

*Articles of Interest*  
*For*  
*10 April 2022*

Sunday, 3 April 2022

**Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations**

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Fourteen: It Can't Be Carried Alone

**Sin and Salvation Are Collective**

*The next day John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" —John 1:29*

*Father Richard Rohr preaches a homily on the collective nature of salvation and sin:*

I'm convinced God is saving history. God is saving humanity. God saves the whole, not merely parts. One great misinterpretation of the Bible is thinking that God saves individuals apart from one another. That can't be the full meaning of salvation. The real collective message is hidden in plain sight throughout the Bible.

Every proclamation of salvation in the Hebrew Scriptures is collective. In the book of Isaiah, God promises to raise up all the tribes of Jacob, and restore all the survivors of Israel, that "my salvation may reach to the very ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). This is the first outpouring of the notion that God's message was for the whole—history, society, humanity. All are saved. This usage is so constant throughout the Bible that we stopped noticing it. All came forth from God. Everything then exemplifies the mystery of God, and then everything

(despite its worthiness or unworthiness) is taken back into God! *We're saved because we're connected—not because we're worthy.*

As Jesus' ministry begins, John calls him the "Lamb of God." That's not what history expected. We expected a Lion of God—an almighty, omnipotent God who solved all problems. Instead, the Lamb of God is the one who is vulnerable and powerless, who is taken and absorbed into whatever history unfolds. That's what is meant by the Lamb of God who forgives the "sin" of the world. Notice, it isn't "sins," as in many. It's singular, "sin." Just as salvation is one collective reality, so too is evil. It's always collective. God forgives it by becoming incarnate. If God becomes a human being, then it's good to be human! Incarnation is already redemption.

Similarly, we are all complicit. We're all cooperative in the stupidity and evil of human history. No one can stand up and say, "*I didn't do anything wrong.*" As Paul says so clearly: "All have sinned" (Romans 3:23), so we all bear the burden of sin. It's a waste of God's time—and our own—to try to prove who is more worthy, more holy, more blameless. Stop trying to be better than someone else! Just forget it! All that does is make us egocentric.

I truly think Christianity itself will not be reformed until its basic proclamation to the world is that we bear the "weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17) as a collective. Paul called this collective mystery "the Body of Christ." We've got to carry the whole. That's why our central sacrament is Communion, a shared meal and a shared table. More important than being correct is being in communion, collected into one. If we don't feel weight taken off our backs by that message, we're not really listening.

Monday, 4 April 2022

## Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Fourteen: It Can't Be Carried Alone

### Stay with the Suffering

*Father Richard turns to Saints Francis (1182–1226) and Clare of Assisi (1194–1253) as models of how we can embrace and bear collective suffering:*

Because of their deep faith, Francis and Clare had total trust that Jesus' seemingly negative way of the cross could not, and would not, be wrong. They voluntarily leapt into the very fire from which most of us try to escape. They trusted that Jesus' way was the way of solidarity and communion with the larger world, which is indeed passing and dying. By God's grace, they could trust the eventual passing of all things, and where they were passing to. They didn't wait for liberation later—after death—but grasped it as already present.

When we try to live in solidarity with the world's pain—and do not spend our lives running from necessary suffering—we will encounter various forms of “crucifixion.” (I do not use that word lightly.) Many say pain is physical discomfort, but suffering comes from our resistance, denial, and sense of injustice or wrongness about that pain. I know that is very true for me. This is the core meaning of suffering on one level or another, and we all learn it the hard way. *The cross was Jesus' voluntary acceptance of undeserved suffering as an act*

*of total solidarity with the pain of the world. Reflecting on this mystery of love can change our lives.*

It seems there is an inherent negative energy or resistance from all of us when we are suffering, and it is in those moments that we are invited to a more generous response. It is actually the necessary dying that the soul must walk through to go higher, farther, deeper, or longer. The saints called these dyings “nights,” darkness, or seasons of unknowing and doubt. Our society has almost no spiritual skills to deal with our personal and collective pain, so we resort to pills, addictions, and other distractions to get us through. This does not bode well for the future of humanity.

Only truly inspired souls like Francis and Clare willingly choose to fully jump on board this ship of life and death. They fully rode the resistance to which the rest of us surrender. Our lives can take this same ride—whenever we try to hold any negativity or self-doubt with integrity, and when we “suffer” the full truth of any situation instead of just taking what we think is the one righteous side. Integrity is often a willingness to hold the hard side of things instead of reacting against them, denying them, or projecting our anxiety elsewhere. Frankly, it is just another name for faith. Without the inner discipline of faith, most lives end in negativity, blaming, or deep cynicism—without even knowing it.

Jesus hung in the crucified middle and paid the price for all such reconciliation with reality in its wounded state (Ephesians 2:13–18); then he invited us to do the same. And Francis did so wholeheartedly!

Wednesday, 6 April 2022

## Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



### Week Fourteen: It Can't Be Carried Alone "It Can't Be Carried Alone"

*Father Richard wrote the following poem in response to the collective suffering of the people of Ukraine.*

How can we not feel shock or rage at what is happening to the people of Ukraine—  
As we watch their suffering unfold in real time from an unfair distance? Who of us does not feel inept or powerless before such manifest evil? In this, at least, we are united. Our partisan divisions now appear small and trivial.

Remember what we teach: both evil and goodness are,  
first of all, social phenomena.  
The Body of Christ is crucified and resurrected  
at the same time. May we stand faithfully  
Inside both these mysteries (contemplation).

In loving solidarity, we each bear what is ours to carry,  
the unjust weight of crucifixion,  
in expectant hope for God's transformation.  
May we be led to do what we can on any level (action)  
to create resurrection!

The people of Ukraine have much to teach the world.

Thursday, 7 April 2022

## Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



### Week Fourteen: It Can't Be Carried Alone Coming through Crises Stronger

*In September 2020, Pope Francis spoke of the pain and suffering caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ongoing crises around the world have brought his message of solidarity into greater resonance:*

To emerge from this crisis better than before, we have to do so together; together, not alone. Together. Not alone, because it cannot be done. Either it is done together, or it is not done. We must do it together, all of us, in *solidarity*. . . .

The big wide world is none other than a global village, because everything is interconnected, but we do not always transform  
this *interdependence* into *solidarity*. There is a long journey between interdependence and solidarity. The selfishness—of individuals, nations and of groups with power—and ideological rigidities instead sustain  
“structures of sin.” [1]

*Pope Francis speaks of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–3) as an example of God's Spirit inspiring solidarity, diverse creatures united to share the liberating love of God:*

The Spirit creates unity in diversity; he creates harmony. . . . Each one of us is an instrument, but a community instrument that

participates fully in building up the community. Saint Francis of Assisi knew this well, and inspired by the Spirit, he gave all people, or rather, creatures, the name of brother or sister. Even brother wolf, remember.

With Pentecost, God makes himself present and inspires the *faith* of the community *united in diversity and solidarity*. Diversity and solidarity united in harmony, this is the way. . . . Diversity in solidarity also possesses antibodies that heal social structures and processes that have degenerated into systems of injustice, systems of oppression. Therefore, solidarity today is the road to take towards a post-pandemic world, towards the healing of our interpersonal and social ills. There is no other way. Either we go forward on the path of solidarity, or things will worsen. I want to repeat this: one does not emerge from a crisis the same as before. The pandemic [*Father Richard: and the war in Ukraine*] is a crisis. We emerge from a crisis either better or worse than before. It is up to us to choose. And solidarity is, indeed, a way of coming out of the crisis better, not with superficial changes, with a fresh coat of paint so everything looks fine. No. Better!

In the midst of crises, a *solidarity* guided by *faith* enables us to translate the love of God in our globalized culture, not by building towers or walls—and how many walls are being built today!—that divide, but then collapse, but by interweaving communities and sustaining processes of growth that are truly human and solid. And to do this, solidarity helps. . . .

In the midst of crises and tempests, the Lord calls to us and invites us to reawaken and activate this solidarity capable of giving solidity, support and meaning to these hours in which everything seems to be wrecked.

May the creativity of the Holy Spirit encourage us to generate new forms of familiar hospitality, fruitful fraternity and universal solidarity.

Friday, 8 April 2022

## Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



### Week Fourteen: It Can't Be Carried Alone Christ Suffers with Us

*Father Richard reminds us that while we are invited to be in solidarity with the pain of others, God carries all pain:*

Many people rightly question how there can be a good God or a just God in the presence of so much evil and suffering in the world—about which God appears to do nothing. Exactly *how* is God loving and sustaining what God created? That is our dilemma.

I believe—if I am to believe Jesus—that God *is* suffering love. If we are created in God's image, and if there is so much suffering in the world, then God must also be suffering. How else can we understand the revelation of the cross and that the central Christian logo is a naked, bleeding, suffering man?

Many of the happiest and most peaceful people I know love a crucified God who walks with crucified people, and thus *reveals and redeems their plight as his own*. For them, Jesus does not observe human suffering from a distance; he is somehow *in* human suffering, with us and for us.

The suffering that we carry is our solidarity with the one, universal longing of all humanity, and thus it can teach us great compassion and patience with both ourselves and others. Some mystics even go so far as to say that there is only one suffering; it is all the same, and it is all the suffering of God (see Colossians 1:24).

*Episcopal priest Stephanie Spellers helps us understand how our one “entwined” suffering spurs us to take action in solidarity:*

*Solidarity is love crossing the borders drawn by self-centrism, in order to enter into the situation of the other, for the purpose of mutual relationship and struggle that heals us all and enacts God’s beloved community.*

Solidarity is the voice that finally comprehends: “You are not the same as me, but part of you lives in me. Your freedom and mine were always inextricably entwined. Now I see it, and because of what I see, I choose to live differently. I will go there, with you, for your sake and for my own.” . . .

Latina theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz [1943–2012] sums up solidarity as “the union of kindred persons” who work together toward “the unfolding of the ‘kingdom’ of God.” [1] The bottom line is not who wins or loses the struggle, or even who secures enough allies to flip the power dynamic. Isasi-Díaz wants us to see that the loving, sacrificial friendship at the heart of solidarity is itself the antidote to sin and oppression.

Domination, control, and self-or group-centric behavior alienate and separate us from God, from each other, and from ourselves as beloved children of God. By contrast, embracing union with oppressed

and despised peoples, placing any privilege you hold at the disposal of the movement to dismantle oppression and alienation and to restore balance and wholeness to human community—*this* solitary love is how we most closely and faithfully follow Jesus and join him in beloved community. [2]

## Opposition to Pope Francis is rooted in a rejection of Vatican II

4 April 2022

by [Massimo Faggioli](#)

### [Vatican](#)



Pope Francis holds up the Lectionary, or book of Mass readings, that was used during the Second Vatican Council. The special lectionary was part of the celebration in St. Peter's Basilica Jan. 26, 2020, the first Sunday of the Word of God, a new annual celebration encouraging Catholics to know and read the Bible, as Vatican II desired. (CNS/Vatican Media)

**Editor's note:** *The following keynote address was delivered at a conference for and with a group of U.S. bishops March 25-26 in Chicago. "[Pope Francis, Vatican II, and the Way Forward](#)" was co-organized by Loyola University Chicago's Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage, Boston College's Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life, and Fordham*

*University's Center on Religion and Culture. Also helping with the organization was NCR political columnist Michael Sean Winters.*

The first thing to acknowledge when we talk about the Second Vatican Council today is the gap between the horizon of expectations raised by the council and the situation of the Catholic Church today, especially in this country. Vatican II called Catholics to unity: unity in the one human family, with non-Christians and non-believers, with Christians of other traditions, and with fellow Catholics.

But in these last few years we have seen that the fundamental call of Vatican II to unity through *reconciliation* has often turned into a source of bitter division and contention, at times dangerously flirting with schism. This is paradoxical because reconciliation is maybe even more original as an intent of Vatican II than the call to church reform.

We have seen all this with shocking clarity during the pontificate of Francis. This is more than a chronological overlap. There is a parallel between the rejection of Vatican II and the relationship between the church in the United States and Pope Francis. The opposition to Pope Francis is rooted in the opposition to Vatican II — a theological crisis that did not begin with this pontificate.

This is a problem that is not just theological, but also ecclesial, that is, it has profound consequences for the ways in which all Catholics experience their life of faith in the church. Therefore, it is a problem that needs to be addressed. Also, because it would be naive to think that it's a problem created by Francis and that it will disappear with the next pontificate. Hence, this is the attempt at an analysis of the problem and to offer some possible solutions.

## **Phases in reception of Vatican II**

Despite some limitations in the wording in the final documents about the need of the church to reckon with the past, Vatican II took history seriously. We should do the same thing for the history of the post-Vatican II period, that is, try to identify different historical phases in order to comprehend the origins of a crisis in the reception of Vatican II.

One way to look at the issue of the reception of Vatican II is that the reception of a council like Vatican II takes a long time, at least a century to be fully implemented. This is true if one looks, for example, at the history of the reception of the Council of Trent. The greatest historian of the council of Trent, German Fr. Hubert Jedin remarked, in the very first lines of his multi-volume [\*History of the Council of Trent\*](#), that the first century after the end of the council was shaped by the clash of historical and theological narratives on the council between the Venetian Servite Brother Paolo Sarpi and the Roman Jesuit Francesco Sforza Pallavicino. Only three centuries later, in the middle of the 20th century, it had become possible to write an account of that theological and ecclesial turning point that Trent was — something more than a battle between "accusation and defense."



"Council of Trent," a 1588 painting by Pasquale Cati in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere in Rome (Wikimedia Commons/Anthony Majanlahti)

At the same time, choosing a mechanistic periodization — that is, expecting that the full reception of Vatican II will *necessarily* happen in the next 50 years or 200 years — is risky because it ignores the fact that in church history there have been failed councils: councils that did not accomplish their stated goals (the Council of Ferrara-Florence of 1438-1445, a council of "union" with the Eastern Orthodox Churches), or that fundamentally missed what was going on (the Fifth Lateran Council, 1512-1517, concluded immediately before the beginning of the Reformation), or that were overwhelmed by external factors and whose trajectory became substantially different from what the council had in mind (the Council of Moscow for the Russian Orthodox Church, 1917-1918).

Now, Vatican II is not a failed council. There is — despite the well-known differences and tensions — a fundamental consensus between papal magisterium, the *sensus fidelium* in the people of God, and the theological tradition on the fact that the teachings of Vatican II represent a development, a growth in our understanding of God's Revelation. If anything, the "signs of our times" represent evidence of the necessity of the reorientation of the Catholic Church at Vatican II.

But we must acknowledge that we live in a time of interruption in the reception of Vatican II in the U.S. — and this crisis has been there for quite some time. We need to understand the present state of the reception of Vatican II, especially in the U.S., in order not to be trapped into narratives that posit a direction toward a pre-determined end.

