong

as the scent of lilacs
the day she'd been born.

Why endure more,
wasn't she beyond

the owl's tremolo?
Wasn't her breath

already the fleece of the Lamb?

## VISITANT

All through our third-story meal
we hear its hoots as darkness falls
into a dazzle of shooting stars,

before the great horned owl
swoops to the balcony rail,
one wing-beat from our table.
Its yellow eyes drill through us.

We barely breathe.
The raptor's fierce stare
prompts my mother to say

she's ready to go. *Not indoors*—
she stops me from picking up plates—
no, our uncanny companion
thrills her, she meant

she misses those
she can no longer call or hold.
*I'm just waiting to be taken.*

The meteor shower dwindles
to a few stray streaks.
The owl swivels its head
toward a stirring below.

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*Donald Levering's seventh full-length poetry book,* Coltrane's God, *published by Red Mountain Press, was Runner-Up for the New England Book Festival contest. His previous book,* The Water Leveling with Us, *placed second in the 2015 National Federation of Press Women Creative Verse Competition. He is a former NEA Fellow and won the 2014 Literal Latté award and the 2017 Tor House Robinson Jeffers Prize.*

*Margaret O'Brien Steinfels*

# What Doomed Clinton?

**Shattered**
**Inside Hillary Clinton's Doomed Campaign**
*Jonathan Allen and Amie Parnes*
Crown, $28, 464 pp.

If Hillary Clinton had been elected president, what would the authors of *Shattered: Inside Hillary Clinton's Doomed Campaign* have done with the trove of data, gossip, leaks, interviews, and speculations they had amassed during the 2016 presidential campaign? Would they have called it: *Amazing: How a Campaign Riven by "Too Many Cooks," Second-guessing, Conflicting Strategies, and Personal Animosities Elected Hillary Clinton President of the United States?*

That could have happened. Allen and Parnes began their reporting in 2014 sharing the assumption that Clinton was the likely winner. If they had thoughts of using "shattered" in their title, it referred to the proverbial glass ceiling, not shock and despair over a Clinton loss. At what point then, were they persuaded otherwise, and began to frame the campaign as a disaster and Clinton as the loser? Or, were they as surprised as the whole country by Donald Trump's victory, and decided on November 9 to describe the campaign as "doomed"?

As Clinton moved from her 2015 "listening tour" to Election Day 2016, the authors hung their story on three themes: (1) the candidate lacked political charisma; (2) the campaign was ruled by "science rather than the art of politics"; (3) a string of unexpected events reminded voters that they didn't trust Hillary Clinton.

(1) Clinton's loss to Barak Obama in 2008 didn't quell her presidential ambitions. She played the good sport: campaigned for Obama, joined his administration as secretary of state, and looked ahead to following him in office. The rallying cry of the super pac "Ready for Hillary" pinned down donors and edged out the plans of serious competitors, though Bernie Sanders's entry in April 2015 undid that presumption. Analyzing the errors of 2008, her own and others, Clinton devised rules that governed the 2016 campaign; for example, don't fire anyone. In 2008 unhappy former staffers leaked to the media, a mortal sin and personal affront for Clinton. In this campaign doubtful performers were kept on but elbowed aside while new staff, advisers, and consultants were added. Layering over problems of strategy and staffing created multiple power circles with concomitant confusion and resentments piling up among staff, while major donors, long-time friends, and Bill Clinton rained a stream of criticisms on the worker bees. Hillary's wonkishness overwhelmed what little political sensibility she possessed, leaving to a loose group of friends and speechwriters the task of providing the themes, words, and appeals she offered the voters. In any case, the no-leaking rule was violated. The authors promised anonymity and assured willing talkers that nothing would be published before the election.

