

*Articles of Interest*  
*For*  
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# Pope Francis names 16 new cardinal electors, including San Diego's Bishop McElroy

29 May 2022  
by [Christopher White](#)

[Vatican](#)



Cardinals and bishops attend the closing Mass of the Synod of Bishops on young people, the faith and vocational discernment, in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Oct. 28, 2018. (CNS photo/Claudio Peri, pool via Reuters)

**ROME** — Pope Francis on May 29 named 16 new cardinal electors, including Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego, California, along with three Vatican officials and a number of bishops from the global south.

The pope made the announcement at the end of his weekly Sunday Regina Coeli prayer from a window in the Apostolic Palace overlooking St. Peter's Square. Francis said he would install the new cardinals during a

consistory at the Vatican on Saturday, August 27.

McElroy, 68, will become the seventh residential U.S. cardinal under the age of 80 and thus eligible to vote in a papal conclave and the fifth U.S. cardinal named by Pope Francis, joining the ranks of Blase Cupich of Chicago; Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey; Wilton Gregory of Washington, D.C.; and Kevin Farrell, prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life.

The other cardinal electors of the United States are Sean O'Malley of Boston; Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston; and Timothy Dolan of New York, all of whom were named by Pope Benedict XVI.

Among the other new cardinal-designates are Vatican officials Archbishop Arthur Roche, head of the Vatican's liturgy office; Bishop Lazarus You Heung-sik, head of the Vatican's clergy office; and Spanish Archbishop Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, who governs the Vatican City-State.

Prelates from eight archdioceses around the world will also receive the cardinals' red hat from Francis, along with five dioceses that are not traditional cardinal sees.



Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego in October 2019. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

McElroy, who was first made an auxiliary bishop of San Francisco in 2010 and then named bishop of San Diego by Pope Francis in 2015, will be the first cardinal for the Diocese of San Diego.

He has been among the most vocal champions of Pope Francis' pastoral agenda among the U.S. hierarchy, frequently echoing the pope's [prioritization of environmental concerns](#), migration and a more [welcoming approach](#) to LGBTQ persons.

In 2019, McElroy was one of two Americans to be [named](#) by Francis to participate in the Vatican's Synod on the Amazon region, which opened up discussions on celibacy requirements for the priesthood and the possibility of restoring the ministry of women to the diaconate.

"I'm in favor of it," McElroy [told NCR](#) at the time on the question of women deacons. "My view on it is [that] women should be invited into every ministry or activity we have that's not doctrinally precluded," he said.

McElroy's selection by Francis also comes at a time when the U.S. church has been roiled by debates over whether pro-choice Catholic politicians should be denied Communion, most recently led by Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone of San Francisco, California who earlier this month [announced](#) he would bar U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi from receiving the sacrament. McElroy, by contrast, has warned against the ["weaponization"](#) of the Eucharist for political ends.

His elevation to cardinal means that Francis has once again chosen to pass over the more conservative leaning Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez, who heads an

archdiocese that has normally been led by a cardinal. Gomez is also currently the president of the U.S. bishops' conference.

Cupich, one of Francis' closest U.S. allies, told NCR that he is "both happy and yet not really surprised," by the pope's decision to name McElroy to the College of Cardinals. "He is one of the most gifted bishops in the United States, and I think that his nomination today is a sign of the esteem that he has in the life of the church, which is held by the Holy Father," Cupich said.

In a statement, McElroy said he was "stunned and deeply surprised" by the pope's decision to make him a cardinal. McElroy said he prays he can "assist the Holy Father in his pastoral renewal of the Church."

Roche, 72, was [appointed by Francis last May](#) to replace Cardinal Robert Sarah as prefect for the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. He had been the department's No. 2 official since 2012. Prior to that, he was the head of the diocese of Leeds, England.

You, 70, is a new arrival in Rome, having [been appointed](#) last in June as prefect for the Congregation for Clergy, the Vatican office that oversees Catholic priests and deacons around the world. Previously, he led the South Korean Diocese of Daejeon.