In the [literature on Vatican II](#), there are different periodizations of the post-conciliar period. Few of them try to deal with the fact that Vatican II was a council for the global church, received by the global church in a

timeline that may vary dramatically from country to country and continent to continent. Periodizations of the post-Vatican II years still tend to cling to perspectives tied to national or (at best) continental histories. We still do not have a global history of the post-Vatican II Catholic Church, and even less an accepted narrative of the global post-Vatican II period — something that is more possible for the reception and application periods of previous councils, given that their impact can be measured on a Catholic Church that was predominantly European and Mediterranean (at least in its idealized models).



The opening session of the Second Vatican Council in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Oct. 11, 1962. In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), the council described the family as the "domestic church." (CNS/Catholic Press Photo/Giancarlo Giuliani)

But for our intent here it suffices to divide the first three decades in three periods. The first is the age of *Vatican II acknowledged, received or rejected* — the 15 years between 1965 and the end of the 1970s: the time of the implementation of the liturgical reform, of the translations and dissemination of the final texts of the council, of the great commentaries written mostly by those men who helped draft the final texts of the council. The rejection of Vatican II was limited to small fringes of extremists —

fringes both in the church and society — that articulate their opposition on the basis of nostalgia for pre-secularization Christendom and allegations of violation by Vatican II of the continuity of tradition. It was not yet based on sociopolitical arguments, that is, the alleged evidence of the failure of Vatican II to reframe the relations between the church and the world.

A second period is the one of Vatican II *remembered, reconsidered and expanded* — the 1980s. It is the time of Pope John Paul II's effort to stabilize the reception of Vatican II by keeping "letter and spirit" together (the extraordinary synod of 1985) and to "institutionalize" Vatican II (the Code of Canon Law of 1983, the 1992 catechism project launched after the 1985 synod). At the same time John Paul II pushed the teaching of the church beyond the boundaries of the letter of Vatican II, especially on ecumenism and interreligious dialogue (with Judaism and Islam in particular).

The third period is the one of *Vatican II historicized and lamented* — the 1990s and the early 2000s: the period of the effort to write the master narrative on the history of Vatican II while at the same attempting to narrow down the import of the openings of the council by the institutional church in a rebuke to the appeals to the "spirit." But there was still among Catholics of the two aisles a fidelity (although sometimes nominalistic) to the letter of Vatican II and to the legitimacy of the conciliar tradition that extends to and includes Vatican II.

It is in this third period, 30 years from the celebration of the council, that the crisis of the reception of Vatican II in the U.S. begins, and this activates the diversion of large pockets of U.S. Catholicism from an *ecclesial* reception of Vatican II.

On the one side, there is the beginning, in academic theology, of symptoms of detachment from the institutional church but also from a connection with the lived experience of the people of God, in ways that are more drastic than anywhere else in global Catholicism. It is the rise of a post-ecclesial horizon also thanks to a false polarity between institution and society as argued by [Italian philosopher Roberto Esposito](#). It was not just a healthy relativization of the institutional church in favor of the transcendent. It was also the failure to recognize that *also* the institutional element in Catholicism allows different kinds of theological-spiritual cultures and different subjects to build the catholicity of the church.

But we must acknowledge that we live in a time of interruption in the reception of Vatican II in the U.S. — and this crisis has been there for quite some time.

On the other side, there is the [neoconservative ideologization of Catholicism](#), which still showed in the 1990s a certain amount of respect (at least nominally) for Vatican II. It's the long wave and the American Catholic version of the "comeback of God" in politics which [Gilles Kepel](#) wrote about three decades ago. But in the U.S. there is also the dangerous turn on its head of a clerical culture of identification of Catholicity with one particular model of papal leadership. On the conservative and traditionalist side of the spectrum, in the early 2000s the papacy is still providing important legitimacy to Vatican II. But Pope Benedict XVI's interpretation of Vatican II was different from John Paul II's. From Benedict's famous — *and often misquoted* — [speech](#) to the Roman Curia of Dec. 22, 2005 onwards, the polarity of "continuity and reform *versus* discontinuity and rupture" became something like a

mantra. The argument of "continuity with the tradition of the council," presented at the beginning as an argument against the Lefebvrite thesis of Vatican II as a "rupture" with the Catholic tradition, soon turned against any idea of "reform" — which was in fact an [integral part](#) of that pivotal December 2005 speech by Benedict XVI.

This protection given by the papacy to the legitimacy of Vatican II, lasts only until the end of Benedict's pontificate and dangerously made it easier to trade one kind of ecclesial source of identity for another in favor of a new papalism. This happens at the expense of a healthy sense of the Catholic tradition — which was ironic or tragic for a theologian, like Joseph Ratzinger, who was among the main authors and interpreters of key documents of the council such as *Lumen Gentium* and *Dei Verbum*.

One of the effects of the identification in the U.S. between Benedict XVI's pontificate and Catholic resistance to theological progressivism was the creation of the premises for the transition from Vatican II conservatism to a neo-traditionalist rejection of Vatican II among the Catholic intellectual and clerical elites in the U.S. It was a key turn: a rejection not anymore just of the vague appeals to the "spirit," but also a rejection of the letter, of the documents of Vatican II and their theology. The explosive effects of this expansion of the anti-conciliar Catholic front became clear beginning in March 2013.



Fr. Joseph Ratzinger is seen with French Dominican Fr. Yves Congar during the Second Vatican Council in 1962. Ratzinger, who became Pope Benedict XVI, gained a reputation as a progressive theologian during Vatican II. (CNS/KNA)

### **A new phase with Francis**

The interruption in the reception of Vatican II has become a crisis of ecclesial communion during the pontificate of Francis. But this started even before the beginning of his pontificate: the neoconservative and neo-traditionalist voices within the U.S. episcopate felt orphaned suddenly on Feb. 11, 2013, when Benedict XVI announced his resignation. There were orphans of Benedict's pontificate in the Roman Curia, among bishops, theologians and politicians. But this sense of loss was particularly acute in the U.S. because of the (largely mistaken) feeling that Joseph Ratzinger — Benedict XVI — had turned the table on Vatican II: the expectation that he had settled forever the disputation on the interpretation of the council — as prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine, or CDF, of the faith first and then as pope.

But the globalization and de-occidentalization of Catholicism — one of the strongest intuitions of Vatican II — had an effect on the conclave of 2013. Not just a pope "almost from the end of the world," as Francis said in his [first address](#) to the people gathered in St. Peter that night of March

2013. Francis's pontificate has coincided with, and in part contributed to, the transformation of the transatlantic ecclesial bond between the papacy and American Catholicism.

This is based on the fact that the election of Pope Francis on March 13, 2013, has indubitably changed the landscape of the church and especially of the debate on Vatican II. From the very first weeks and months of his pontificate, Pope Francis showed a full and unequivocal reception of Vatican II, also thanks to the theological and ecclesial debate on Vatican II, which in these last 50 years never ceased to be part of the real life of the universal church.

Pope Francis inaugurated a new phase in the reception of Vatican II, and not only for the disappearance of the defense of traditionalist, anti-Vatican II issues from the agenda of Pope Francis and his Roman Curia (in the CDF especially). The pontificates of the last century have all been defined (in different measures) by the historical-theological debate in relation to the council: Pius XII, the pope most cited in the documents of Vatican II, and his failure to reconvene Vatican I; John XXIII, convener of the council; Paul VI, who was explicitly elected to continue the council, and that led him to its conclusion at the cost of significant compromises with some of the dreams of reform that emerged from the council; John Paul I, "second row" council father; John Paul II, the last pope who was a member of Vatican II, a key-figure of Vatican II and at the same time "stabilizer" of the council; Benedict XVI, one of the most important periti of Vatican II and as pope and cardinal the most important theological "enforcer" of the council and its interpretations.

Pope Francis stopped this line of popes biographically involved in Vatican II for

biographical reasons (he was ordained a priest in 1969), but also for the specific heritage of the church in Latin America. The Argentine Jesuit Bergoglio perceives Vatican II as a matter that should not be reinterpreted or restricted, but [implemented](#) and [expanded](#) (on some issues more than others). His reluctance to theorize on different kinds of hermeneutics of Vatican II should not be seen as indifference or ignorance of the centrality of the hermeneutical question.



Pope Francis appears for the first time March 13, 2013, on the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Faithful to the intuitions of Vatican II (which are expressed in only a partial manner in the final documents of the council), Francis speaks of the theological value of spiritual poverty as a condition of accepting the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and proposes a radical and continuous need for the church and Christians to be next to the poor, in the sense of existential and economic poverty. This emphasis on social justice is part of Francis' ecclesiology, an "ecclesiology of the people of God" that has clear implications also on the level of a more conciliar style and structure of church government. Francis talks about a greater collegiality with the bishops and [synodality](#) at various levels in the church. Francis' documents and gestures of dialogue with Islam parallel only with John

Paul II's documents and gestures of dialogue with the Jews.

But the problem of the authority of Vatican II as part of the tradition has not been solved and it has become more serious in the situation pope Francis inherited. Especially around *Traditionis Custodes* and the liturgical issue in light of the ecclesiology of the liturgical reform, there have been some mixed and confusing signals from the Holy See in recent months.

However, it is still true that in Francis there is a particular way of talking about Vatican II without explicitly mentioning it or quoting its documents. This is also an expression of the refusal to identify Vatican II with the letter of its documents in a legalistic way. Francis talks about Vatican II without falling into veterans' sentimentality. He does this through the Catholic tradition of which Vatican II has become part: through quotations of St. Paul VI, by letting documents of bishops' conferences speak in his encyclicals and exhortations, and by recovering the fundamental intuitions of Vatican II as an integral part of the mission of the church.

Francis' philosophy of the [polarity in tension](#) is still trying to solve the polarization between opposite extremisms on Vatican II: between those who see Vatican II as too modern to be Catholic and those who see it as too Catholic to be modern; between the status quo narrative and a post-ecclesial narrative; between the spirit and the letter; between *ressourcement* and *aggiornamento*; between defense of a Tridentine institutional system and naive dreams of a tabula rasa.

One of most important contributions of Francis to the reception of Vatican II has probably been in terms of "exorcizing" the opposition — in the sense of revealing the

non-ecclesial or anti-ecclesial spirits that drive the rejection of Vatican II. We have seen this lately on the issue of the liturgical reform, which is historically the way in which the opposition to the teachings of Vatican II tried to find an impossible legitimacy with an argument from tradition which is actually a rejection of the way in which Catholic tradition works.



Pope Francis walks past flowers as he celebrates Easter Mass in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican in this April 1, 2018, file photo. Although Western and Eastern Christians celebrate Easter on different dates most years, since the Second Vatican Council, the Vatican has been open to a common date for Easter. (CNS/Paul Haring)

### **Current ecclesial disruption and Vatican II**

What we have seen during the last nine years in the Church in the U.S., in terms of opposition to Pope Francis, defies imagination and has also distorted our expectations about the church in dangerous ways. We have witnessed unprecedented, rebellious challenges — sometimes coming from members of the clergy — to the legitimacy of the bishop of Rome that are clearly incompatible with the *sensus ecclesiae*. It's a phenomenon not limited to social media. It's something fundamentally different from the "dissent" against some aspects of papal teaching that we have seen under Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI. And it's something that must be

denounced for what it really is, without tactical silences and without complacency. This does not mean that we can ignore the context in which this ecclesial disruption occurs. First, there has been a change in the perception of Vatican II compared to the early post-conciliar period. It used to count as among the most important in church history. Some saw it as a deliverance, others as a catastrophe, but they agreed that it had changed the church. For over 50 years, this verdict stood more or less unchallenged. No longer. Postmodern critics deconstructed the grand historical 'metanarratives' in which the revolutions could have a central place. The rise of a global, post-colonial or de-colonial sensibility has called into question Vatican II's seemingly most significant achievements.

Christianity and the Catholic Church in this country is an integral part — and on both sides of the aisle — of what has been called by Indian essayist Pankaj Mishra "[the age of anger](#)" — a world in which those who were unable to enjoy its promises of freedom, stability and prosperity were increasingly susceptible to demagogues. Mishra (in general, not a big fan of Catholicism) called Pope Francis "the most convincing and influential public intellectual today. ... In a piquant irony, he is the moral voice of the Church that was the main adversary of Enlightenment intellectuals as they built the philosophical scaffolding of a universal commercial society."

The context for the ecclesial disruption has been different in different areas, but in the U.S. the situation is very particular: While the Catholic left's narrative about Vatican II is not clear, on the right side of the spectrum the view of Vatican II as a catastrophe has resisted the post-modernist deconstruction, for different reasons. In just 20 years, this is a church whose members have seen the pendulum swing from the Great Jubilee of

2000 to the revelation of sexual abuse involving some of the most powerful members of the hierarchy — U.S. Catholicism being the ground zero for the global abuse crisis in the church. Theological and political polarization have fueled one another — a theologization of political identities and a politicization of the ecclesial discourse.

Another key factor is the shift in perceptions of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue between the time of the council and now, in this post-9/11, new Cold War, 21st-century world. We have moved from a narrative of encounter to a narrative of clash and conflict. Compared to the 1960s and '70s, Catholicism has to engage with more assertive (both religiously and politically) faiths around the world, as well as with a more assertive secularism. This has coincided with a rise of converts who bring a different set of expectations to their understanding of church tradition, which gives greater emphasis to the fathers of the church, the catechism and papal teaching than to the conciliar tradition, including Vatican II. And this in turn introduces new interpretations of historical periods.

What we have seen during the last nine years in the Church in the U.S., in terms of opposition to Pope Francis, defies imagination and has also distorted our expectations about the church in dangerous ways.

Overall, it is undeniable the enormous gap in terms of expectations between the generation of Catholics that grew up with Vatican II and the young generations in our parishes, classrooms and workplace. The situation of the church and the world of today echo less the "joys and hopes" and more *luctus et angor*, "the griefs and the anxieties" (the words immediately following the incipit of [Gaudium et Spes](#)).

But there are also systematic-theological weaknesses in the reception and transmission of the conciliar teaching that have made Catholicism subject to infiltration or even an engine of anger and disenchantment:

- The liturgical debate as part of post-modern identity politics and of the "culture wars";
- Ecclesiology reduced to mimic social imagination (from Bellarmine's *societas perfecta* to secular models of "perfect society"), and an ecclesial imagination largely surprised if not puzzled by Francis' call to synodality — the synodal "walking together" having to fight against a "walking out" mentality according to the new "extra Ecclesiam, sola salus" (the only salvation is in leaving the church);
- A loss of the theology of *Dei Verbum* on the approach to God's revelation as sacramental, open to growth in understanding, fundamentally different from both intellectualism and doctrinalism;
- The reduction of religion to notions and to ethics, in an environment dominated by the sometimes utopian nature of *prophetic indictment* for the voice of religion in our public discourse;
- The embrace of economic and social libertarianism (as we have seen during the COVID-19 pandemic in these last two years) contributing to the crisis of our democracy — a result of the *damnatio memoriae* of *Gaudium et Spes* (which is one of, if not the most important documents of Vatican II for Pope Francis);
- A reduction of the conciliar doctrine of religious liberty to a *libertas Ecclesiae* echoing medieval Christendom;
- A politically partisan kind of ecumenism that has made urgent the need for intra-Catholic ecumenism;

- The globalization of the American "culture wars" that has given us the grim dividend of a visible lack of unity on critical domestic (the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on Capitol Hill) and international emergencies (the war in Ukraine): a lack of unity not just on policies, but on the very moral and spiritual nature of the clash between democracy and authoritarianism.