(2) Even though campaigns are transient enterprises, like pop-up stores, their many moving parts require constant attention and adjustment: fundraising, polling, staffing, scheduling, speech-writing, TV ads, robo calls, and get-out-the-vote efforts. The effort must

LORIE SHAULL

*Hillary Clinton speaking at the AIPAC Policy Conference in Washington, D.C. last year*

be up and running in fifty states for the twelve to fifteen months preceding the primaries and in full force in the two to three months between the convention and election day. Initially without serious competition, Clinton expected to sail through the primaries, a trajectory derailed in March by Sanders's surge in the Michigan primary. Clinton campaign manager Robby Mook's strategy for the primaries had been directed at clinching an overwhelming delegate count. That meant allocating money and staff even to states unlikely to support a Democrat in the general election. Yet once the convention is over, appeals to the general electorate and not delegates must be made, especially in states where the Democrat was likely to win—say, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin. *Shattered* is not clarifying on the trade-offs between resources devoted to the primaries and later to the general election. The authors describe Mook's approach as science vs. politics, analytics vs. ground game. The ground game is the traditional organizing of local forces in an effort to persuade *all* voters and then to get out those likely to vote for your candidate. In contrast, analytics pays less attention to actual voters and persuasion. Instead, it plumbs demographic data, polling, statistics, and public records using an algorithm to identify the candidate's likely voters by gender, race, age, religion, and education. Calling this "so-called science," or "alchemy" perhaps, might better describe the process, or at least Mook's version of it. His approach angered actual politicians, Bill Clinton, Campaign Chair John Podesta, and Democratic officials in states getting short shrift in this analytic lottery. Think again of Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin.

(3) Clinton's path to the presidency was disrupted by several unexpected events. The continuing and hostile congressional investigation into her use, while secretary of state, of a private email server became public in March 2015. This dogged the campaign through James Comey's July 5, 2016, announcement that Clinton would not be prosecuted for using her private server to send classified material. At the same time, of course, Comey accused her of being extremely careless. Just before the election, Comey again intervened, informing Congress that Clinton emails found on a laptop seized from Anthony Wiener in a criminal investigation required vetting. That these emails turned out to be duplicates of emails Comey had already examined did nothing to quell the reminder that Clinton had been careless. Finally, Wikileaks' release of Podesta's and DNC emails, full of gossip and sharp repartee, added to the distraction. Whether these were released at the behest of Russian intelligence remains an open question. Although they had nothing to do with the campaign as such, these interventions—whether accidental, fateful, or even malevolent—nonetheless evoked the voters' sense that Clinton was untrustworthy and self-protective.

The authors interlard these three themes with tales of imprudent decisions as well as paralyzing indecision, and examples of Hillary's stiff public persona. For all of this, and to the degree that their account rests on gossip, exaggerations, and a few lies, political junkies will read *Shattered* with an interested but skeptical mind. The fog of a campaign, like the fog of war, leaves us with several possible explanations for the failure of Clinton's campaign, but her campaign was no foggier than the one that elected Donald Trump.

Political campaigns suffer from heightened expectations, gossip, mistakes, and human folly; Clinton's 2016 campaign was no exception. Did Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump run better campaigns, the one because he spooked Clinton and the other because he won the Electoral College? Those campaigns were also chaotic and beset by miscalculations, animosities, and gossip. It was not her campaign that doomed Clinton; it was the eighty thousand voters who stayed home in three critical states. ■

**Margaret O'Brien Steinfels**, *a former editor of* Commonweal, *is co-founder of Fordham's Center on Faith and Culture.*

*Kate Massinger*

# Keep Them Poor & Tired

## The Road to Jonestown
**Jim Jones and the Peoples Temple**
*Jeff Guinn*
Simon & Schuster, $28, 468 pp.

From the beginning we know the end; *The Road to Jonestown* shows its cards immediately. In the book's prologue, officials discover more than nine hundred of Jim Jones's followers dead in the Guyanese jungle. They are decomposed in piles, faces melting in the tropical heat. Some of the bodies have bruises, marks of resistance. The tragedy is deemed a murder-suicide. Some took their poison willingly; others, children included, had it squirted into their mouths. The year is 1978.

Jeff Guinn's new biography-cum-history is a study of persuasion and power in Peoples Temple, the twentieth-century socialist cult led by preacher Jim Jones. Many readers, like me, come to the story aware of its associated quip: "Don't drink the Kool-Aid." (Morbid party fact: the poison was actually mixed with generic Flavor Aid, not the pricier Kool-Aid powder.)