The full list of new cardinal electors are:

- Archbishop Arthur Roche, prefect for the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments;
- Bishop Lazarus You Heung-si,; prefect of the Congregation for Clergy;
- Archbishop Fernando Vérgez Alzaga, president of the Governorate of the Vatican

City State and of the Pontifical Commission for the Vatican City State;

- Archbishop Jean-Marc Aveline of Marseille, France;
- Bishop Peter Okpaleke of Ekwulobia, Nigeria;
- Archbishop Leonardo Ulrich Steiner, of Manaus, Brazil;
- Archbishop Filipe Neri António Sebastião di Rosário Ferrão of Goa e Damão, India;
- Bishop Robert Walter McElroy of San Diego, California;
- Archbishop Virgilio Do Carmo Da Silva, of Dili, East Timor;
- Bishop Oscar Cantoni of Como, Italy;
- Archbishop Anthony Poola of Hyderabad, India;
- Archbishop Paulo Cezar Costa of Brasília, Brazil;
- Bishop Richard Kuuia Baawobr of Wa, Ghana;
- Archbishop William Goh Seng Chye of Singapore;
- Archbishop Adalberto Martínez Flores of Asunción, Paraguay; and
- Bishop Giorgio Marengo, the Apostolic prefect of Ulaanbaatar, in Mongolia.

In addition to the new cardinal electors, Francis also named 5 cardinals over the age of 80: retired Archbishop Jorge Enrique Jiménez Carvajal of Cartagena, Colombia; retired Archbishop Lucas Van Looy of Ghent, Belgium; retired Archbishop Arrigo Miglio of Cagliari, Italy; Jesuit Fr. Gianfranco Ghirlanda, a renowned professor of theology and canon law; and Msgr. Fortunato Frezza of the Canon of St. Peter.

The creation of 16 new cardinal electors will put their total number well above the limit of 120 set by Pope Paul VI in 1975. Both

Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI also exceeded that number at various points during their papacies.

As of August 27, there will be 132 electors. (Not counting Cardinal Angelo Becciu, who remains a cardinal in title but renounced "the rights connected to the cardinalate" [in Sept. 2020](#) due to a series of financial scandals for which he is [now on trial](#) at the Vatican.)

At that time, of the 132 electors eligible to vote in a papal conclave, 11 will have been named by John Paul II, 38 by Benedict XVI and 83 by Francis, meaning Francis will have named over 62% of the men who will eventually elect his successor.

The August ceremony will be Francis' eighth consistory for the creation of new cardinals since his election as pontiff in March 2013. He last created new cardinals [in November 2020](#) in a [part-virtual consistory](#) that took place at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.



[Christopher White](#)

Christopher White is the Vatican correspondent for NCR. His email address is [cwhite@ncronline.org](mailto:cwhite@ncronline.org). Follow him on Twitter: [@CWWhiteNCR](#).

# Francis' choice of new Cardinal McElroy an unmistakable sign for US church

29 May 2022

by [Michael Sean Winters](#)

## Vatican



Pope Francis speaking with now Cardinal-designate Robert McElroy of San Diego during a general audience in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican in September 2021. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

The news that Bishop Robert McElroy of San Diego [has been named a cardinal](#) is thrilling. The first American to be named a cardinal who was not already an archbishop or a top Vatican official, McElroy has long been recognized as the leading intellectual among the U.S. bishops. He is America's Newman.

St. John Henry Newman was the Anglican clergyman and Oxford don turned Catholic priest, who emerged as the leading 19th Century theologian of the English-speaking world. He earned many enemies along the way, but Pope Leo XIII recognized his wisdom and named him a cardinal in 1879. His writings were seen as a precursor to the Second Vatican Council just as McElroy's

writings are seen by some as among the finest applications of the teachings of that same council.

NCR has a long association with McElroy. Back in 2010, NCR's Tom Roberts ran [the first national profile of McElroy](#) when he was named an auxiliary bishop of his home city, San Francisco. He has written for us many times, including what remains [the best article on synodality](#) from a U.S. bishop to be published to date.

Understandably, I am very excited by the announcement and extend the new cardinal my best wishes.

One wonders if the official U.S. delegation to the August consistory where McElroy will receive his red might be led by a prominent Catholic who is also from San Francisco: Speaker Nancy Pelosi. What an exciting thought. I wonder if San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone's [ban on Pelosi receiving communion](#) extends to the Diocese of Rome?

There will be some gnashing of teeth in certain conservative circles to be sure. Michael Warsaw, CEO at EWTN, published an article at the National Catholic Register two days before the announcement, entitled, "[A New Era?](#)" Warsaw pointed to Cordileone's action against Pelosi. Right meme; wrong application. It is the McElroy appointment that signals a new era.