The list of forgotten conciliar teachings could go on. But the most disturbing phenomenon is the transition from a crisis of ecclesial authority to a crisis of the authority of Vatican II and therefore a collapse of a healthy sense of the tradition: a dynamic and organic idea of the tradition; the letter of the tradition not as a paradigm of understanding, but as an expression of the act of understanding; a [shift](#) from cognitive and propositional to a personalist and dialogical understanding of revelation.

The public debate in the church among theologians and bishops seemed to have been replaced by a creeping schism created by the ones who see in the interpretation of Vatican II a point of rupture now more symbolic than textual: From this point of view, we were now well beyond the dialectic "letter vs. spirit" or "event vs. documents." No longer just the spirit or the event, but also the same letter and the documents of Vatican II are now under the influence of revisionism and revanchism — which has nothing to do with the idea that the texts of Vatican II are not the final word: They too are subject to growth in understanding.

The most typical and tragic aspect of the crisis of reception of Vatican II — for a country rich in resources like the U.S. — is an "interruption" in the scholarly tradition of studying the council. Studying the council requires fluency in Latin and other languages, and an intellectual ecosystem in

which theology is grounded in conversation with church history and the history of theology, not just social sciences. For example, there is still no consensus on the English translation, the [last one](#) of which is now more than 25 years old. (This is far from a purely theoretical problem: in a recent article, Australian Jesuit [Gerald O'Collins](#) pointed out the fact that the English translations of the documents of Vatican II basically *canceled* the explicit references to *lectio divina*, mistranslated with "spiritual reading" which does not involve meditation and is engaged with non-scriptural texts). There are [important studies](#) on the U.S. and Vatican II, but the last American history of Vatican II is John O'Malley's [What Happened at Vatican II](#), published in 2008 during the pontificate of Benedict XVI.

A related factor is a breakdown of the coexistence and collaboration that used to characterize the "working relationship" between professional theologians, Catholic laity, and the institutional and hierarchical church. For the church in Latin America and in Europe, for example, one can clearly see that in the post-Vatican II period there have been three distinct phases:

- The honeymoon between bishops and theologians at Vatican II;
- A time of divorce or separation beginning in the late 1970s and 1980s until the early 2000s;
- In the last decade, glimpses of reconciliation also thanks to the pontificate of Francis.

This reconciliation is not happening in the U.S. This a result of the dangerous intra-Catholic tensions — ecclesial and political — that have developed in this country over the years since the publication of [multivolume commentaries](#) on the [documents](#) of Vatican II. Other countries

have not experienced this to the same degree; in the past two decades, large networks of theologians in Italy, Germany, Spain and Latin America have produced (or at least translated in their languages) important series of Vatican II commentary. The lack of historical-theological work on Vatican II in the United States has consequences for Americans who wish to study the council but also for all U.S. Catholics. There seems to be more space now in the Catholic theological academy for pre-Vatican II and anti-Vatican II theology on one side, and a post-Vatican II theology with fewer discernible ecclesial commitments on the other side. Vatican II itself is caught in something of an intellectual and ecclesial no man's land.

### **Vatican II and synodality: walking together versus walking out**

This is a moment of ecclesial crisis in the context of a larger cultural, political and social crisis. But in these last 60 years, the Catholic Church in the U.S. has been and is an important part of the process of reception of Vatican II just like and, in some cases, more than other churches around the world. Our church in this country has at its disposal vast resources and a vitality that is not easy to find in other churches.

For a recovery of Vatican II and of Pope Francis' pontificate and, in the long run, of a healthy sense of the church, there are two possible ways to tackle the sorry state of reception of the council in our church – and this is a route that requires the leadership of the bishops to be followed by the clergy, theologians, lay leaders in this vast world that is American Catholicism.

The first way is theological:

- It is necessary to recover Vatican II integrally, not just the four constitutions, but all the documents, as some of them are usually and unjustifiably ranked inferior

(especially *Nostra Aetate* on non-Christian religions and *Dignitatis Humanae* on religious liberty).

- All final documents of Vatican II are indispensable to let the entirety of Vatican II speak in an intertextual way and dialogical with papal teaching.
- We must take seriously the historicity of the council, not just the letter of the documents, but also the spirit of the council, without ever separating or opposing the two, as the extraordinary Synod of Bishops of 1985 said.
- We should acknowledge the issues on which Vatican II was silent or came too early and acknowledge that some aspects of conciliar theology are in need of completion in a way compatible with the *modus procedendi* of the tradition — something that has happened already also thanks to papal teaching: on women, on racism, on colonialism. This can be done without accusing Vatican II of being cheap and recognizing the debt that we owe to the council fathers, the periti, and all those who contributed to what we call "Vatican II."
- All this does not and need not happen in events remembering Vatican II, fueling veterans' sentimentality on the one side and putting off the younger generations on the other side. Our theological language needs to be unapologetically conciliar, even and especially without the label "Vatican II."

Second, at the level of *ecclesial life*:

- It is urgent to detach Vatican II from partisan narratives — ecclesially partisan and politically partisan. Just like other groups in American Christianity, "Vatican II Catholics" must stop consulting themselves for guidance.
- There is no future for Vatican II and Catholicism in general without the inclusion of Latino and Black and Asian American Catholics. Vatican II is still perceived in the

U.S. (also in academia) as "the last big thing" (not the next) for white-European Catholicism.

- It is urgent to bridge the gap between bishops and theology. This is not just hurting the bishops and theology, but the entire church.
- Synodality is the great opportunity to revive an inclusive, healthy sense of the church. As John O'Malley [wrote](#) recently in *America* magazine: "although Pope Francis' call is altogether traditional, it is radically new in the breadth it envisages. This should not scandalize us but energize us. We are entering upon a great project, and our responsibility for its success is as great as the project itself."

In conclusion, as Pope Francis wrote in the preface of a recent [book](#) co-authored by Cardinal Michael Czerny and Christian Barone, "it is necessary to make more explicit the key concepts of Vatican Council II, the foundations of its arguments, its theological and pastoral horizon, the arguments and the method it used."

Francis' pontificate is embattled, at the theological level, largely and mostly because of his recovery of the council. But this battle for the meaning of Vatican II will be with us for a long time. At stake is not just the communion with the bishop of Rome, but also the viability of the Catholic magisterial and intellectual tradition.



[Massimo Faggioli](#)

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# The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults works, but only if we change

5 April 2022

by [Diana Macalintal and Nick Wagner](#)



A religious sister places her hand on the shoulder of a candidate during the Rite of Election and Call to Continuing Conversion ceremony in the Diocese of Brooklyn in the 2016 file photo. (CNS/The Tablet/Marie Elena Giossi)

"It works! It really works!" Mary (not her real name) is a parish faith formation coordinator and had traveled across the state to participate in our workshop on the upcoming changes to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults.

"Our parishioners got to know our catechumens, and it's made a huge difference," she said, her face beaming. "We have so many young adults becoming Catholic, and our parish is really growing!"

The changes in the new translation will be relatively minor: a new English and Spanish

text for the U.S. church, clarified terminology and rubrics, more succinct national guidelines.

But what excited Mary were the things that were *not* changing — those fundamental principles of the catechumenal process promulgated in the rite 50 years ago — the same principles that, unfortunately, many parishes have yet to fully embrace.

Sadly, this has led some to say that the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, or RCIA, doesn't work and that we should "explore other routes," [as one writer recently stated](#). This skepticism isn't new. Shortly after the Latin text of the adult initiation rite was published in 1972, [Benedictine theologian Aidan Kavanagh](#) lauded it for being the seed of a "revitalized sacramental theology and pastoral practice" but warned that it was "an Achilles' heel" destined to fail.

The rite, he surmised, intimidated most parishes, not because it was complex but because it was "explosive of the conventional patterns of church life." Most clergy, he wrote, "regard its implementation as problematic if not impossible. They are right. For what the Roman documents contain are not merely specific changes in liturgical rubrics, but a restored and unified vision of the Church."

With a new translation coming in the next few years, it's time we fully implement the restored catechumenate process. However (and it's a big "however"), the catechumenate will work only if we ourselves are ready to change.

Here are some changes we need to embrace.

**RCIA leads seekers into relationship with Jesus, not into a school.** The most important thing we must do is let go of the "school model" of catechesis, a paradigm

that Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, [called](#) a “chokehold” on effective catechesis.

In the school model, everyone follows a predetermined one-size-fits-all schedule and curriculum focused on presenting doctrine organized by topics. This methodology is so prevalent that many parish leaders believe it to be prescribed.

However, Pope Francis reminds us in [Evangelii Gaudium](#) (Joy of the Gospel): "Pastoral ministry in a missionary style is not obsessed with the disjointed transmission of a multitude of doctrines to be insistently imposed." Over and over, the pope urges us "to concentrate on the essentials, on what is most beautiful, most grand, most appealing and at the same time most necessary."

**RCIA is a process of conversion for unbaptized persons.** The catechumenate is not for parishioners to learn more about the faith, baptized practicing Catholics preparing only for Confirmation or faithful Christians becoming Catholic. They are all already living the Christian life. They may need more formation — as we all do — but they do not need to learn the basic disciplines of following Christ because they already are.

Most people we put into our parish adult initiation processes don't belong there. But we put them there because it's often the only adult faith formation happening in a parish. This results in catechumenate processes focused less on discipleship in Christ and more on information about Catholicism. The latter is important, but it is not the purpose of the catechumenate.

**Conversion happens by encountering the entire mystery of Christ unfolding**

**throughout the liturgical year.** In life, there is no season for falling in love or deadline for getting married. Falling in love with Christ is similar. The Spirit doesn't work only from September to May, and you can't pre-determine God's timeline.

We need to be ready *whenever* the Spirit opens a seeker's heart. When that happens, we can immediately introduce seekers to Christ because the celebrations of the liturgical year are happening every day! And we share with them the *entire* mystery of Christ throughout the *whole* liturgical year, not just a part of it. This is why the [rite](#) says: "The time spent in the catechumenate should be long enough — several years if necessary — for the conversion and faith of the catechumens to become strong." However, "the duration of the catechumenate will depend on the grace of God. ... Nothing, therefore, can be settled a priori."

**Initiation is a ritual process.** That may seem obvious, but often our practice and policies treat it more like a catechetical program with occasional prayers. RCIA is first and foremost an official rite of the church. Therefore, it is not optional or simply one method of adult initiation among many.

Moreover, when the church prays, Christ is present, teaching us to become like him. The rites, as Pope Benedict XVI [said about the liturgy](#), are "the permanent catechesis of the Church, the inexhaustible source of catechesis" and, as the [Catechism](#) states, "the privileged place for catechizing the People of God."

**Initiation is the responsibility of all the baptized.** There is no mention in the rite of an "RCIA team" or "RCIA group." This is because the process of conversion happens in the midst of the community of the faithful (see #4 and 9). Instead of having

catechumens meet only with a catechist once a week, our "RCIA teams" can coach all our parishioners to be mentors and examples for the catechumens any time they are with them.

This isn't as hard as it sounds. Parishes, by definition, are spiritual communities that manifest Christ in everything they do. So we can intentionally embed seekers into the parish community (and not merely into a separate "RCIA community") where they will regularly encounter Christ and learn to live as disciples through the life of the parish.

**Becoming a disciple is not an acronym.** We have a decades-long history of referring to the adult initiation process by the initials RCIA. This is unfortunate because it's insider vocabulary. And it's too easy to think of those initials as an academic program to complete or an exclusive club to join instead of a relationship with Jesus Christ that changes everything. When the new English translation is approved by Rome (which has not yet happened), the title will be the "Order of Christian Initiation of Adults." Now is the perfect opportunity to use language that is more descriptive of what the Spirit desires for all of us and more inviting to those who seek the living God.

The rite indeed works, but only if we trust it enough to let it change us, too. If we do, we can expect, as Kavanagh writes, "a community of lively faith in Jesus Christ dead, risen, and present actually among his People," for "when one change occurs, all changes."



Diana Macalintal and Nick Wagner  
Nick Wagner and Diana Macalintal are the founders and co-directors of TeamRCIA.com, a free online resource and community of over 20,000 parish and diocesan ministers throughout North America and beyond who help form Christians for life through the catechumenate.

## The church needs to name and confront 'clerical fragility'

6 April 2022

by [Daniel P. Horan](#)

### Accountability



A large poster is attached to a van Jan. 19 in Munich, depicting retired Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Reinhard Marx of Munich and Freising, and Archbishop Rainer Maria Woelki of Cologne, during a demonstration in protest of the church's handling of sexual abuse. (CNS/KNA/Dieter Mayr)

Last week two major U.S. Catholic universities hosted conferences that engaged ongoing historical and theological research on clergy sexual abuse in the Catholic Church.

The first, a symposium titled "Gender, Sex, and Power: Towards a History of Clergy Sex Abuse in the U.S. Catholic Church," was hosted March 27-29 by the [Cushwa Center for the Study of American Catholicism](#) at the University of Notre Dame.

The second, a conference titled "'Our transgressions before you are many, and our sins testify against us' (Is 59:12a): Re-Imagining Church in Light of Colonization and Catholic Sexual Abuse," took place at [Gonzaga University](#) March 31-April 3.

Although I was out of town and could not attend the Notre Dame event, I was an invited participant in the Gonzaga conference, which was sponsored in part by the "[Taking Responsibility](#)" project based at Fordham University. The primary working group consisted of approximately 40 scholars from across North America, mostly historians and theologians (including some who had presented at or attended the Notre Dame symposium just a few days earlier). While there were two plenary sessions open to the public, most of these working sessions were closed to the invited participants.

Without disclosing details, I will say that the quality of scholarship, the level of discussion, and the seriousness and sincerity of all the participants was exceptional. The Gonzaga event was especially significant given the particular focus on the intersection of sexual abuse with the history of colonialism and systemic racism in the Catholic Church in the United States, something rarely explored in discussions of clergy abuse and its cover-up.

Yet during the conference I began thinking about the notable lack of ordained scholars involved in the work of engaging the terrible history of sexual abuse in the church, both represented at this specific gathering and more broadly. For example, of the nine clergy scholars invited to participate, only three of us were able to be present. But it also struck me as telling that very few members of the local Gonzaga [Jesuit community](#) came in person to the public lectures on the subject of clergy abuse.

Organizers and participants of the event at Notre Dame also told me that they were aware of only two members of the [Congregation of Holy Cross](#) who attended all or part of the symposium, and one was a postdoctoral fellow required to be there. For context, [Corby Hall](#) houses more than 60 [members](#) of the congregation, and it is just one of four major residences for the community on campus.