But Guinn's steady, removed prose can make us forget what we know. The book is a slow reveal of sensationalist material, methodically tracing Temple's history. In 1954, Jones established a multi-racial, charismatic Indianapolis congregation. In 1965, he and many of his followers relocated to Redwood Valley, California, establishing a powerful megachurch with campuses in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Finally, in 1973, work began on Jonestown, a clearing in the midst of the Guyana jungle. Moving from inspiring Indianapolis sermons to wild Guyananese rants, Guinn demonstrates why so many found Jones's message of a people set apart to be compelling, inspiring, worth moving and dying for. When tragedy strikes, we are startled; we, like his followers, didn't think Jim would really do it.

Jones possessed typical dictatorial traits. He was magnetic, preaching hour-long stints on the revival circuit, peeing behind the pulpit to keep from taking breaks. He was charming; he learned names quickly, curried favor with San Francisco politicians like George Moscone and Joseph Alioto, and gained official, legitimizing recognition from the Disciples of Christ. He was cunning. His famous healings were performed with sleight-of-hand and chicken offal disguised as tumors. His prophecies were fueled by audience spies; they gathered intimate information from guests before services, then reported the details to their leader. He smuggled money overseas in tampon boxes. Jones was cruel. He flaunted affairs with both genders in front of his wife Marceline, and openly fathered children by other women. In ceremonies called White Nights, he pretended to initiate mass suicides, noting who was willing to die for him. Jones was hypocritical. He used church coffers for his family's lavish vacations, even as his followers donated their cars, homes, and heirlooms. He relied on drug cocktails, although his followers were held to strict sobriety. As a child, Jones admired the Nazis, goose-stepping in his Lynn, Indiana, backyard. He was paranoid. He forbade outside friendships, censored mail, feared the media, drugged dissenters, and threatened defectors. He was egomaniacal, certain that his church was the primary concern of governments everywhere, and determined to be remembered. He practiced "situational ethics." People loved Jones because he seemed to love them; people followed him because he led convincingly.

But as Guinn makes clear, Jones was no garden-variety tyrant. "Jim Jones would frequently be compared


*Jim Jones at an anti-eviction protest in front of the International Hotel in 1977*

to murderous demagogues such as Adolf Hitler and Charles Manson," Guinn writes. "These comparisons completely misinterpret, and historically misrepresent, the initial appeal of Jim Jones to members of Peoples Temple. Jones attracted followers by appealing to their better instincts." Although Jones did use fear—of nuclear fallout, of government interference—he also motivated followers with calls for compassion and justice. His was a cult of personality, but also a cult of action and ideas. Peoples Temple operated a system of clean, affordable nursing homes, as well as a successful drug-rehabilitation program for teens. It funded college for low-income students. Members volunteered for community cleanups; they ran soup kitchens and clothing drives. The sick and poor were cared for; jobs were found for the unemployed. Jim preached racial equality; in Indianapolis, he integrated many local restaurants by paying for black members to dine with him. He adopted multiracial children to prove his commitment to unity. In light of Jones's radical social mission, it's easier to understand why thinking people stayed in the Temple—they believed they were doing good work, and they were.

What the book doesn't do (and doesn't because it can't) is establish what Jones really believed. Was he a genuine socialist? Did he care about racial equality? Was he merely a power-hungry maniac, who saw the equality message as a way to manipulate and rule over others? Did he fear nuclear fallout, or simply use it as an excuse to keep moving? Was he a Christian? Jones imbued his sermons with vague Gospel language, appealing to older, orthodox followers without actually quoting Scripture. He operated within the black-church tradition, performing healings and invoking the Promised Land. But Jones also publicly ranted against an invisible "Sky God." He increasingly defined himself as a divine, as a reincarnated spirit, even as an alien. Those closest to him, including Marceline, didn't buy this. But did Jones?