A protégé of the late San Francisco Archbishop John Quinn, McElroy carries on Quinn's example of civic engagement by means of intellectual engagement. Very few bishops have the theological depth or range that McElroy brings to virtually any topic. Like Quinn, he is a churchman who sees past and through the often small and sterile public debates of the day to the core values and foundational principles at stake. From

heaven, I think Quinn is smiling broadly at this news.

McElroy was on the receiving end of what I considered the most ill-mannered conduct by a president of the U.S. bishops' conference in my many years of attending their meetings. In 2015, during the debate on the bishops' document on voting, Faithful Citizenship, McElroy made a powerful intervention calling for the bishops to scrap the text and start over. Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, then the conference vice president, [replied brusquely to McElroy](#), commenting on the latter's "rhetorical flourishes" as if rhetoric was the heart of the matter. It was appalling. I wonder what DiNardo thought of the news McElroy will be joining him in the College of Cardinals?

I wonder, too, what Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez, the current president of the conference, thinks of the news. The Holy Father has sent an unmistakable sign: Gomez leads the largest archdiocese in the country, he is the president of the conference, and he is McElroy's Metropolitan Archbishop. Instead of leading the conference in a new direction of unified leadership behind Pope Francis, he joined up [with the Napa Institute crowd](#). By naming one of Gomez's suffragans as cardinal, and not Gomez himself, the pope has rendered an unmistakable sign of the kind of episcopal leadership he is seeking. An unmistakable sign.

There will be plenty of time to reflect on what this means for the U.S. church going forward. Some wondered if this news means McElroy will be transferred to an archbishopric, but I doubt it, at least not right away. The [elevation of Cardinal Joseph Tobin](#) to the archdiocese of Newark shortly after he was named a cardinal in 2015 was different: Tobin's name was already being considered for Newark when the pope

named him a cardinal. Besides, the U.S. church needs a cardinal on the West coast.

What we can say is this: Cardinal-designate McElroy has long been seen as the intellectual leader of those bishops most closely aligned with Francis, and the pope has confirmed that assessment. Like Newman, he knows the Catholic tradition in detail and applies it with dexterity and fidelity, and he is unafraid of new challenges. It is a thrilling day for the church in the United States. Thrilling.



Michael Sean Winters

Michael Sean Winters covers the nexus of religion and politics for NCR.

## Pope Francis, Ukraine and effective nonviolent resistance

30 May 2022

by [Eli McCarthy](#)



A bird sits on a cross amid newly made graves at a cemetery near Mariupol, Ukraine, May 15. (CNS/Reuters/Alexander Ermochenko)

So much energy is being expended to urge Pope Francis to justify violent resistance. The latest episode of this is the war in Ukraine. Journalists, scholars, politicians and some religious continue to press the pope to join the chorus of people perpetuating the violent dynamic.

My sense is that the pope is trying to shift our gaze. It is a shift that he senses Jesus models. A shift toward pastoral accompaniment and a focus on how we might break the violent dynamic. It is not about condemning or judging people in very difficult situations, like some Ukrainians who choose to take up arms in violent defense of their country. It affirms and admires their willingness to take a high-risk stand against injustice rather than to be passive. At that same time, it is also not about justifying methods of war and enabling the violent dynamic to perpetuate and spread.

Francis speaks of accompaniment as the way of God, as [in his March 20 Angelus address](#): "God trusts us and accompanies us with patience. He does not get discouraged, but always instills hope in us. ... He does not keep track of your shortcomings but encourages your potential. ... In this way God accompanies us: with closeness, mercy, and tenderness."

Such accompaniment is being done in a variety of creative, courageous, [nonviolent ways](#) by Francis as well as by Ukrainians and others. It also includes humanitarian resource provision, identifying credible messengers and persistent [needs-based](#) diplomacy, coalition building, consistent public statements, impacting

Russian leaders' [sources of power](#), prayer and shared physical risk.

Examples of Ukrainian nonviolent action include them [blocking](#) convoys and tanks, and standing [their ground](#) even as warning [shots were fired](#) in multiple towns. In [Berdyansk](#) and Kulykivka, people organized peace rallies and convinced the Russian military to get out. Hundreds [protested](#) the abduction of a mayor, and there have [been protests](#) and [refusals to shift to the ruble](#) in Kherson to resist becoming a breakaway state.