This is not the only time that I have seen clergy absenting themselves from engaging in the public or scholarly reckoning with the history and reality of clergy sexual abuse. There are a lot of reasons why clergy may choose not to attend or participate in such events, including schedule conflicts or other legitimate excuses. Still, in other instances, some clergy have even been hostile, defensive or claiming the status of victimhood for the continued investigation into abuse and its cover-up. We have seen this sort of clerical defensiveness over the years, even from [Pope Francis](#), and more recently [in some defenses](#) of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in the wake of revelations of his own mishandling of abuse cases while archbishop of Munich.



A woman holds a candle during a rally for victims of clerical sexual abuse, Jan. 21 in front of the cathedral in Essen, Germany. (CNS/KNA/Andre Zelck)

I have been present for conversations in which some members of religious communities and diocesan priests have expressed views that suggest they — the clergy — see themselves, their community or the church in general as the ones "really" under attack. Some even go so far as to decry "unfair" or "negative" inquiry into past cases of abuse or collective responsibility on the part of the communities today. *I didn't do anything wrong! Why do I have to deal with this? How is this my problem?* Conversations with colleagues confirm that I am not the only one who has experienced these kinds of comments.

As I have tried to interrogate why so many of my fellow clerics have absented themselves or engaged in defensive strategies, I found myself reflecting on systemic racism and white privilege as both an analog for clergy sexual abuse and a compounding factor in this horrific phenomenon. In this context, clericalism serves as a parallel to white privilege, just as the systemic injustice of clergy abuse often parallels systemic racism.

By definition, clericalism — that institutional evil that Pope Francis [regularly decries](#) — is a system of privileges, benefits,

presumptions of goodwill and entitlements based solely on a person being an ordained minister (or, at times, a non-ordained member of a religious community). It marks some members of the church as "set apart" and, in its most distorted forms, presents clerics as "holier," unable to be questioned, entitled to special treatment and absolute in authority. The very nature of clericalism conspires to prevent those who benefit from it — including its critics like me — from seeing the full range of its impact.

Clericalism also creates a culture of isolation from many hard realities and discomfiting facts. And when many clerics are forcibly confronted with the overwhelmingly painful and disturbing truths of the abuse crisis and its cover-up, what surfaces is defensiveness, dismissiveness, avoidance, and other behaviors and strategies.

Drawing from the work of the scholar and antiracism activist Robin DiAngelo, who [in 2011 coined](#) the term "[white fragility](#)" to describe the phenomenon of white people's inability "to tolerate racial stress" in a white supremacist and systemically racist society, I believe that the many Catholic clergy today suffer from "clerical fragility."

DiAngelo notes that white Americans live, often unaware, in an insulated environment and this "insulated environment of racial privilege builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress." This is, of course, a symptom and effect of white privilege.

Comparably, because of the insulation and comfort provided by clericalism, priests, bishops and deacons struggle in contexts where they must face the realities of the abuse crisis. We can see how easily even a minimum amount of abuse-related stress becomes, as DiAngelo says, "intolerable,

triggering a range of defensive moves." She adds: "These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation."

Suddenly, the self-absenting of clergy from conversations about the abuse crisis or defensive and argumentative behavior within such contexts makes a great deal of sense.

I can relate to the description. On the very same day that I proposed the analogy of "clerical fragility" to my academic colleagues in a discussion, I attended a plenary lecture about the history of clergy abuse in the American Southwest by [Kathleen Holscher](#), associate professor of American Studies at the University of New Mexico.

At one point, she put up a list of names of those documented as abusers in the Diocese of Gallup during the 20th century. About 10 of them had "OFM" after their names. I didn't know any of these friars, I didn't recognize any of the names, nor am I from the province that primarily supplied the "missionaries" to the Native American reservations there, but those details didn't and shouldn't matter. Within just a few seconds I felt a roller coaster of emotion, from anger at my historical brothers in Franciscan life to fear of guilt by association to shame for being affiliated with such evil to righteous indignation at the senseless and unspeakable harm perpetrated on such vulnerable populations of people.

Facing these simple, blunt and disturbing historical facts was overwhelming, uncomfortable and even painful. I wish these thousands of cases of abuse and violence did not exist, but pretending that they didn't won't make anything better. As a

Franciscan priest complicit in the church's structural sin of clericalism, I know the experience of what I'm calling "clerical fragility." I know the desire to pretend the [Dallas Charter](#) solved all the problems, to avoid the topic and reality of abuse, and to absent myself from difficult contexts, just as I know the experience of being socialized as a white cisgender man in the United States conditions me to experience forms of both white and male fragility.

But just as racism is a white problem, sexual abuse in the church is a clergy problem. And just as white people need to name and confront "white fragility," then push through the discomfort we have been socialized to avoid and ignore in a white supremacist society, so too do we priests, bishops and deacons need to name and confront "clerical fragility," then push through the discomfort we have been socialized to avoid and ignore in a church marked by the persistent sin of clericalism.

Only then can we begin to know and speak the truth, work toward justice, and ensure that the reign of God is what governs the actions of the church and its ministers, rather than the abusive deployment of racist, colonial and clerical power.



Daniel P. Horan

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# Thinking existentially at the 'gates of Hope'

6 April 2022

by Caileigh Pattisall

## Spirituality



During our last retreat, we spent the final day making a collage that brought us back to our social justice story. It felt good to reflect why I'm here doing this work and set aside intentions for the remainder of the year. (Caileigh Pattisall)

**NEW YORK** — In less than four months, my year with Good Shepherd Volunteers will be over. I've been thinking a lot: contemplating what I've learned this year and reflecting on what I thought this year would be; comparing where and who I was one year ago to the person I am now; thinking about all the people I've met on this journey and how they've shaped me and the views I now hold.

At the end of February, we had our social justice and simplicity retreat at Collier High School. It was a time where we could all reflect on why we are here and what is driving our passion.

This retreat turned out to be well-timed, and we all were honest with each other. Throughout these months, doing this service work proved to be hard, and we were all feeling a bit of compassion fatigue. We each had a different picture of what this year would look like. We all have similar drive in that we have such an innate desire to fix the world's problems. But some of us thought this year would be easier than it has been, and some of our passions had shifted.



My roommate MJ Miranda and I recently went to the Grand Bazaar, a big flea market on the Upper West Side. We saw many vendors selling these Tibetan singing bowls, which Good Shepherd Volunteers uses at every retreat to signal our presence in the space and being together. (Caileigh Pattisall)

During the retreat, we read a passage by Victoria Stafford in an essay called "The Small Work in the Great Work":

I have a friend who traffics in words. She is not a minister, but a psychiatrist in the health clinic at a prestigious women's college. We were sitting once not long after a student she had known, and counseled, committed suicide in the dormitory there. My friend, the doctor, the healer, held the loss very closely in those first few days, not unprofessionally, but deeply, fully — as you

or I would have, had this been someone in our care.

At one point (with tears streaming down her face), she looked up in defiance (this is the only word for it) and spoke explicitly of her vocation, as if out of the ashes of that day she were renewing a vow or making a new covenant (and I think she was). She spoke explicitly of her vocation, and of yours and mine. She said, "You know I cannot save them. I am not here to save anybody or to save the world. All I can do — what I am called to do — is to plant myself at the gates of Hope. Sometimes they come in; sometimes they walk by. But I stand there every day and I call out till my lungs are sore with calling, and beckon and urge them in toward beautiful life and love."

This passage really resonated with me for many reasons, but the main one was the imagery of the "gates of Hope." Though the psychiatrist had suffered a major loss not only in her profession, but, as the passage says, "fully," she was still able to see the bigger picture. And that larger perspective is that she's still here, and she still sees that purpose: not to save or do the unattainable, but to simply guide and inspire change.

I've been thinking a little existentially lately. What do I want to do and who do I want to be after July? And why have I been grappling with the same weird, contradictory feelings this entire year? I started to zoom out and look at it through a bigger lens.

I've been listening to a podcast that has helped me understand a lot of these feelings: "[We Can Do Hard Things](#)" with Glennon Doyle, considered a top-rated podcast by Apple Music, Spotify and Audible. Doyle, author of *Untamed*, discusses topics surrounding society and culture with her sister, Amanda. In one of their episodes, "[Overwhelm](#)," they get into gender

expectations and the weight of the invisible load that caretaking can hold. This leads into a deeper conversation about gendered socialization.

Women are taught that in order to be good, to be fulfilled, they need to be "good" in relation to others. They need to be good mothers, good daughters and good co-workers. In order to have these roles, we must serve others sometimes before ourselves. We're taught to fill up others' cups before our own. And culturally, the patriarchy is set up this way.



In October, the Good Shepherd Volunteers board of directors was kind enough to get us all tickets to the New York Botanical Gardens in the Bronx. From left: Caileigh Pattisall, Moe Berry, Gabby Kasper, Theresa Vaske, MJ Miranda, Makenzie Moore and Erin Hood. (Courtesy of Caileigh Pattisall)

"[These systems of oppression are] ridiculously connected, because if you're going to overtax women of their time, of their money, of their energy, of all of it, then in order to make it sustainable in a patriarchy, what you have to do is hold up the ideal of a woman as that [of] a woman who is serving constantly to the extent that

she has no self," Doyle says in "Overwhelm." "How do we make that desirable? 'Oh, I know, we will create this idea that the epitome of womanhood is this selfless woman.' "

The idea of success through this paradox is for women to serve others so much that they lose themselves in the service of others. I want to strive to be in service to others, but I do want to know the context, the game I'm playing. I don't want to uphold the expectation that women are meant to lose themselves in their relationships with others.

Independence has become an important value to me, and when I was first exploring that part of myself, I felt so much guilt. I felt selfish prioritizing what I needed and what I simply wanted for myself, my life. And that's a complex I'm still unlearning. I want to show up to these roles as fully myself, not someone who's lost inside a role they think they're supposed to be playing.

I find myself unlearning these patriarchal constructs that keep many women from setting up healthy boundaries in many aspects of their lives. And I'm learning to feel pride in these boundaries and excited to grow because of them. Maybe these observations stem from [Women's History Month](#), but I think they're important concepts to explore within your family, with your friends and with yourself.

As I reflect and move toward the end of my year of service, I plant myself at the "gates of Hope" not only for those I serve, but, most importantly, for myself and the woman I am becoming.



[Caileigh Pattisall](#)

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## Here's an idea: Have lunch with a bishop

6 April 2022

by [Heidi Schlumpf](#)



I was in line for lunch, when a bishop glanced at my name tag and introduced himself. Then he said, "I read something you wrote and want to tell you what I think of it."

I braced for criticism. But then he surprised me, by noting that a column I had written after last year's U.S. bishops' meeting in November, which pleaded, "[Don't overromanticize adoption in pursuit of pro-life goals](#)," had really opened his eyes about the complexity of adoption.

We continued to have a brief chat about why adoption always begins with loss and how adoptees often struggle throughout life, and why adoption, which can still be an overall positive experience, is not the simple answer to every unplanned pregnancy. I was able to share my perspective as an adoptive mother, and as a birthmother who placed a child for adoption when I was a teenager, and he gave me some background about the comments made about adoption at the bishops' meeting.

It is one-on-one encounters like this one that made the recent Chicago conference between some U.S. bishops, theologians and journalists worthwhile — even as the selection of participants and secrecy around the meeting has raised eyebrows.

As [reported](#) by my colleague, NCR News Editor Joshua McElwee, the March 25-26 conference, "Pope Francis, Vatican II, and the Way Forward," was co-organized by Loyola University Chicago's Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage, Boston College's Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life, and Fordham University's Center on Religion and Culture. Also helping with the organization was NCR political columnist Michael Sean Winters.

Keynote presentations and panel discussions focused on how the U.S. Catholic Church can better support the agenda of Francis, especially given that some in the church — including in the hierarchy — actively do *not* support the pope.

The event was by-invitation-only for about 70 cardinals, bishops, theologians and journalists, and was held under "Chatham House Rule," meaning attendees agreed they could speak afterward about the contents of the discussions but not reveal who had made any particular comment.

I was invited to present as part of a panel on "The Money, Media, and Networks that Oppose Pope Francis." Drawing on NCR's reporting about the [Eternal Word Television Network](#) (EWTN), [The Pillar blog](#), [Church Militant](#) and other outlets, I contrasted anti-Francis media and their funders with more reputable media that follow traditional journalistic and ethical practices.

One of those journalistic principles is support for so-called "sunshine" laws, which protect openness of public meetings, proceedings and records, usually of governmental bodies. It would have been my preference, as a journalist, for the Chicago conference to have been "on the record," as opposed to the Chatham House Rule.

But private meetings are not uncommon, and journalists learn to work around them. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops meets privately in executive session (and lately increasingly so) during its otherwise public twice-annual meetings. Its committee meetings are also private.

A similarly private [gathering](#) of bishops and theologians was held in 2017 on the topic of the *Amoris Laetitia*, the apostolic exhortation after the synods on the family, as was this February 2020 [event on "co-responsibility"](#) sponsored by the Leadership Roundtable.

That NCR was invited to both of those events seems to speak to our journalistic credibility. (As national correspondent then, I was not invited to either event.)

At least these meetings are clear about the rules up front — unlike an event on ["Authentic Reform"](#) sponsored by the Napa Institute in 2018 after the revelations of sexual abuse by former Cardinal Theodore McCarrick. Although journalists do not

normally pay for admission to events, they are covering to avoid a financial conflict of interest, Napa not only insisted I pay the \$500 registration fee but then announced that journalists must leave the room when the bishops' panel began. Other journalists, from more "Napa-friendly" outlets, got up and exited. I refused.

It's understandable that those not invited to the Chicago event may feel excluded, and the fact that such gatherings are few and far between heightens the seeming importance of this individual event. Although the rules prevent me from naming the attendees, I can say that most were familiar faces, and ethnic and racial diversity was noticeably minimal. I hope organizers rectify that in any future conferences.

For an [article by Religion News Service](#) about the conference, I told reporter Jack Jenkins that the synod on synodality was a hot topic, and the event itself seemed to be an example of "walking together": "hierarchy, lay professionals — having conversations and talking about their hopes and dreams for the church."

The next day, I attended the in-person synodal meeting at my parish, which was sparsely attended and similarly undiverse, despite sizeable ethnic and racial diversity in the parish. Still, a fruitful conversation was held, and our feedback — along with that gathered in regional virtual synodal meetings — will be forwarded to the archdiocese.

As editor of a national Catholic publication, I already have an outsized voice in church conversations. But if I hadn't been standing in that lunch line, the bishop and I wouldn't have had that shared exchange. Perhaps if there were more opportunities for church leaders to hang out, in person, with everyday Catholics, we could better understand one

another. I vote for more conferences, more gatherings and more lunches together.



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## First pope, now US churches face boarding-school reckoning

6 April 2022

by [Peter Smith](#), [The Associated Press](#)



Members of the Assembly of First Nations perform March 31 in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. As Native Americans cautiously welcome Pope Francis' historic 2022 apology for abuses at Catholic-run boarding schools for Indigenous children in Canada, U.S. churches are bracing for an unprecedented reckoning with

their own legacies of helping operate such schools. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino, File)

As Native Americans cautiously welcome [Pope Francis' historic apology](#) for abuses at Catholic-run boarding schools for Indigenous children in Canada, U.S. churches are bracing for an unprecedented reckoning with their own legacies of operating such schools.