And what did Jones's followers think? Although the book is built on interviews with defectors, survivors, and family members, the nine hundred dead are voiceless. What of Marceline, who kept her vows but resisted the mass suicide? What of Jones's mother, Lynetta, who always believed her son was special? What of Sharon, the mother who urged on the murder of her own children? How much of this devotion was delusion? Pretended? Genuine? Partial? "What you thought Jones said depended on who you were," Guinn quotes. Each congregant focused on what appealed to him or her—the hodgepodge religion, the utopian politics, the man himself—and downplayed what didn't. Overworked, exhausted, and penniless, they had no time to think. "Keep them poor and keep them tired, and they'll never leave," Jones said.

After finishing *Jonestown*, I wondered if I could understand Jones by watching him. Guinn avoids individual scenes, preferring general descriptions. I wanted to see the preacher in action. Curious, I found a video online. It shows a huge crowd of congregants dancing, clapping, singing, wailing. Jones speaks in a buttery tenor; he stands handsome in a dark suit, a crisp part in his hair. He calls people "honey" and "baby." He heals a woman from the pulpit. "Sister Ingram, you're concerned about the losing of your sight," he intones. "Look at my face. I'm going to hold up some fingers. Concentrate hard. I love you. The people love you. Most importantly, Christ loves you. What do you see? How many fingers?" "Three," whispers the woman, and the crowd explodes. She is weeping. Even knowing how Jim did it—the woman was probably a plant—the scene is still weird, wild, disturbingly moving. I watch Jones's face. His brow is furrowed. He licks his lips, and smiles without showing his teeth. What is he thinking—most likely, probably? A whole book behind me, the question can't be answered. ■

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NANCY WONG

*Nicholas Haggerty*

# Manifestations

## A New Literary History of Modern China

*Edited by David Der-wei Wang*
Harvard University Press, $45, 1,032 pp.

The Chinese novelist Lu Xun (1881–1936) wrote in the early 1920s that his goal was to "change the spirit" of his countrymen, and that literature was the best means to this end. Lu Xun's use of the vernacular and choice of overtly political themes threw Chinese literature into modernity. Or so the standard account of modern Chinese literature goes.

David Der-wei Wang, the editor of *A New Literary History of Modern China*, argues persuasively that literary modernity did not suddenly appear in China with the publication of Lu Xun's work. To begin with, Lu Xun was not the first Chinese writer to write political fiction; literature with political themes, written in service to a project of national rejuvenation, was already present as early as the mid-nineteenth century. Another essay in this collection, on a debate within the late Qing-dynasty intelligentsia on the proper relationship between politics and literature, challenges the idea that Lu Xun's innovations were inspired by foreign influences. Still another essay boldly asserts that a fiction genre mockingly referred to as "Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies" dealt with politics more directly than Lu Xun and his school did during the same period. The overall effect is to put Lu Xun in his place in more than one sense. He emerges as just one of many contributors—albeit an especially important one—to the development of modern Chinese literature

The title of this new collection presents the reader with an obvious question: Is *A New Literary History of Modern China* a historical account of literature in modern China, or a history of modern China as seen through the lens of its literature? As it turns out, it's some of both. Although most of the volume consists of scholarly essays about China's literature, it also includes material one would not usually find in such a collection of literary scholarship. Using the techniques of fiction, Ha Jin tells the story of how Lu Xun wrote his groundbreaking short story "Diary of a Madman." There is an essay by Li Juan about her own experiences among the Kazakh-speaking natives of Xinjiang, as well as Wang Hui's deeply personal reflections on death.

Why this apparent blurring of the line between scholarly writing and literature? In his introduction, Wang notes the fundamental difference between the Western understanding of literature and the traditional Chinese one. The West, he argues, has usually understood literature as a representation of reality, and therefore subordinate to it. In traditional Chinese thought, literature is not a representation of reality but rather a manifestation of it: the written word participates in and illuminates the cosmic order. There is no implied hierarchy between literature and reality.

This distinction has two important consequences for Wang. First, it means that historical writing, literary criticism, and literature itself are all legitimate ways to tell the story of modern Chinese literature. Not only are they all legitimate, but combining them as this volume does will provide a fuller picture of the subject than a standard academic history would. Second, and more importantly, the idea of literature as manifestation suggests that one cannot really understand modern China without understanding its literature. As an essay in this collection points out, the Nationalists believed that they "lost China" to the Communist forces partly because they did not take enough interest in controlling the country's literary culture. (The Nationalists had murdered five left-wing writers in 1931, ensuring the intelligentsia's support for the Chinese Communist Party). And this understanding of literature helps to shed light on the active interest the Chinese Communist Party has taken in directing literary production, beginning with Mao Zedong's Yan'an Talks on Literature and Politics in 1942 and continuing through the censorship issues of today.