Ukrainians have fraternized with Russian [soldiers to lower](#) their morale and stimulate [defections](#). Ukrainians have courageously evacuated many people from dangerous areas. The Ukrainian [League of Mediators](#) is helping address increasing polarization within Ukrainian families and communities, in order to minimize the violence.

Russians have participated in numerous anti-war protests, and around 15,000 people have been arrested. Journalists have [interrupted](#) and [resigned](#) from state TV. Nearly 100,000 Russians from a variety of sectors have signed petitions to end the war. Russians from all parts of society have spoken out against the war — from members of the [military](#) and connected to the [foreign ministry](#) to members of the Russian [oil industry](#) and billionaires, as well as nearly 300 [Russian Orthodox](#) clerics. Meanwhile, [hundreds](#) of soldiers have [refused](#) to take part.

There are additional ways we can support peacebuilders and nonviolent activists in Ukraine by creating coordination hubs with diplomatic, legal and material assistance; amplifying their stories; supporting unarmed civilian protection units already on the

ground; sending waves of peacebuilder or religious leader delegations to Kyiv and perhaps other cities in Ukraine; and encouraging a focus on diplomatic solutions.



Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, head of external relations for the Russian Orthodox Church, participate in a video meeting with Pope Francis and Swiss Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, March 16. (CNS/courtesy Russian Orthodox Church)

For Francis, accompaniment is about not perpetuating the violent dynamic as much as possible.

"There was a time, even in our churches, when people spoke of a holy war or a just war," the pope told Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill [in their March 16 video meeting](#). "Today we cannot speak in this manner. A Christian awareness of the importance of peace has developed. Wars are always unjust, since it is the people of God who pay. Our hearts cannot but weep before the children and women killed, along with all the victims of war. War is never the way."

At the same time, the pope is not calling us to passivity or surrender in the face of aggression, as he made clear in his message [for the 2017 World Day of Peace](#). As he told an Italian women's group [in March](#): "The real answer is not more

weapons, more sanctions, or more political-military alliances," but rather a different approach, "a different way of governing the world." What is the way about? Francis points to the school of Jesus, of Gandhi and particularly of "women who have cultivated and cherished life."

Francis invites us into recognizing conflict as a process with a long-term view, both forward and backward.

During a press conference [in April](#) as he flew back from Malta, Francis said: "They fought for the strategy of peace. ... Not by chance, at the beginning of the Bible, there is this problem: the 'Cainian' spirit to *kill* instead of the spirit of peace." These schools and models illuminate how there may be other ways of defense or resistance to aggression that are more nonviolent, and also perhaps more effective at saving more lives.

In their 2011 volume, [Why Civil Resistance Works](#), researchers Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan analyzed more than 300 contemporary cases and showed that nonviolent resistance is twice as effective as violent resistance and at least 10 times more likely to lead to durable democracy, including against authoritarians. Additional research has corroborated these patterns. This is notable in light of many claims that violent resistance is necessary to defend democracy. Francis invites us into recognizing conflict as a process with a long-term view, both forward and backward.

Such research shows why war not only makes it at minimum harder for a durable democracy but also is "the [suicide of humanity](#)" and a defeat for humanity, as Francis exclaims. War, therefore, is not consistent with a 'humanitarian' initiative or activity in accord with human dignity. Pope Francis [explains](#) that war is a "stinging

defeat before the forces of evil," rather than a necessity to confront evil.



Local residents gather outside an apartment building damaged during Ukraine-Russia conflict in the southern port city of Mariupol, Ukraine, May 15. (CNS/Reuters/Alexander Ermochenko)

Yes, Russian leaders invaded Ukraine and bear principal responsibility for the war. Kirill is also enabling this violence and the traumatization of the Ukrainian people. All leaders involved in diplomatic negotiations will need to make significant alterations to end the war, save lives, and create space to build a new future. Francis is trying to influence these and other key stakeholders in the conflict, yet he will need our support, collaboration and, especially, shared focus.

In turn, it seems Francis invites our focus to center on accompaniment and breaking, interrupting the logic or dynamic of violence, rather than justifications for war. This is what will more likely prevent and limit war, as well as help us to prioritize abolishing war rather than regularly trying, futilely, to 'humanize' war.