Church schools are likely to feature prominently in a report from the U.S. Department of the Interior, led by the first-ever Native American cabinet secretary, Deb Haaland, [due to be released later this month](#). The report, prompted by last year's discovery of hundreds of unmarked graves at former residential school sites in Canada, will focus on the loss of life and [the enduring traumas the U.S. system inflicted on](#) Indigenous children from the 19th to mid-20th centuries.

From Episcopalians to Quakers to Catholic dioceses in Oklahoma, faith groups have either started or intensified efforts in the past year to research and atone for their prior roles in the boarding school system, which Native children were forced to attend — cutting them off from their families, tribes and traditions.

While the pope's April 1 apology was addressed to Indigenous groups from Canada, people were listening south of the border.

"An apology is the best way to start any conversation," said Roy Callison, a Catholic deacon and Cherokee Nation member helping coordinate the Oklahoma Catholic Native Schools Project, which includes listening sessions for those affected by the boarding school legacy. "That's the first step to trying to get healing."

In his meeting with Canada's Indigenous delegations, Francis asked forgiveness "for the role that a number of Catholics ... had in all these things that wounded you, in the abuses you suffered and in the lack of respect shown for your identity, your culture and even your spiritual values."

Francis "did something really important, which is name the importance of being indignant at this history," said Maka Black Elk, executive director of truth and healing for Red Cloud Indian School on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

That history "is shameful, and it is not something we should accept," said Black Elk, who is Oglala Lakota.

Red Cloud, affiliated with the Catholic Jesuit order, was for generations a boarding school for Lakota children. It's now a day school incorporating Lakota leadership, language and traditions. Black Elk is [guiding a reckoning process that includes archival research and hearing the stories of former students](#).

Canada underwent a much-publicized Truth and Reconciliation process in recent years. The issue gained unprecedented attention last year after a researcher using ground-penetrating radar reported finding about 200 unmarked probable burial sites at a former school in British Columbia.

That discovery, followed by others across Canada, prompted Haaland to commission her department's report.

"This history in the United States has not been addressed in the same way it has been addressed in Canada," Black Elk said. The Interior report "will be an important first step about the work that needs to happen in this country."

Church leaders are getting ready. The report "will likely bring to light some very troubling information," said a letter circulated last fall to members of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops from two colleagues who chaired committees related to the issue. The letter urged bishops to build relationships with local Indigenous communities and engage "in a real and honest dialogue about reactions to the report and what steps are needed to go forward together."

Conditions varied at boarding schools in the United States, with some described as unsafe, unsanitary and scenes of physical or sexual abuse. Other former students recall their school years as positive times of learning, friendship and extracurricular activities.

Indigenous groups note that even the better schools were part of a project to assimilate children into a predominately white, Christian society and break down their tribal identities, customs and languages — what many Indigenous groups call a cultural genocide.

"The very process of boarding schools is violent and damaging," said Bryan Rindfleisch, an expert in Native American history at Marquette University who is helping Catholics in Oklahoma research their school legacy.

There were at least 367 boarding schools across the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries, according to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, a Minneapolis-based advocacy group.

Most were government-run; many others were run by Catholic and Protestant churches.

The national healing coalition called Pope Francis' comments a historic first step, but urged the Vatican to repatriate Indigenous artifacts in its museum collections and called on religious organizations to open their school archives.

In listening sessions held through the Oklahoma Catholic Native Schools Project, many participants told positive stories of school experiences, Callison said, though the church is committed to documenting the traumatic ones too. "You're going to hear things you don't want to hear," he said.

The project will also include archival research and individual interviews with those affected. At least 11 Catholic boarding schools operated in Oklahoma.

"We need to get to the truth before we can deal with whatever hurt or celebrate whatever success" the schools achieved, Oklahoma City Archbishop Paul Coakley said.



Interior Secretary Deb Haaland speaks during a July 14, 2021, ceremony at the U.S. Army's Carlisle Barracks in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. A report from the U.S. Department of the Interior, led by the first-ever Native American cabinet secretary, Haaland, due to be released in April 2022, will focus on the loss of life and the enduring traumas of the U.S. boarding school system, in which Native Americans were taken to hundreds of government- and church-run facilities from the 19th to mid-20th centuries. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke, File)

Several church groups — including Quakers, Methodists and some Catholic religious orders — are backing pending legislation in Congress that would go beyond the Interior report. It would create a truth and healing commission, modeled on Canada's, to investigate the boarding school legacy.

The New England Yearly Meeting of Friends — a regional group of congregations — issued an apology last year for Quakers' historic sponsorship of such schools, acknowledging they were undertaken with "spiritual and cultural arrogance."

"We are deeply sorry for our part in the vast suffering caused by this system and the continuing effects," the New England group said.

It's important for Quakers to accept such responsibility, said Paula Palmer, a Quaker from Colorado whose research has identified about 30 Native American boarding and day schools that were run by Quakers.

"The yearly meetings voted to support, operate and finance" the schools, she said. "So it's really the yearly meetings who have the responsibility to respond. They were the ones who also participated in the whole project of forced assimilation of Indigenous children."

The Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States has hired an archival researcher to document its own boarding school history.

The order is "committed to examining and sharing the truth of our history, even where that is difficult," said Fr. Ted Penton, secretary of the Jesuit conference's Office of Justice and Ecology.

The Episcopal Church's General Convention in July is expected to vote on a statement that would "acknowledge the intergenerational trauma caused by genocide, colonialism" and the operation of boarding schools and "other systems based on white supremacy."

The convention will also consider authorizing a "comprehensive and complete investigation" of the church's operation of such schools. The proposals came from a group appointed by denominational leaders.

Such measures are strong, but local dioceses also need to research their own histories and advocate for Indigenous peoples, said the Rev. Rachel Taber-Hamilton, rector of Trinity Episcopal Church in Everett, Washington. Taber-Hamilton, whose heritage includes the Shackan First Nation of Canada, is an Episcopal Church representative to the worldwide Anglican Indigenous Network.

"It's not enough to say, 'I'm sorry, and here's some money,'" she said. "We first have to do some very hard work of listening to the pain."

## Reclaiming the Catholic moral and intellectual tradition from the culture wars

7 April 2022

by [M. Therese Lysaught](#)

[Vatican](#)



Pope Francis recites a prayer, "Forgive us for the war, Lord," composed by Italian Archbishop Domenico Battaglia of Naples, during his general audience in the Paul VI hall March 16 at the Vatican. (CNS/Paul Haring)

***Editor's note:*** *The following keynote address was delivered at a conference for and with a group of U.S. bishops March 25-26 in Chicago. "[Pope Francis, Vatican II, and the Way Forward](#)" was co-organized by Loyola University Chicago's Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage, Boston College's Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life, and Fordham University's Center on Religion and Culture. Also helping with the organization was NCR political columnist Michael Sean Winters.*

When Michael Murphy, director of Loyola's Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage, first invited me to join this conversation, he asked me to give a few remarks as part of a panel on how the culture wars have distorted Catholic bioethics. But then I was relocated to a keynote address on the topic "Reclaiming the Catholic Moral and Intellectual Tradition from the Culture Wars." If the first topic was big, the second is, colossal.

So I am going to take the original starting point that he gave me — the culture wars and bioethics — as a way into the larger question. For the culture wars have long

been with us, but their particular manifestation during the COVID-19 pandemic has clarified key dimensions of this movement and confirmed, for me, a crucial way forward.

To help frame my remarks, I want to start with what I think might be the earliest case in Catholic bioethics. Here we see the distorting culture war dynamics already at play. It is a case familiar, I am sure, to everyone in this room:

Jesus went into a synagogue, and there was a man there who had a withered hand. And they were watching him to see if he would cure him on the sabbath day, hoping for something to use against him. He said to the man with the withered hand, "Stand up out in the middle!" Then he said to them, "Is it against the law on the sabbath day to do good, or to do evil; to save life, or to kill?" But they said nothing. Then, grieved to find them so obstinate, he looked angrily around at them, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and his hand was better. The Pharisees went out and at once began to plot with the Herodians against him, discussing how to destroy him (Mark 3:1-6).

Here we have, I would submit, the key players in the culture wars — the "religious traditionalists" (as I will call them, in order to use this passage as an interpretative framework for the analysis below, as well as to avoid using the word "Pharisee" pejoratively) in their unholy alliance with the Herodians; the man with the withered hand; and Jesus — who, standing at the center of the story points a way forward for us, beyond the contemporary manifestation of the culture wars, indicating how we might begin to move toward a truly post-conciliar Catholic moral and intellectual tradition, one shaped not by the imagination, tactics and sequelae of war but rather by peace,

reconciliation and the flourishing of persons, communities and creation.

### **An unholy alliance**

Before Jesus even walks into the synagogue, the stage has been set for a confrontation. We are only in Chapter 3 of Mark's Gospel, but the war is already simmering. In Chapter 2, Jesus has forgiven the paralytic's sins, eaten with tax collectors, refused to make his disciples fast and plucked corn on the Sabbath. So now the religious traditionalists have laid a trap — and the teeth of that trap is the law.

Mark's depiction of the religious traditionalists — especially as they ally with the Herodians — reads strikingly like Massimo Borghesi's incisive account of a new variant of Catholic Americanism, described in his recent book [\*Catholic Discordance: Neoconservatism vs. the Field Hospital Church of Pope Francis\*](#). Borghesi argues that this form of Catholicism that has emerged since the council rests on "two pillars."

The first pillar he calls "a strident Catho-capitalism." Here the Catholic tradition has been refashioned as an apology for the economic theory of neoliberalism. For those erecting this pillar, who we might call the Herodians, Catholicism serves to support, justify and advance a specific economic ideology and its particular understanding of the state and culture. Such a position requires a selective, partial — and quite distorted — presentation of the Catholic tradition, which Borghesi dissects in detail.

The second pillar is the culture wars, fought, as Borghesi notes, by traditionalists who have long "take[n] morality as their battleground." The culture warriors claim to be defending "a specific set of values ... that were rejected by the dominant culture" — unborn life, heterosexual marriage, the lives of the terminally ill. While it has shifted

since the early 1970s, the terrain of the culture wars had largely been co-extensive with Catholic bioethics.

More recently, however, the language has become more expansive. Take, for example, University of Notre Dame political scientist Patrick Deneen. In a piece [written](#) ostensibly about the war in Ukraine, Deneen claims the culture warriors are now fighting what he calls a "new biopolitical regime." This regime is run by those he calls the "disembodied 'laptop class,' " or "the Virtuals," a "woke" "radicalized messianic party, advancing its gnostic vision amid the ruins of the Christian civilization." They are "merely a new articulation of the revolutionary dream that was once vested in Communism," who disdain the working class, and who recently sought "to impose bio-political dominion over all of human life during the suddenly irrelevant 'crisis' of the pandemic." So what was once the landscape of bioethics has morphed into biopolitics and is now deeply interwoven with race, class, economics and geopolitics.

Borghesi argues that these two pillars stand in an internal contradiction. They are, on their face, a sort of unholy alliance — a pragmatic plot, we might say, between the religious traditionalists and the "Catho-capitalists." His assessment is plausible, for if one accepts neoliberalism — with its tenets of the radical freedom of the individual, the radical minimization of government, the relentless pursuit of economic efficiency, the elimination of mid-level or voluntary social organizations (including the church) and the endless "[economization of everything](#)" — then the Catho-capitalists should readily accept abortion as a commodified service especially for the full economization of women, the freedom of individuals to marry whomever they wish, the promotion of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia to

eliminate non-productive persons, and so forth. These practices are simply the logical outcomes of neoliberalism as not only an economic theory but a [wider cultural ideology](#).

But they don't. The proponents of this odd American Catholic *mélange* strenuously reject these social and moral ramifications. They refuse to admit, Borghesi argues, that the new capitalist model that they unconditionally embrace is the "real engine" of these practices, creating and requiring the relativism and individualism they vehemently oppose.



A man holds a sign among a group of people protesting the COVID-19 vaccine mandates at Summa Health Hospital Aug. 16, 2021, in Akron, Ohio. (CNS/Reuters/Stephen Zenner)

But are these two pillars really in contradiction? Before March 2020, I would have largely agreed with him on this point. But as the pandemic has brought to light so many previously "invisible" realities around the globe, it has also laid bare that these two seemingly contradictory pillars are rather two faces of the same neoliberal ideology. This became clear this past summer, when some among the small but amplified minority of [Catholics who opposed the COVID-19 vaccines](#) stunningly began [using the mantra](#) "my body, my choice."

But beyond that moment of dark comedy, the language used by anti-vax Catholics is [deeply neoliberal](#). Here we hear the same anthropology — a radically disconnected decision-maker empowered to choose their own preferences based solely on their autonomy, now renamed "a right to conscience." Echoing the neoliberal dogma of privatization, we heard that "the vaccination question is a deeply [personal issue](#)." Following the neoliberal dogma of deregulation, these Catholics opposed any infringement on individual or corporate freedom, be it from local, state or federal government but also from any other organization — be it an employer, hospital, long-term care facility, school, diocese [or even a magisterial body](#).

These arguments — espoused by a few [Catholic bishops](#) and a few too many Catholics — echo, cite or draw on [materials](#) prepared and disseminated by the National Catholic Bioethics Center. In the opinion of many, the NCBC materials misrepresent church teaching on these questions by cherry-picking sentences from authoritative documents and distorting their meaning.

But more troublingly, the National Catholic Bioethics Center has also had no qualms directly challenging the Holy Father. [Their template for religious vaccine exemptions](#) makes clear to state that "conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ." Now, all faithful Catholics know that the Vicar of Christ is, at least according to [Catholic Answers](#), "a title of the pope implying his supreme and universal primacy, both of honor and of jurisdiction, over the [Church](#) of Christ."

Thus, the National Catholic Bioethics Center's [assertion](#) of the priority of an individual's conscience over against Pope Francis could not be more explicit. Every

Catholic is their own pope, their own magisterium. Similarly, the NCBC's Fr. Tad Padolczyk [dismissed](#) Pope Francis' guidance on the COVID-19 vaccines as merely his "personal judgments" or "personal opinion." Beyond these unsubtle challenges to Holy Father's authority, the NCBC released its own statement about the morality of the COVID-19 vaccines two to three weeks prior to the analyses by the [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith](#) and the [Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development](#). But although the NCBC position differed significantly from these Vatican statements, they took no steps to revise their original statement in light of magisterial teaching.

As we all know, the National Catholic Bioethics Center grounded its position in the vaccines' putative connections to two historical abortions. This concern might have been persuasive, except for the fact that many of the figures opposing the vaccines likewise [opposed](#) from the beginning almost every public effort to stem the virus' spread. As early as May 2020, Catholic [dioceses](#) — many with the assistance of [groups](#) like the [Becket Fund for Religious Liberty](#) — were among those suing local municipalities about social distancing occupancy measures. [Parents](#) at Catholic schools — and even some [schools](#) themselves — [protested](#) mask mandates. Importantly, this all began well before the vaccines became available. In other words, well before any "conscience"-based concerns about abortion, the focus of the opposition was simply a purported government repression of individual freedom, camouflaged under the rhetoric of religious freedom.