As China continues to grow in economic and political power, its literature is also likely to become more important in the rest of the world. There will be more and more translations of both its classics and its contemporary poetry and fiction. That makes books like this one all the more valuable to readers in the West who want to understand how China's modern literature relates to its recent history. Those who wade into this long and heterogeneous collection will discover that the literature is not just a marker of that history, but a component of it. ■

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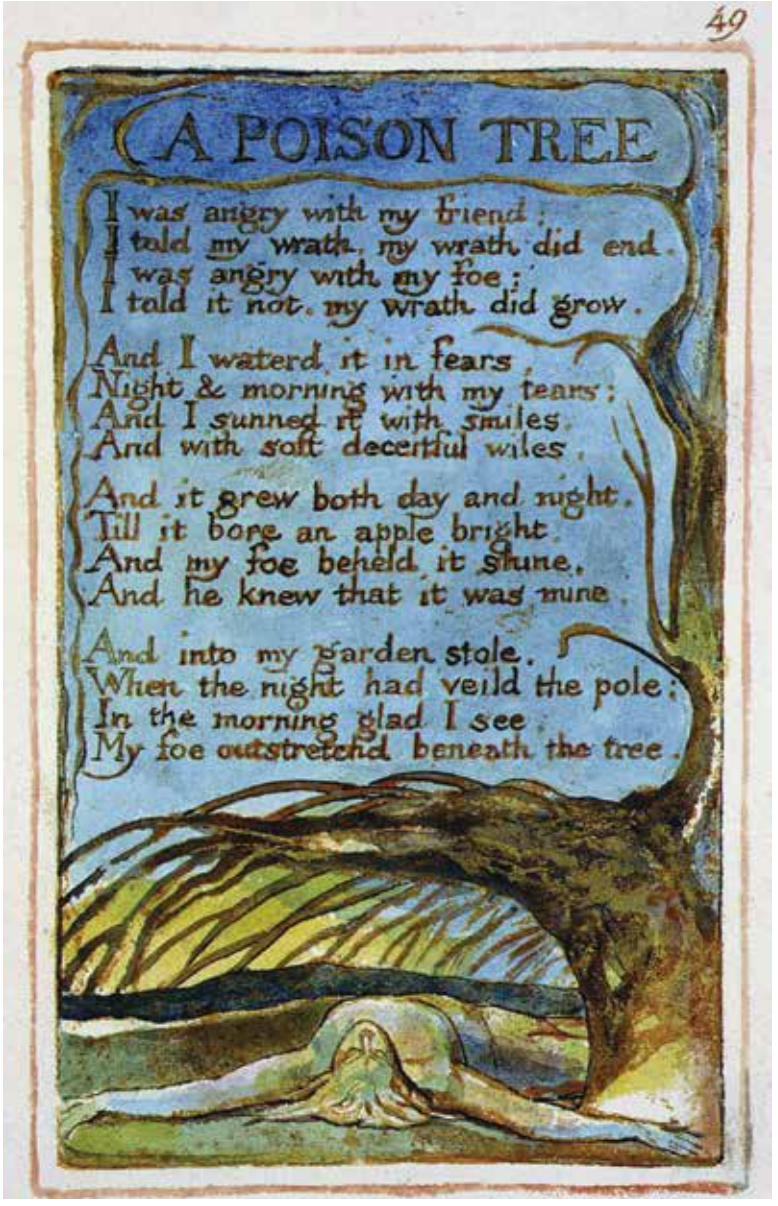
# Confront & Forgive

*Nancy Enright*

Forgiveness is not easy. It is probably one of the most challenging requirements of living out the Gospel for most Christians. Part of the problem may be our lack of understanding of what forgiveness really is. Many think one is being forgiving when one chooses to ignore an offense or makes excuses for the offender. In truth, this is not forgiveness, but instead a kind of self-deception that can perpetuate rather than heal the rift between two people. William Blake wrote and illustrated a poem titled "A Poison Tree"—included in *Songs of Experience*—that tells a powerful story of two ways of dealing with anger and, by implication, with forgiveness. The lesson is powerful.