As Francis [explained](#) in his March 27 Angelus address: "Before the danger of self-destruction, may humanity understand that the moment has come to abolish war, to erase it from human history before it erases human history!"

Pointing to statistics that show half of all Ukrainian children are now displaced, the pope said this is what it means to destroy the future, "causing dramatic trauma in the lives of the smallest and most innocent among us."



Eli McCarthy

Eli McCarthy is a professor at Georgetown University in justice and peace studies, a steering committee member of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative, a project of Pax Christi International, and the director of the DC Peace Team.

## **Panelists come face-to-face with white supremacy and the sin of racism**

30 May 2022

by The Life Panelists



A man at a Tops supermarket in Buffalo, New York, lights a candle May 16 for the victims of a May 14 mass shooting that authorities said was motivated by racism. (CNS/Reuters/Brendan McDermid)

As the United States reels from a racially motivated mass shooting in Buffalo, New York, the panelists for The Life joined other thoughtful people these days in considering this question:

*Has your congregation or have you personally come face-to-face with your own internalized racist/caste superiority or internalized racist/caste oppression? What happened next?*



**Celeste Larroque, a member of the Sisters of the Eucharistic Covenant, is a native of southern Louisiana. She has been in religious life for 47 years and currently is on her community's leadership team. She resides in Lafayette, Louisiana. A licensed clinical social worker, she has spent her career primarily in the areas of social services and psychotherapy. Currently, she is the delegate for religious in the Lafayette Diocese.**

It's about the elephant in the room. Downcast eyes, a cautioning glance between acquaintances, a tightness around your heart — all responses to an inappropriate comment about race spoken out loud by another, or even me. This is Adam's sin, that

inherent struggle of seeking and maintaining power over others. It is an almost-insatiable thirst for domination to the degree of subjecting others to durable submission.



A restored tenant house on Laura Plantation in Vacherie, Louisiana. After the Civil War, many slaves remained on plantations to become tenant farmers in attempts to support their families. (Celeste Larroque)

I was born and raised in the latter days of the Jim Crow era in a small Southern village bordered by gravel roads and small-town pride. The schools were segregated, and most Black families lived "across the tracks" while white families lived along the lush, lazy bayou that snaked through town. There were Black families who lived across that bayou in tenant houses still attached to large functioning white family farms known as "plantations."

As a young white child in a white middle-class community of family and friends, the very first time I can recall the shame of white privilege is the memory of being a small child going to the doctor's office in town with my mother. I saw Black people exiting the office, but when we got to the waiting room, there were never any Black people sitting there.

When I asked my mother where they were, she whispered, "The colored people have their own waiting room."

I immediately picked up that this was not a special waiting room with sweet snacks for the kids. Right away, I knew this did not make sense, and I immediately felt something shifting deep inside my soul. This was not a rational situation. So I just kept quiet — for a long, long time. In the seeds of a small child's conscience there emerged the constant incongruity of living in a social and spiritual parallel existence within my small community.

What is the remedy to such a malady of soul and mind? I have come to know that the only remedy is hope. It is a hope that has survived the most horrifying exercises of hate and despair throughout all of history. It is a hope seen sometimes but unseen at others. But it remains. It is Easter hope. It is Jesus Christ, through his own suffering, death and rising, telling us that the hope is there, and it is everlasting. We have only to reach out for it.

Resurrection comes at a price, but the joy of Easter Sunday comes to us on the wings of hope. May our eyes and hearts forever be opened. Alleluia!



**Annette Arnold is a Sister of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart from Rockhampton, Queensland, Australia. She has an academic background in education, counseling, community development, mission studies, professional supervision and spiritual direction. She has taught in primary and secondary schools and conducted high school retreats and counseling. She has also worked as the executive office of the Brisbane Archdiocese's justice and peace commission and as the coordinator of the social action office of religious congregations. She has worked with First Nations women preparing to coordinate a safe house for victims of domestic violence and has served on her congregation's provincial and general councils and as a regional leader. She currently works in spiritual direction and professional supervision.**

I was standing with colleagues in a line in a café, just chatting, waiting to be served. The person behind the counter singled me out and asked what I wanted. I was confused and said that there were people ahead of me on the line. The penny dropped; I was the only white person in the group. The rest were First Nations people!

This is a real and significant example of the level of racism that exists in our country.