Thus, Catholic opposition to the COVID-19 measures has helped to make clear that, at heart, rather than opposing a "biopolitical regime," the culture wars and Catho-

capitalism are simply two manifestations of what we could call the "biopolitics of neoliberalism." Understanding this connection helps explain what has long been a deeply perplexing contradiction — or apparent contradiction — within the culture wars themselves: that while their lips speak the words "pro-life," their overall platform is often quite anti-life.



A child and an adult are seen during a demonstration against COVID-19 vaccines and restrictions July 24, 2021, in New York City. (CNS/Reuters/David Delgado)

### **The man with the withered hand**

Between Jesus and the religious traditionalists, sitting on the margins, is the man with a withered hand. He is a concrete, embodied person — probably a poor person — who has long been in need of a healing intervention. But the authoritative champions of tradition have no interest in healing him. Rather, across the synagogue invisibly stretches the law — a wire for Jesus to trip over as he moves to heal the man.

Likewise, in the U.S. for the past 40 years, the culture warriors have positioned the "pro-life" witness as a tripwire separating the church from most policy efforts designed to assist those with withered hands. Purporting to defend "life" from conception to "natural death," the culture warriors focus on a narrow array of actions — almost

exclusively legislative efforts — aimed at *prohibiting* a select set of issues.

Confounding many both within and beyond the church, they also often explicitly champion social policies that directly attack human life — such as the death penalty and war, as Borghesi documents. They often have little to say about the violence against men, women, children and families occurring daily at our southern border. And as far as I can tell, they are standing silently by in the face of the newest culture war tactic, which seeks to target individuals with the penal powers of the state — deputizing neighbors against each other; threatening to jail parents; criminalizing people's travel; and proposing the death penalty for women. (Some have [noted](#) this odd contradiction within neoliberalism itself — a tendency toward authoritarianism that is at odds with their rhetoric of freedom.)

At the same time, they have strenuously resisted and continue to fight against social policies designed to protect human health, well-being and life. Not only did many who had previously been vocally "pro-life" stand unmoved as the global COVID-19 death toll advanced toward what is now [approximately 20 million "excess" deaths](#) that have occurred since February 2020. Prior to this, they had often lobbied against seemingly any issue designed to [promote human life and well-being](#): expanding access to health care via the Affordable Care Act; addressing climate change; combatting the real threats to life experienced daily by people of color; expanding social services to assist the elderly, people with disabilities, children and the poor; reducing military spending; or advancing economic initiatives solidly aligned with Catholic teaching, such as living wage or unionization.

This is the wire Cardinal Joseph Bernardin tripped over when he sought, in the mid-

1980s, to reorient the Catholic pro-life witness by envisaging a different way forward — to bridge all these issues under the umbrella of the consistent ethic of life. The vehemence of the backlash against his vision — especially from those within the Catholic Church — signaled clearly that something else was driving those who were rallying under the banner of "pro-life."

With 30 years of hindsight, it is now easier to see that a key driving force has been [neoliberal idolatry](#). For more important than healing, promoting, preserving and protecting the lives of real people, is the iron law of neoliberal economics: anti-government, anti-tax, anti-social spending, corporate "freedom." In the most charitable reading, the culture warriors are "pro-life" only as long as protecting human life and well-being doesn't require government spending or proactive public/social support. On a more wary reading, the rhetoric of "pro-life" has served to deflect attention from their deeper commitments to a nihilistic ideology that ruthlessly privileges economic profit and individual choice over human lives — a commitment to "an economy," as Pope Francis has so rightly [named](#) it, "that kills."

In the most charitable reading, the culture warriors are "pro-life" only as long as protecting human life and well-being doesn't require government spending or proactive public/social support.

In addition to distorting the Catholic pro-life witness, Catholic anthropology and the teachings of popes from Paul VI forward, one of the most significant ways that the culture warriors have damaged the church's witness is by deploying the tactics of war. To name a few:

- A first tactic is dehumanization. Opponents are labeled as "the aggressor" or "the laptop

class" or some version of the enemy—they are [targeted, maligned and demonized](#), often with mockery, insults and vitriolic ad hominem. As Pope Francis notes in [Fratelli Tutti](#), we hear "verbal violence destructive of others ... with a lack of restraint that could not exist in physical contact without tearing us all apart." Here the casualties are human persons and their dignity.

- A second tactic of war is deception. As we have seen, the culture warriors incessantly misrepresent the Catholic tradition. They likewise misrepresent opponents' positions either again, through partial accounts or, via disinformation, falsely and blithely projecting onto opponents their own actions. Here the casualty is truth.
- A third tactic of war is sophistry. This takes many forms. We hear a rejection or distortion of science. We see assertion rather than careful, thorough, logical argument. Contra Thomas Aquinas, who had no problem learning from the pagan Aristotle and the Muslim Ibn Sina, with whom he disagreed on many points, one iota of difference with another's position renders it anathema wholesale. Or we hear [emotivism](#) — positions based on feelings, such as claims that conscientious objectors need not give reasons for their positions, as long as they "feel [sure](#)." As Alasdair MacIntyre notes, once we move to emotivism, where moral positions are reduced to preferences and feelings, the only way to resolve differences of opinion is by propaganda or force. Here the casualty is reason.
- A fourth tactic of war is vice. Lost are prudence, temperance, charity, humility, mercy, hospitality. Gone is any evidence of the gifts or fruits of the Holy Spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. In the comportment of the culture warriors, one

finds little that is discernably Christian. Here the casualty is virtue.

- And a fifth tactic of war is the intentional targeting of embodied human persons. Not to get too academic, but here I think Michel Foucault's [maxim](#) comes alive: Bodies are the site on which power is contested. It is on the bodies of real people that these issues continue to be fought — bodies like the man with the withered hand — "[throwaway](#)" bodies, as Pope Francis has so rightly named them. Here the casualties are mostly innocent bystanders.

This is what has become of the church's moral and intellectual tradition in the hands of the culture warriors and Catho-capitalists. "Certainly," as Pope Francis says in [Fratelli Tutti](#), "all this calls for an alternative way of thinking." If the Catholic tradition has been distorted by a war grounded in an idolatry to an economy that kills, might the alternative be peace—a peace rooted in a very different economy? To explore this, let's return to the synagogue.

### **The body of Christ**

Jesus calls to the man with the withered hand and invites him to stand up in the middle of the assembly. He seeks to dialogue with the religious traditionalists on their own terms — inviting them to a public discussion of the law. They refuse to respond — because this wasn't about truth; this wasn't about living the law. It was simply about power, with the law — God's gift for the flourishing of God's people — serving as a weapon. Jesus is aggrieved and angry. Like the idols they worship, they have become like stones. He turns to the man and, again, invites him: "Stretch out your hand." And the man does — *he* responds. And in this encounter, the man is healed.

Here is the alternative — the encounter between the body of a marginalized person and the body of God incarnate. This

encounter is the center of this story. It takes place at the center of the religious community. Two bodies come together. And indeed, here in this bodily encounter, power is contested — Jesus' radically different, life-giving power squares off against the death-dealing power of idolatry. And his power is greater. The man is healed ... and freed.

To provide a detailed, theological account of *how* this passage provides an alternate way forward for the post-conciliar church would take all the way to the end of our coffee break after this session and probably to the end of our next panel. I have begun to develop this account [elsewhere](#). Today I simply want to direct our attention to a series of instances where Pope Francis has publicly performed a radically different alternative to that of the culture warriors, an alternative that reprises this Gospel passage.

Return with me to March 28, 2013. Holy Thursday, a mere two weeks after the conclave. Pope Francis, as I'm sure you all remember, kneels before a dozen prisoners — some Muslims, some women — and [washes their feet](#). Year after year he repeats this with a different group of marginalized people, performing the practice that stands in for the Last Supper in John's gospel — tenderly, individually and sacramentally washing, drying and kissing their feet.



Pope Francis washes the foot of a prison inmate during the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's

Supper at Rome's Casal del Marmo prison for minors March 28, 2013. Pope Francis washed the feet of 12 young people of different nationalities and faiths, including at least two Muslims and two women, who are housed at the juvenile detention facility. (CNS/Reuters/L'Osservatore Romano)

Move ahead to July 2013. On his first pastoral visit as pope, Francis visits the tiny island of [Lampedusa](#). Face-to-face, hand-to-hand, he stands surrounded by throngs of refugees — men, women and children who had survived the perilous sea crossing, who had lost not only home and life savings but friends and family members, both at home and to the unforgiving waters. He looks at them, touches them, listens to them, laughs with them, cries with them. And then together, they move to an open-air Mass where he commemorates the thousands of migrants who had died en route.

Fast-forward to August 2021. Where the culture warriors were wielding their interpretation of the law as an instrument of death, Pope Francis declared over and over in a [video](#) that went viral that to be vaccinated against COVID-19 — and importantly to bring the vaccines to all the peoples of the world, particularly the poorest — was an "an act of love."

I could cite many more examples, but let me trace the key features of these three. In the COVID-19 vaccine video, Pope Francis — amplifying Thomas Aquinas — makes clear that at the center of Catholic moral discernment and the Christian life lies a different economy — the virtue of *caritas*, charity, the practice of self-gift or self-emptying love for the good of others. This economy does not derive from some philosophical account of human nature, whether from Friedrich Hayek or even natural law. Rather, it is revealed in the economic Trinity, in God incarnate in Christ

via the supreme act of self-gift — namely, kenosis. In this act, the Trinity's essence of love reached to the farthest periphery from God's divine self, namely us, taking on our nature and showing us via Jesus' life the fullest image of what it means to be a human person.

But God's kenotic self-gift did not stop there. As the Gospels proclaim, God in Christ did not simply assume human nature but pressed through to the farthest peripheries of human existence — per Matthew 25, to the bodies and lives of the hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned, the sick, the poor, the weeping — all who experience the greatest pain, suffering and brokenness, and to death, on the cross.

And God's kenotic self-gift does not stop there. God in Christ presses further to each and every one of us, offering — gratuitously — to engraft us into God's very self, so that we can embody Christ's living presence in the world. The place of this transformative encounter is, of course, the sacraments. Through baptism, or so we say, we become members of Christ's kenotic, reconciling body. This identity, this reality, is reaffirmed renewed, and deepened each time God in Christ encounters us in the Eucharist. There, in the words of St. Augustine and [Benedict XVI](#), "we become what we consume." In the Eucharist, we are again and again and again encountered by the Trinitarian God who is love, *caritas*, self-gift via Christ's endlessly self-emptying body. And we are thereby enabled to go forth into the world, bringing Christ's healing and reconciling love near to those on the peripheries.

But, even then, God's kenotic *caritas* isn't done with us yet. For as we move into the world from the Eucharist — individually as missionary disciples and corporately as the body of Christ, a missionary church — we not only bring Christ. We are encountered

by Christ again — Christ who is present in the sick, the hungry, the thirsty, the lame, the bereft, the poor, the imprisoned, the bombed—and those on all the world's peripheries. As a place where we meet Christ, those on the peripheries become a *locus theologicus*, in fact, a [sacramental locus](#).



Pope Francis is pictured in a video for an ad campaign promoting COVID-19 vaccines throughout the Americas. (CNS screenshot/Courtesy of Ad Council)

Of course, I'm not getting all this from the Holy Father's two-minute commentary in the video on the COVID-19 vaccines, but rather from the wider corpus of his writings and his witness. From *Aparecida* through *Lumen Fidei*, *Laudato Si'*, *Samaritanus Bonus*, to *Fratelli Tutti*, we hear a polarity — one that Borghesi does not mention in his very fine book [The Mind of Pope Francis](#). It is a polarity that moves continuously back and forth between two sacramental locations — the Eucharist and the peripheries. In the work of Pope Francis, we find a dynamic of the Christian life that moves recursively from Christ to Christ and back again; we could say from sacrament to sacrament and back again. Or we could say, the heart of the Christian life is to be those agents where Christ encounters Christ in the recursive dynamic of Trinitarian love.

Now how does one preach this to the world without constantly orating a theological treatise that most people couldn't

understand? You perform it. And that, I would suggest, is what Pope Francis did at Lampedusa; that is what he does every year on Holy Thursday. Here he physically, tangibly, brings Christ to Christ — enveloping Christ's presence on the peripheries within Christ's sacramental presence in the Eucharist. Here, as in the synagogue, two bodies come together — the body of a person who is broken, withered, hurt, invisibly relegated to the margins, and Christ's eucharistic body. Again and again, Pope Francis brings these two together — creates an encounter between these two bodies — unleashing God's extraordinary healing power, both for these individual people as well as for those who see it — which is, of course, evangelization.

And here, he crystallizes in these gestures, the essence of the church. For where we find the body of Christ, we find the church. It is in this recursive movement between the body of Christ in the Eucharist and Christ in the bodies of the poor and marginalized, that the church exists. This, I would suggest, is the dynamic captured in the vision of the Second Vatican Council. Opening with *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the council proclaims that the font of the church is the sacraments — the endless wellspring of God's real presence in the world. Out of the sacraments, the church moves — via all the members in the *communio* of the people of God — into the world through *Gaudium es Spes*, the final document of the council. Here the church meets the world in all its "joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of the [people] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted ... [we rarely hear that latter part of the sentence, right?] ... [these] are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."

What Pope Francis helps us see, via the Argentinian reception of the council in

the *teología del pueblo*, is that this vector is not unidirectional. The Spirit that goes forth into the world via the church as missionary disciple, returns to the church through its encounter with those on the peripheries, thus recursively remaking, renewing — even converting — the church.

Thus, the council gives us a vision of the church rooted in a particular economy — an economy of gift and need that is at the heart of the sacraments. This economy and its Christological anthropology points toward a radically different ecclesiology than that espoused by First Things culture warrior Rusty Reno who [preached](#) to his Napa Institute audience last summer that "We're in a season in which we need to rebuild *the walls* of the church."

This economy and its Christological anthropology points toward a radically different moral theology than that espoused by the culture warriors, not a biopolitics of neoliberalism but instead toward what we might call a "sacramental biopolitics" — a vision of Christian discipleship — both individual and corporate — informed first and foremost by the sacraments and the peripheries and the identity of the God who encounters us there.

### **A sacramental (bio)politics**

Like Jesus in the synagogue, Pope Francis has unmasked the nihilistic idol at the center of this deadly variant of Catholic Americanism. And we know how the Gospel passage ends. Jesus tripped the wire, and "the Pharisees went out and at once began to plot with the Herodians against him, discussing how to [destroy him](#)." Jesus was crucified. [War requires dead bodies](#). Though you might not know it, this war is apparently coming for us. You don't even need to move, it seems, to trip the wire. [As George Weigel put it](#) just this past November, paraphrasing — of all people —

Leon Trotsky: "to my progressive Catholic friends I say: you may not be interested in the culture war, but the culture war is interested in you — and everyone else." So it appears that it's only a matter of time before it comes for us all.