*"A Poison Tree," by William Blake, 1794*

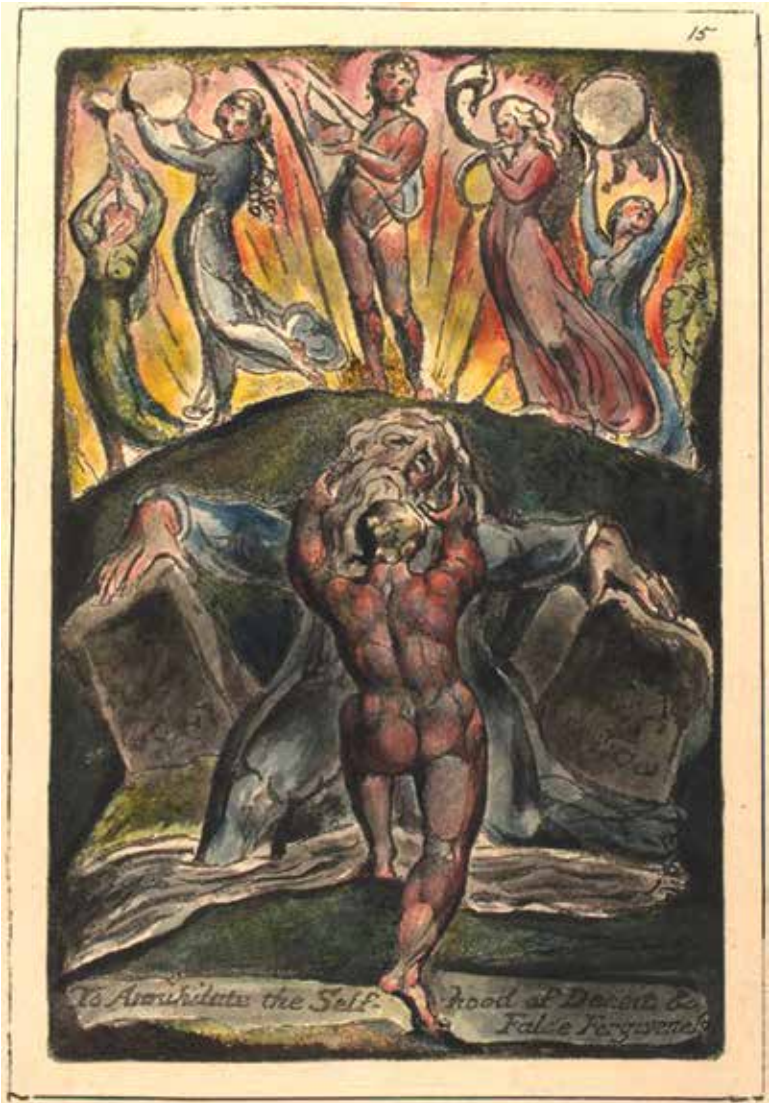
The first two lines of the poem succinctly describe the speaker's dealings with a friend who has hurt or angered him: "I was angry with my friend / I told my wrath, my wrath did end." More complicated is the depiction of how the speaker deals with his enemy. In this case, the wrath is not expressed: "I told it not," he says, and so "my wrath did grow." This untold wrath becomes the poisoned fruit on the "poison tree" of the title. False silence and pretended love cause this "poison fruit" to grow: "I sunned it with smiles, / and with soft, deceitful wiles." Concealing one's wrath can actually increase it. In the second half of the poem, the unnamed foe sneaks into the garden and eats this apple of wrath, now grown larger and deadly with poison. The speaker expresses satisfaction at finding his enemy lying dead under the tree. Blake is clearly writing about the destructive nature of unforgiveness, particularly when it is disguised, but I believe his poem also tells us something important about forgiveness.