As one First Nations member of the New South Wales State parliament said, "You don't have to scratch the surface too hard in this country to find an awful underbelly of racism." Racism, like it or not, is alive and well — and for me personally, it is an ongoing journey of conversation of heart, compassion and action.

I have lived and worked closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and have learned so much with and from them. Sometimes the journey has been full of awe and wonder, and at other times full of deep pain as I encounter the unfathomable levels of deep loss and pain: of country, culture, family, language and identity.



Noonga Place, the reconciliation garden in front of the regional house of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Sacred Heart in Nundah, Queensland, Australia, is a joint project between the sisters, the local Indigenous reconciliation group, and students and staff of the college across the road. (Courtesy of Annette Arnold)

The most significant things that have taken me to deeper levels of awareness and consciousness have been the honest engagement in interpersonal relationships

with individual First Nations people and the white privilege workshops in which I have participated. The knowledge gained in the workshops was critical in understanding just how tiny the number of white people are on this planet, yet we have so much unearned privilege, assets and power — and the devastating effects this has on people already suffering deeply from the ongoing impacts of colonization.

It gave me the opportunity to listen carefully to the personal stories of First Nations people and the impacts of white privilege on their lives. It called me to know and face who I really am as a white middle-class woman and invited me into deep conversion, understanding and compassion.

Over decades, the empowerment and well-being of First Peoples has been both a priority and commitment of our congregation, particularly through education at all levels, community development work, doing advocacy and lobbying in partnership and solidarity with First Nations people, and often raising our corporate voice over the serious ongoing injustices in our country.

Our sisters, too, have had many opportunities to learn, understand and face racism within, but this is a very personal invitation and call to conversion, so it is up to each one to continue to commit to that lifelong journey.



**Elis Weber is a member of the Medical Missionaries of Mary in Ireland. She ministered in Angola as a nurse/midwife and in nursing education. In Boston, she wrote newsletters and appeals to benefactors. She currently ministers at the motherhouse in Drogheda, Ireland, working with elderly sisters, staffing the switchboard, and writing for the congregational newsletter and other newspapers.**

Racism has been a part of the human condition since the beginning of time. We all have internalized racism, whether we realize it or not. Divisions caused by color, race, religion, nationality: All have the potential to create havoc, often resulting in atrocious abuses of human rights and even death.

I am a member of an international congregation, the Medical Missionaries of Mary, founded by an Irishwoman, and most of our older sisters are Irish. When the congregation was founded in 1937, Ireland was a small, isolated country with little experience of other countries except as destinations for emigrating Irish. So we had little contact with other nationalities.

I grew up in Dublin. My childhood memories were generally happy ones except for one thing: My elders indirectly made it

clear that everything English was bad — the country, the people, the music, everything! I hardly knew where England was, but as a child, I believed anything I was told.

If an international rugby match was being broadcast on the radio and England was playing, as soon as "God save the Queen" (the English national anthem) came on, our radio was turned off and only turned back on when the match started. I worried about my uncles, Paddy and George, who worked over there, wondering how they were surviving in that "terrible" country. The why of this antagonism was never really explained.

Fast-forward a number of years. Horror of horrors, I acquired an English brother-in-law! He and my sister lived in England, so I only saw them once or twice a year. When I did meet him, he seemed to be a really nice person with a gentle manner, a sense of humor, and — when the children arrived — a wonderful father. I presumed he was the exception.

Some years later, I entered an international congregation and now lived with sisters of different nationalities, including English. Again, I was in for a surprise: These sisters were nice, especially one who was in the novitiate with me. By now, I was an adult and realized that my understanding of Ireland's next-door neighbor was appallingly wrong.

But how could it be otherwise? How does a country oppressed unjustly by a foreign power for many years come to terms with its past? One denies or ignores it at one's peril. Facing it with dignity and objectivity, focusing on the positive and trying to see a broader picture helps. Forgiving those who unjustly offended is of course the answer but is not always easy.

However, it is important to engage in the process, regardless of what aspect of racism we are trying to change.

I now try to respect all people with whom I come in contact, avoiding generalizations and presumptions. I also include in my prayer both the perpetrators and the victims of racism.