But Jesus was raised and, we proclaim, is present in his body, the church. Thus Pope Francis, the Vicar of Christ, [declares](#): "Never again war!" As he has [insisted](#) almost every day since Feb. 24: "God is only the God of peace, he is not the God of war, and those who support violence profane his name."

As we envisage our way forward, our moral and intellectual traditions must no longer be shaped by a grasp for secular power gained by distorting Catholicism in service of particular political parties and ideologies.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis has called for a better kind of politics — a politics rooted in charity, in love, a politics that prioritizes and seeks peace and human flourishing. He outlines what that might look like for the usual political actors. But if our words are to have any meaning, that better kind of politics must start with the church. There can be no room for anyone who identifies as a "warrior," who profanes Christian witness by using the tactics of war.

As we envisage our way forward, our moral and intellectual traditions must no longer be shaped by a grasp for secular power gained by distorting Catholicism in service of particular political parties and ideologies, nor by, as Pope Francis has [noted](#), "a disjointed multitude of [philosophical] doctrines to be imposed insistently."

Rather, the council points us toward a framework that finds its structure, content and norms in the sacraments (per *Sacrosanctum Concilium*) paired with Catholic social thought (per *Gaudium et*

*Spes*) and shaped by an understanding of each of us as a member of the *communio* of the body of Christ (per Vatican II documents 2-15). Let me sketch three implications of such a framework.

First, such a sacramental-ecclesial framework would suggest that, via our Christological identity given in *baptism*, Catholic moral reflection concerns first (not solely, but first) our own action and character as those reconfigured in Christ as missionary disciples — as both individuals and the corporate body of Christ — rather than with policing the actions of others via lobbying for prohibitive, penalizing legislation carried out by secular authorities.

Instead, it pushes us to ask: how might each and every parish wash the feet of homeless people — or refugees or ex-cons or AIDS patients or opioid users — not only as a symbolic gesture on Holy Thursday but via [concrete, corporate, economic practices](#) that bring them to the center of our churches, just as Jesus brought the man with the withered hand to the center of the synagogue? How might bishops, one might ask, create and foster such a vibrant vision of the *corporate agency* of our parishes in our local communities as a first step in healing our moral fabric?

Second, such a sacramental-ecclesial framework would suggest that, as those reconfigured as embodiments of the Prince of Peace and gifted with the sacrament of *reconciliation*, our moral and intellectual traditions would be grounded at all times in the practices and tactics of peacemaking and reconciliation — commitments, for example, to the infinite dignity of each and every human person — even our enemies — in our actions and words; commitments to truth, honesty and transparency; to reason, knowledge and dialogue; to the practice of virtue, mercy and the fruits of the Holy

Spirit; and to the care and flourishing of all people, especially those who might be accidentally caught in the crossfire.

It might also entirely reorient moral theology, helping us reimagine traditional issues, such as conflicts at the end of life. It might help us see that a [case like that of Terri Schiavo](#) — which I am sure you all remember — is less about treatment decisions than about how tragedy fractures families and their need for reconciliation. It would critique the culture warriors who held vigil and stormed the media in her case, fomenting enmity and hatred rather than embodying the healing and reconciling presence of Christ to her family. How might such a sacramental-ecclesial perspective provide a new, truly post-conciliar framework for the discipline of moral theology?

Finally, such a sacramental-ecclesial framework would suggest that, as a church grounded in the *Eucharist*, the Catholic tradition operates out of a different economic vision, an economy of gift. As Benedict XVI notes in *Deus Caritas Est*, "a Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented." Thus, a Catholic vision that emerges from the theological economy of the Eucharist and moves to the world, pushes us as Catholic intellectuals to draw on a wider array of theoretical resources to make clear the economic and structural dimensions of every issue and to begin to reimagine correlative practices and structures.

At the beginning of *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis speaks of St. Francis and notes: "Wherever he went, he sowed seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters." Let me close with a final gesture of Pope Francis

performing this powerful vision of church — which happened today [March 25] — in which we all participated. Today, on this, the Solemnity of the Annunciation, the Holy Father invited all the bishops of the world, along with their priests, to join him in praying for peace and in consecrating and entrusting Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary during the liturgical Celebration of Penance in Rome. Here, again, he brought Christ's sacramental presence — captured in the gathered global prayer of the church — together with Christ embodied in those at the margins, in this case, in the people caught up in this horrific conflict. For as he [prayed](#) earlier in March:

Lord Jesus, born in the shadows of bombs falling on Kyiv, have mercy on us!

Lord Jesus, who died in a mother's arms in a bunker in Kharkiv, have mercy on us!

Lord Jesus, a 20-year-old sent to the front lines, have mercy on us!

Christ — he proclaims — is a casualty of this, as of every war. For our complicity in this, we join him in praying: "Forgive us for war, O Lord." And so forgiven, might we go forward to reimagine and embody the Catholic tradition in all its Christological light.



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# Catholic groups call for rapid climate action as UN report warns window is closing fast

7 April 2022

by [Brian Roewe](#)



A coal power plant in Neurath, Germany, is seen reflected in a puddle of water Feb. 5, 2020. (CNS/Reuters/Wolfgang Rattay)

Many of the technologies and tactics to avert the worst impacts of climate change exist today. While still a major challenge, what's missing mostly is the political and financial will to wield them at full force.

So says the latest major report from the world's foremost scientific body on climate change. The report, focusing on mitigation efforts to limit rising temperatures, and with it the fallout from increasing heat, was issued Monday, April 4, by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

The report reiterated that immediate, rapid and massive societal shifts this decade are required to meet the world's goal under the Paris Agreement to limit average global temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius — a

threshold that climate scientists say will expose millions of people to increasing droughts, heatwaves and extreme storms, and with it, result in greater rates of poverty, migration and health issues, all consequences expected to harm already vulnerable communities the most.

The [nearly 3,000-page IPCC report](#), compiled by 278 authors from 65 countries, is the third issued by the international scientific group in the past nine months as part of the sixth assessment cycle. The first updated the [physical science of climate change](#), and the second, issued in March, detailed [how climate change is impacting our world](#) and efforts to adapt. A final synthesis report will be released in the fall.

At current emissions rates, the world will burn through its remaining carbon budget to meet the 1.5 C target within approximately eight years, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.



A child in Glasgow, Scotland, holds a placard at a "Fridays for Future" march Nov. 5, 2021, during the U.N. Climate Change Conference. (CNS/Reuters/Dylan Martinez)

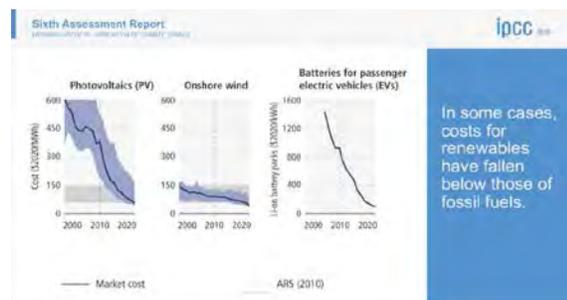
Catholic development groups operating across the world said the latest IPCC report was "[a clarion call](#)" and made clear that countries must focus on "transformative solutions" with no time to waste.

"Its message is crystal clear: we need climate action now in the form of deep and urgent emissions reductions, and well before 2030, to stay below 1.5°C," said CIDSE, a network of Catholic international justice organizations, in a statement. "As Catholic Development agencies, we are inspired by Pope Francis to call for urgent action on the climate emergency."

Salesian Fr. Joshtrom Kureethadam, coordinator of the ecology and creation sector of the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, told EarthBeat that the IPCC report shows that the time to act is now, and the next few years are "crucial" in shaping a habitable world for people today and generations to come. He said it was encouraging that the report documented signs of a renewable energy transition, including renewable energy making up the vast majority of new energy sources in recent years.

"All this is doable if we are willing to change our behavior, if our political leadership is able to step in. But we don't want to wait for others to lead. We think we should be leading our communities," he said.

"We are at a crossroads. The decisions we make now can secure a liveable future," Hoesung Lee, chair of the IPCC, said in a statement. "We have the tools and know-how required to limit warming."



A new report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stated that many of the technologies to limit climate change exist today, but so far national actions have fallen short in implementing them in substantial ways to meet the goals laid out in the Paris Agreement. (EarthBeat screenshot/IPCC)

In a joint statement, U.N. climate chief Patricia Espinosa and Alok Sharma and Sameh Shoukry, the heads of the COP26 and upcoming COP27 U.N. climate conferences, respectively, said the latest IPCC report "makes it clearer than ever that the window of opportunity to achieve [the 1.5 C goal] is rapidly closing."

"Despite the urgency of our task, there is hope. The window for action has not yet closed. ... There is also clear evidence that — with timely and at scale cuts to emissions — countries can pursue a mitigation pathway consistent with limiting global warming" to 1.5 C, they said.

The new mitigation report concluded that the decade from 2010-2019 saw the highest average annual greenhouse gas emissions on record, and were 54% higher than 1990 levels. The carbon emissions released from 2010-2019 accounted for 17% of historical emissions since 1850. While overall emissions dropped slightly in 2020 at the start of the coronavirus pandemic, they rebounded by year's end. And since 2010, global emissions have increased across all major sectors.

"Human-induced climate change is a consequence of more than a century of net GHG emissions from unsustainable energy use, land-use and land use change, lifestyle and patterns of consumption and production," the IPCC report authors wrote.

"Without urgent, effective and equitable mitigation actions, climate change increasingly threatens the health and livelihoods of people around the globe, ecosystem health and biodiversity."

The report reinforced that the release of emissions is uneven. Developed countries are responsible for 57% of historical carbon emissions, compared to .4% from the world's least developed nations, and the richest 10% of households account for between 36% and 45% of emissions.

"Richer countries must urgently kick their addiction to fossil fuels and mass consumption," said Alistair Dutton, director of Scotland Catholic International Aid Fund. "This is the only way to stop the world overheating and leaving a planet that is habitable for future generations. If we don't, our children and grandchildren will never forgive us."



Activists at Esso West London Terminal in Staines, England, hang a sign on a storage tank April 1. (CNS/Reuters/John Sibley)

Global temperatures have risen an average of 1.1 C since the Industrial Revolution at the turn of the 18th century. Countries under the 2015 Paris accord agreed to work to hold temperature rise "well below" 2 C and to strive to limit it to 1.5 C.

So far, the national climate pledges countries issued ahead of COP26 in

Glasgow, [held in November](#), would result in 3.2 C warming, according to the IPCC, or well short of both Paris Agreement targets. At the end of COP26, countries agreed to reassess and submit new climate targets before COP27 later this year in Egypt.

The urgency of climate change has yet to be matched by an equivalent political response. For decades, the fossil fuel industry and its political allies have [sowed doubt about the science](#) and [sought to delay](#) attempts to phase out the use of coal, oil and gas. And recent global events, from Donald Trump's election in the U.S. to the coronavirus pandemic to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, have drained momentum and drawn political attention away from the global threat posed by climate change and the need to transition away from fossil fuels.

Despite that, the IPCC report stressed that a pathway to 1.5 C still exists.

It pointed to positive signs, such as the rapidly declining costs of solar and wind energy, along with lithium-ion batteries, and the rapid expansion of solar energy and electric vehicles. As of 2020, more than 20% of global emissions fell under carbon taxes or emissions trading systems, and 56 countries representing 53% of emissions had passed climate laws to slash greenhouse gases.

But it's also not enough.



Fridays For Future, Sept. 20, 2019 in Bonn, Germany (Unsplash/Mika Baumeister)

The IPCC said that global emissions have to peak no later than 2025 to keep 1.5 C in range, and emissions need to be cut nearly in half by 2030 and reach net-zero by 2050. Even then, the report estimates that average temperature rise will likely overshoot 1.5 C temporarily.

Limiting warming to 1.5 C or 2 C will "involve rapid and deep and in most cases immediate GHG emissions reductions in all sectors," the report stated.

Models in the report achieving the 1.5 target show the world rapidly transitioning from fossil fuels to low- or zero-carbon energy sources. Nearly all electricity would need to come from such sources by midcentury, while the use of coal would fall to near zero, and oil and gas slashed dramatically, with up to \$4 trillion in stranded fossil fuel infrastructure. Further rollout of energy efficiency, especially in buildings, and conservation efforts, through reforestation and ecosystem restoration, are also key facets to cutting emissions, as is designing cities in ways that encourage public transit, reduce energy demand and enhance access to green spaces.

The IPCC said that taking such steps can have co-benefits, including reducing exposure to pollution, improved health and less congestion, and that mitigation tactics are "a necessary part of development," including meeting the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals. It added that "individual behavioral change is insufficient for climate change mitigation unless embedded in structural and cultural change."

Susan Gunn, director, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, said that each of those strategies are "essential for a global just transition" to a world powered by renewable and emissions-free energy.

One area the Catholic organizations disagreed with the report was on the use of carbon capture and storage technologies to pull emissions from the atmosphere, which the IPCC said would be necessary to offset emissions from hard-to-decarbonize sectors. The technology's inclusion was [part of debates that delayed the report's release](#) by several hours.

CIDSE and its members called carbon capture and other negative emissions technologies "false solutions." They have joined environmental groups in saying fossil fuel companies will seek to use those technologies as a means to continue burning more coal, oil and gas. Instead, they have advocated expansive rollouts of renewable energy and agroecology, and for ending all government subsidies for fossil fuels.

"It is never a solution to rely on risky technologies that have not yet developed or proven effective, nor is it a solution to continue accepting more risks already posed to the environment and people because of following mitigation models that rely on such technologies," CIDSE said in its statement.

Another major area for increased activity is investments. Currently, public and private investments for fossil fuels continue to outpace those for climate mitigation and adaptation measures. The report said that financing for clean energy will need to increase 3 to 6 times over current levels.

The good news, the IPCC report said, is that "there is sufficient global capital" to close the investment gaps. The bad news? There are barriers to doing so, such as inadequate assessments of climate-related risks and investment opportunities. The IPCC said that governments can help alleviate risk concerns through "clear signaling" they are aligning state funding with strong climate policies.

The IPCC report said that while the costs of addressing climate change appear high — roughly 2.6%-4.2% losses in global GDP, and in the electricity sector alone, an estimated \$2.3 trillion annually between 2023 and 2052 — inaction will cost far more, both monetarily and the toll on human and other life. "The economic benefits on human health from air quality improvement arising from mitigation action can be of the same order of magnitude as mitigation costs, and potentially even larger," the report said.

In its statement, CIDSE said it was encouraging that the IPCC report highlighted how investor-state dispute settlements can hinder more ambitious climate action by governments over fears that corporations or investors could sue over the impacts on their businesses.

Josianne Gauthier, CIDSE secretary general, said that "corporate power is hindering climate justice" and that a full response to climate change must involve addressing current economic systems.

"As Pope Francis has said, we cannot live within an economy based on insatiable and irresponsible growth. We are motivated to challenge the system based on the direct experiences of people at the forefront of climate change, who need mitigation urgently," she said.