Though there are many small offenses that can and should be overlooked in the exercise of daily charity toward our neighbor, other offenses are too big for this kind of gentle and graceful sweeping away of faults, and in this situation it may not be the most Christian of acts to keep one's anger hidden. In Matthew 18:15–17, Jesus spells out what to do in such cases:

> If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Much could be said about this passage, but a few key points link it to Blake's poem. First, the fault is not simply a sin that needs to be addressed in order to keep the community holy in a general or impersonal way. That might be part of the concern, but it is also a personal offense, as Jesus says, "If your brother sins against *you*…[emphasis mine]." Second, we are told by Jesus to "go to him and tell him his fault." This is not easy, and I think many of us think it would be more Christian to act as if we had not been offended. But Jesus gives us a compelling reason for confrontation: "If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." The motivation is one of love—a relationship is restored, and the offender is brought back into the fold. If the relationship is not restored because the offender refuses to admit his wrongdoing, the next step is for the person he has offended to confront him again, this time in the company of one or two others. This tactic is a little like an intervention for an addict, when several family members or friends confront a person about his or her addiction. The suggestion is that hearing not just from the person he has harmed but also from two or

three "witnesses" will convince the offender, and he will repent. If this doesn't work, Jesus says to bring it to the church, in the spirit of fraternal correction and in the hope of reconciliation. But if this doesn't work either, the person is to be treated as "a Gentile or a tax collector." Even after this estrangement, however, we are forbidden to indulge in hostility and enjoined to offer forgiveness as soon as it is asked for. In fact, the next section of Matthew 18 makes clear that we must be willing to forgive not only once, but "seventy times seven." Ideally, however, the reconciliation happens at an earlier stage, before the estrangement sets in. Not telling a person when he or she has seriously hurt or offended us makes real forgiveness harder, not easier. How can a person be expected to repent when it might not be at all clear to him what his offense was? And how can we forgive if we are pretending to others, and perhaps also to ourselves, that we were never offended in the first place?



*"To annihilate the Self-hood of Deceit and False Forgiveness," William Blake, 1804*

I speak from experience. Not long ago, I was very angry at someone who had hurt me. Though it was not an easy thing to do, I confronted the person (in writing), and later involved another person for support. It was a complicated and difficult situation, but, after a period of months, there was finally a reconciliation. The person apologized for at least part of what had offended me, and I said, "I forgive you"—and meant it. Afterwards, I realized that the initial confrontation had helped me to forgive. Had I kept my anger to myself and acted "nicely," I don't think I would have been able to forgive, nor would the other person have known that there was any need for him to apologize. Prayer, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and Scripture all helped to prepare me to forgive, but without openly confronting the person who had offended me, there would have been no prospect of reconciliation—forgiveness offered and accepted.

What happens if the person who has offended us does not acknowledge his or her offense or simply doesn't want our forgiveness? Is real forgiveness even possible when the person to whom it is offered rejects it? I would argue yes—that real forgiveness subsists in the willingness to forgive, in the heart of the person who offers it, even if the offer is refused. Just as the poison tree of unforgiveness in Blake's poem represents a malice that is destructive despite its silence, so our expression of a willingness to forgive can still benefit us even if it goes unanswered. A door is held open, and though the offender may not go through it right away, the opening remains a powerful sign. Perhaps it was a situation like this that Paul had in mind when he wrote, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." He goes on to explain how to treat those who do not wish for peace with us: "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. 'But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:19–20). Love must be shown even to those who are determined to remain our "enemy," and there is hope for their eventual repentance in Paul's final injunction to "overcome evil with good."

Simply offering our forgiveness helps us heal even without reconciliation. One example of such an unaccepted offer is the case of those who survived the attack on Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in 2015. They amazed the world by offering forgiveness to Dylan Roof, who killed nine of the members of their church. Though he showed no sign of remorse, their offers of forgiveness and prayer were a moving testimony to the spirit of forgiveness in this community. These offers did not ignore or minimize the gravity of Roof's crimes, or seek to excuse them. They were not a form of escape from a painful reality, but a heroic response to it. Forgiveness, rooted in truth, is as powerful as unforgiveness is destructive. ■

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