**Maryann Agnes Mueller is a Felician Sister of North America. Before her entrance into the congregation, she worked as a dietician and research tech in cholesterol metabolism. Later, she worked as a certified diabetes educator and taught science in high school. Now, she serves as the full-time justice and peace coordinator for the Felician Sisters of North America in Enfield, Connecticut, and edits the congregational justice and peace newsletter. She serves on several boards; among them is U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking, for whom she publishes the Stop Trafficking Newsletter.**

On the day that George Floyd was arrested and murdered, Amy Cooper, a white woman, walked her dog without a leash in Central Park in New York. When asked by Christian Cooper, a Black man who was in the park bird-watching, to leash her dog as

required by law, Amy placed a call to 911, reporting that an African American man was threatening her: "There is an African American man — I am in Central Park — he is recording me and threatening myself and my dog. Please send the cops immediately."

Christian recorded the events on his cellphone, and the video soon went viral.



Woman holds up sign at a Black Lives Matter protest in Washington, D.C., June 6, 2020. (Unsplash/Clay Banks)

Looking at that video, I found myself rooting for Christian and was relieved when Amy was later charged with filing a false police report. However, at the end of the video, I paused and stared at the computer screen. In my heart and stomach, I knew that I saw a little of myself in Amy Cooper.

In the weeks that followed, I realized how subtle my complicity could be concerning racism as I paid attention to my feelings of superiority or thoughts of "othering" another human being. I realized how much I had adapted to thinking that supports the status quo of white privilege.

Over the years, I have read books on racism and even initiated online book discussions around Jim Wallis' book *America's Original Sin*. I thought I knew about and

acknowledged racism as systemic injustice, but I was largely unconscious of how deeply the normalcy of white superiority is embedded in my consciousness.

Since the summer of 2020, I have intentionally looked for opportunities to participate in small-group discussions online with those of other cultures and allow myself to lean into my discomfort and stay engaged in the often-challenging conversations. At times, I force myself to keep quiet and listen, acknowledging this is partly out of fear of opening my mouth, saying something inappropriate or perhaps hurtful.

I recognize that I need God's help to help me listen to other voices. When I reflect upon what I have heard, I can then confront my resistance to change and growth, again only with God's help.

Finally, I know I can only help dismantle racism by calling it out in myself. To quote [James Baldwin](#), "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." I pray for the courage not to be silent in the face of injustice and to take action to defend the dignity of all my brothers and sisters.



**Jane Aseltyne is in first vows with the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart**

**of Mary in Monroe, Michigan. Before entering, she served as the communications manager at A Nun's Life Ministry and worked in various ministries focused on disenfranchised populations, including teenagers and the elderly. Currently, she is a graduate student at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, pursuing a master's degree in systematic theology and spirituality, and is involved in the Together Program, an intercultural cohort of young women religious who are studying at Catholic Theological Union and living in community.**

As a white woman in a predominantly white congregation, it is not only critically necessary but part of our own prophetic calling as religious to confront the sin of racism. For many congregations, that means reexamining our history, and for my congregation in particular, that starts at our very foundation.

Our co-founder, [Theresa Maxis Duchemin](#), was the daughter of a Haitian woman and an English man. She was a founding member of the [Oblate Sisters of Providence](#), a congregation established by women of African descent. While serving as superior, she was approached by Louis Florent Gillet, a Redemptorist priest, who invited her to establish a new community in Michigan that would become the [Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary](#).

Unsure if the Oblates would survive because of the oppressive racism within both church and civil society, Maxis left the Oblate Sisters of Providence in search of a more stable religious life. She was light-skinned and could pass as white, especially in a place where no one knew her heritage.

No one, that is, except Bishop Peter Paul Lefevère of Detroit. Lefevère welcomed a

group of teaching sisters in his diocese, and so he tolerated Maxis. Yet, surviving documents reveal Lefevère's disdain for people of color. And eventually, so did his actions. He increasingly placed restrictions on Maxis and even appointed a priest as director-superior of the community over Maxis. Eventually, she was forced to leave Monroe.

Maxis lived for a time in the Immaculate Heart of Mary missions in Pennsylvania, which later became the separate foundations of Scranton and Immaculata. Angry about these missions outside of his diocese, Lefevère officially dismissed and banned Maxis from the Monroe foundation, forbidding the Monroe IHMs from contacting or even mentioning Maxis or their Pennsylvania sisters.