Kureethadam told EarthBeat it's understandable if people find climate reports like the latest from the IPCC disturbing, because it's from that point that they can become aware of the challenges and mobilized to act. He said that people can also draw hope through the actions that are happening, including through the Vatican's [Laudato Si' Action Platform](#) that Francis has invited Catholics across the world to join as a way to embrace sustainability and an ecological conversion.

"People are coming together, so I see that as an element of hope. We don't need to get discouraged," Kureethadam said. "It's urgent, so we cannot afford to postpone. That time is over. The report is so clear."



Brian Roewe

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# Baseball, like religion, can teach us something about enchantment

As MLB's delayed season begins, we're reminded that truth, beauty and enchantment matter

8 April 2022

by [Jacob Lupfer](#), [Religion News Service](#)



A member of the grounds crew ropes off the on-field logo before baseball workouts at Nationals Park, April 6, in Washington. (Alex Brandon/AP)

Slightly delayed by labor negotiations, another Major League Baseball season opened this week. While in the academy it's common to hear theses about [sports as a folk religion](#), the most salient connection between religion and baseball is their increasingly tenuous status as honored institutions in American life.

Faith and the nation's pastime do have elements in common, of course: Both carry forward tradition to give meaning to the present. Both are firmly rooted in

physical reality yet always point to the the unseen, the improbable and even the impossible. Their inherent order is punctuated by moments of ecstasy.

For me, baseball fandom even has Scripture of a sort: Ken Burns' 1994 documentary "Baseball" has brought me back to the game multiple times over the years. The nine episodes, which began dropping a month into the players' strike that had canceled that season's World Series, marked my transition from a player (Little League) to a spectator. Baseball movies of the era — from 1988's "Bull Durham" to the mid-'90s "Angels in the Outfield" — emphasized the emotional and redemptive qualities of the game. Burns added a deep measure of history that gave my barely adolescent self a new reverence for the game.

He also showed quite plainly that baseball's greatest days were in the past.

Religion, too, we are told, is on the decline. Last year, Gallup reported that membership in a faith community in the U.S. had fallen below 50% for the first time in the survey firm's history. Children are less likely to be raised religious than in past generations. Immigration may stem the decline somewhat, but the more devout age cohorts are dying off.

To make itself seem more relevant, religion is tempted to evolve: contemporary music, relaxed sexual standards, easier alliance with one political party or the other. But innovations meant to attract newcomers

are considered by the old guard as impure, even heretical or just tacky.

Baseball's struggles are not so different. From any accounting of popularity, market share or American cultural dominance, baseball seems to be in decline. Whereas 25 million people used to tune in to watch a World Series game in 2003 on average, only 8 million watched in 2019. While all sports viewership has struggled of late, the NFL drew more than 100 million to its championship game this year. As with religion, immigrants and minorities will help: The growing number of Hispanic Americans, the most avid fans, will help, but the game's popularity is not likely coming back.

Numerous rule changes have been proposed and implemented, ostensibly to make games quicker and more exciting: seven-inning doubleheaders, a pitch clock, starting extra innings with a runner on second base and, new for 2022, the use of the designated hitter in the National League. But older die-hard fans often find such innovations to be degradations of what makes baseball so special.

The reasons for baseball's slide, however, go deeper than these innovations, aimed at increased media competition, can solve. More than most sports, baseball depends on fathers teaching it to their sons, but with more broken families and fatherless children than ever before, far fewer children are playing baseball. Even in families that are intact, the younger, digitally native generation trusts its own superior

knowledge of technology above any lore of a game played outdoors with sticks and scraps of leather. But by and large the connections that have sustained baseball for more than 150 years are blinking out.

Baseball should rethink its evangelization strategy. The sport's owners have for too long depended on keeping up attendance for its own sake, luring fans into their stadiums by resorting to fancy food courts to make them destinations for other than their stated business. They have appealed to a long-gone respect for institutions and their place in our personal and national history. ("The tradition is here. The memories are waiting," went the old NBC Game of the Week promo.)



Large sections of empty seats are shown during the sixth inning of a baseball game between the Seattle Mariners and the Texas Rangers at Safeco Field, on Sept. 8, 2015, in Seattle. The announced attendance of 13,389 was the smallest home crowd of the 2015 season for the Mariners. Many MLB teams struggle with low attendance. (Ted S. Warren/AP)

What people want today is not the glorification of an American past but

indelible, life-enhancing experience. From the perfect, dissipated March afternoons of spring training in Florida and Arizona to the unparalleled drama of October baseball, the sport stretches across the year. Americans can follow highlights from 15 games most days through a six-month regular season, played from coast to coast. The grueling 162-day schedule full of cherished rivalries, lamentable injuries and the triumphs of superstars and unlikely heroes alike takes place in something like the eternal now.

In every game, you may see something that has never happened before. Every sport has magical moments; baseball is fundamentally enchanted.

While baseball's obsession with statistics has been used to enshrine its past heroes, data has been remaking the game: Incorporating statistical analysis, teams have upended orthodoxies about which pitchers to start when and positioning players in awkward-looking defensive shifts. These probability-fueled decisions frustrate the old-timers but, unlike pitch clocks and designated hitters, they lean into the inner clockwork of the game, not try to tamper with it.

Baseball is complex enough to confound its most learned devotees. When attention drifts or devotion fades, fans don't come back because you've come up with the right formula of distractions but for a single moment of inspiration.

Religion and baseball aren't substitutes for the other, but they run along parallel tracks in American culture. I will gladly root for both to bring flourishing and

inspiration to a nation that could use some joy, excellence and virtue just now.

After another long winter, it's mercifully time to say: Play ball!

[Jacob Lupfer, a frequent commentator on religion and politics, is a writer and consultant in Baltimore. The views expressed in this commentary do not necessarily represent those of Religion News Service.]

## We all need a 'reset' button

8 April 2022

by Susan Rose Francois

### Spirituality Religious Life



What if life came with a "reset" button that you could push when you got knocked down, and everything would be made right? Think of the reset button at the bowling alley that rights the pins that have been knocked down and thrown against each other, blocking the lane and stopping play. One push of the button and the rack comes down from the sky, wipes the errant pins out of the way, and replaces them with new ones ready to stand straight and face whatever comes their way.

In life of course, there's no magic reset button. We are responsible for righting our own figurative bowling pins in this thing called life, even as we might try not to knock down our neighbor's pins by accident. "I get knocked down," sang the lead singer of Chumbawamba in their 1997 pop hit song, "Tubthumping," "but I get up again, you are never gonna keep me down." (Yes, this song has been stuck in my head as I have been pondering this reflection. If it is now in your head, you are welcome).

No matter our worries, the sun will rise in the morning, and if we are blessed to live another day, so will we. Life goes on. Yet there is also an undeniable weariness that comes from hearing the news of death and destruction raining on innocent families in distant villages, or the stark reality of systemic racism, or the anxiety of the climate emergency. Hearts are broken each day through interpersonal conflicts that seem, in the moment, to be beyond repair. Like Jeremiah (20:10) in the first reading for this Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent, someone somewhere just now has been knocked down by rumor and gossip:

I hear the whisperings of many:  
"Terror on every side!  
Denounce! let us denounce him!"  
All those who were my friends  
are on the watch for any misstep of mine.

Who has not felt this way at some time in their life, whether on the playground or in the board room or even the parish hall? If we are honest, we've probably been on the whispering side too.

No doubt despairing, Jeremiah looks to God for his reset button ... *But the Lord is with me* (Jeremiah 20:11).

The usefulness of my analogy ends here, however, because while Jeremiah finds his

reset in God, he also is counting on God's vengeance against those who denounce him. Vengeance and violence in my experience are not particularly helpful responses; they are also not representative of a God of peace and love.

More and more, I am convinced that we need a collective reset in God's love. We need to know, believe, and rest in God's love and then act accordingly. This is our spiritual crisis point, and the reset is the antidote. Maybe it is just that simple.

I recently had an opportunity to rewatch an interview on racial justice with Fr. Bryan Massingale. "People are not willing to make significant sacrifices," he said, "unless they can see their life as part of a broader religious and spiritual narrative. I think part of our problem is that we have not reached the fact that God loves us immensely. And when I stand in awe of the immensity of God's love, something else takes over, and that is I want to make sure that all human beings are treated as beloved children of God."

We are knocked down, we knock others down, when we don't know in our core that God loves us and everyone else immensely.

The reset is to know who we are and whose we are.



The Sisters of Saint Joseph of Peace at their 2022 chapter (Courtesy of Susan Francois)

Last month, I joined with other members of my religious community, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, for our Congregation Chapter. As [our constitution says](#), the chapter "is the highest decision-making body in the congregation. In this event we celebrate our unity, renew our life and spirit, reflect together on the call of the Gospel, and make decisions in fidelity to our charism." I find it significant that, when discerning our collective response to the signs of today's times, our focus was not so much on *what* we were called to do or *how* to do it, but rather on *who* we are called to be as people of peace.

"These new times demand a change of heart: to be, think, and act differently," we wrote in our Chapter Act, "[To Be Who We Say We Are](#)": "Our spiritual lives require deep re-examination and transformation; our outward actions must confront privilege and power in ourselves and society." Our Chapter Act commits us, in collaboration with others, to:

- Intentional living of interculturality, anti-racism, and inclusion;
- Addressing, healing, and being present to the wounds and broken relationships among ourselves and all of God's creation;
- Resisting every form of war and violence;
- Making a place at the table where all are welcome and gifts are honored.

We embrace these promptings of the Spirit, to be who we say we are, with courage, humility, hope and trust. We have only begun to unpack these words that we call ourselves to live.

During these last days of Lent, I pray for the courage, humility, hope and trust to believe this impossible truth of God's immense love in my innermost being. I pray that you

believe this too. I pray that we live into this reality in ways that only God can imagine.

Ready. Set. Reset.



Susan Rose Francois

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## In Ukraine, the suffering challenges our faith

8 April 2022

by [Michael Sean Winters](#)



Ukrainian soldiers stand next to the grave of a civilian April 6 in Bucha, Ukraine. Local residents said the civilian was killed by Russian soldiers during Russia's invasion of Ukraine. (CNS/Reuters/Alkis Konstantinidis)

It was difficult not to turn away, not to close one's eyes. The [pictures](#) from Bucha, Ukraine, were too painful. The streetscape strewn with dead bodies, their hands tied behind their back. The old woman in what was once a garden, where three corpses now invited the worms instead of spring's flowers.

In a war marked by atrocities that were broadcast in real time around the world, these images were too much. Bad enough to see a bombed-out apartment building, or a hospital that had sustained shelling from distant artillery. The dead of Bucha had been murdered at close range. The perpetrators had seen whom they were killing. Perhaps that fact, the closeness of the murdered to the murderers, accounted for the special horror.

The images were too much for Pope Francis as well. At his [general audience](#) on April 6, he held up a Ukrainian flag brought from the "martyred city" of Bucha and reverently kissed it. It was a remarkable gesture coming from a pope who has been repeatedly skeptical about nationalism and its symbols. The pope invited some Ukrainian refugee children to the stage to join him.

On Sunday, April 10, Latin-rite Christians will begin Holy Week. We will hear the opening Gospel, before processing into the church, in which we join ourselves to the crowd shouting "Hosanna" to Jesus as he entered Jerusalem. Later, the second Gospel will be read, the Passion account, and we will join the crowd shouting, "Crucify him!" The shift from one Gospel to the other is always jarring, a reminder of the often fine line between grace and evil. It will be harder this year, when the crucifixion of Jesus is less remote, not only in the streets of Jerusalem 2,000 years ago but in the streets

of Bucha and Odessa and Mariupol last week. And next week.



Pope Francis kisses a Ukrainian national flag from Bucha as he meets Ukrainian refugees during his general audience in the Paul VI hall April 6 at the Vatican. (CNS/Paul Haring)

Every year, there is the temptation to rush to the end of the story, to hear the account of the empty tomb, first the women and then the apostles sharing the miraculous news: He is risen. We should always resist that temptation to rush ahead. We know how the story ends, but we need to sit with the sense of bewilderment and loss that the followers of Jesus felt as their hope he would be the Messiah crashed in the catastrophe at Golgotha.

This year, the temptation to rush ahead to the end of the story is remote. This year, it is easier to sit with Good Friday and the sense of abandonment by God it invites.

We want to hope with the psalmist, "Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them" ([Psalm 126](#)). But how can we? Instead, we find ourselves muttering the lament:

*How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever?*

*How long will You hide Your face from me?*

*How long shall I take counsel in my soul,  
Having sorrow in my heart all the day?*

*How long will my enemy be exalted over  
me?*

*Consider and answer me, O Lord my God;  
Enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep  
of death ([Psalm 13](#)).*

As we look to the dead in Ukraine, it is easier to remember the crucified Lord than the risen Lord, the God who is broken and beaten and murdered, not the glorified Son of God who reigns above.

All of the usual things we say to ourselves when times are tough seem ridiculous or worse when forced to confront the dead of Bucha. We believe that God is all-loving and all-powerful, but where was that love and that power this past month when they were needed in Ukraine? The people of that country prayed to God for protection and their prayer was not answered. With Jesus, they sigh, "My God, my God why have you abandoned me?"

We Catholics believe in human dignity, but how can we believe in it when such deeds are done? Where is the dignity in that garden with its corpses? What crime did they commit to warrant their execution?

We believe in social justice, but these murders mock our human ability to enact justice. This week, at the Hague, militia leader Ali Kushayb [went on trial](#) for war crimes for his involvement in atrocities in Darfur almost 20 years ago. He is the only defendant from that war. It is better he be held accountable for his evil deeds than not, but the justice seems so small compared to the evil committed. If the war in Ukraine ends tomorrow, if the Russian troops go home and the Russian people overthrow the warmonger and war criminal Vladimir Putin, none of that will bring these dead back to life.

We preach a gospel of solidarity, but how do we exhibit solidarity with the families of the victims? What can repair their loss? Six weeks ago, the neighbors looked at that garden, perhaps still covered in snow, and imagined it soon turning green with new life. Instead, there is new death. The streets now littered with dead were two months ago littered with young lovers stealing a kiss, people riding a bus to work. When a tornado runs through a region, causing devastation and destruction, once the storm has passed, the people of neighboring towns, towns that were spared, come to the aid of their unlucky friends. How to console an entire people, whose lives have been turned into hell, where no towns have been spared?

In the end, we are mute before this suffering. Words fail us and only tears bring solace. We remember that Job's friends tried to explain to him why he suffered and, at the end of the story, God upbraids them for their presumption. We should not emulate them.

Suffering is, ultimately, a mystery just like love, which is the other side of the coin of human fragility. No, that is not right. There is no simile. Suffering and love are the same mystery because only those who love suffer. Suffering, whether in Ukraine today or on Golgotha 2,000 years ago, is the face of love in the midst of evil. As Christians, we must always resist the evil, but we must also embrace the suffering in obedience to the example of the Master.



[Michael Sean Winters](#)

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