Because of the suppression, Maxis' role as co-founder of the IHMs, along with Gillet, was not acknowledged by the Monroe IHMs until the 1940s, when historian Immaculate Heart of Mary Sr. Rosalita Kelly wrote our history. With a renewed understanding of Maxis as co-founder, the Monroe IHMs joined with the other two Immaculate Heart of Mary congregations to continue unearthing the true story of our foundation. We have worked closely, too, with the Oblate Sisters of Providence.



Participants at the 2019 Healing Racism Workshop of the Oblate Sisters of Providence and the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Courtesy of Jane Aseltyne)

For our mostly white IHM congregations, facing our racism has been a big first step, but certainly not our last.

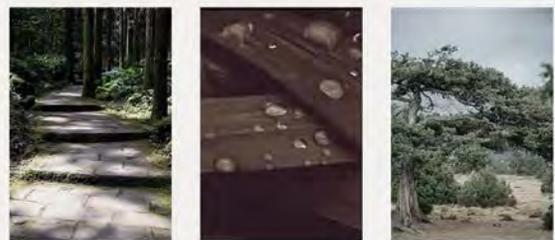
Every few years, the two communities gather for a Healing Racism workshop in which we share our stories and listen deeply to one another, including the great suffering caused by our racism. The 2019 workshop challenged me to continue to confront my racism and acknowledge how my skin color allows me to occupy spaces freely in stark contrast with the reality for our sisters of color.

Dismantling racism is an urgent necessity, and it begins at home in our own hearts and in our congregations. Corporate statements are important, but they are not enough. We must put our words into action. We must be true to the prophetic call of religious life. If we are not willing to tell the truth about our racist history, attitudes and behaviors, how can we call ourselves prophetic?

Monday, 30 May 2022

## Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Twenty-Two: Expanding Our Vision

### Seeing All the Things

*For Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis, religion at its best teaches us how to “see” with greater clarity, which increases our courage and capacity to love ourselves, others, even our enemies.*

In its truest sense, religion should reconnect human beings—bind them again—to the

creation, to one another, to the divine, to love. Religion should reveal to us how much we need one another to survive and thrive. Religion should be revelatory and revolutionary, helping us see how our biases about color, gender, sexuality, and class cause deep hurt to both body and soul. . . . The teaching of rabbi Jesus is simple: Love God. Love neighbor. Love self. Love period. . . .

At a lecture in Israel, I heard one of my favorite rabbis, Donniel Hartman, say, “A life of faith isn’t just about walking with God, but how one walks with humanity. *The core feature of a moral life is to see.* Choosing not to see is immoral. The goal of religion is to improve our willingness and our ability to see.” A spiritual life is supposed to help us see better. The aim of Love, and any God worth worshipping, is improved sight. . . .

An ethical and moral life is about letting go of indifference and *learning how to see.* It’s about waking up to love ourselves, love our posse, and love our world. Imagine love as our shared spiritual practice, binding us to one another, enabling us to see our connection—that we are kin. . . .

In order to live a moral life, a good life, an *ubuntu* life [1], we must commit to a life of love that means *seeing all the things.* See your neighbor suffering and do something about it. See a stranger laboring under a heavy load and help out. See lies spoken and shared in social media and call foul. See a friend soaring, and say, “I see you, beautiful creature!” to build their self-love tank. . . .

Friend, you are the only one standing where you stand, seeing what you see, with your vantage point, your story. You are right there for a reason: to have, as my dear friend Ruby Sales says, “hindsight, insight, and

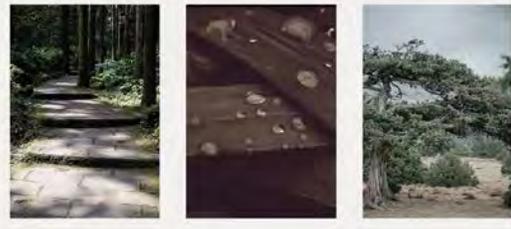
foresight.” I want us to learn to see, with our eyes wide open, how best to be healers and transformers. I want us to really see, *to fully awaken,* to the hot-mess times we are in *and* to the *incredible* power we have to love ourselves into wellness. . . .

I want us open to revelation, not afraid of it, and open to the ways that it will provoke us to believe assiduously in how lovable we each are, and in the love between us and among us because, actually, *believing is seeing.* Believing is seeing our connection: We are one.

Tuesday, 31 May 2022

## Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Twenty-Two: Expanding Our Vision

### Seeing Jesus Again

*In the latest season of the CAC podcast Learning How to See, Diana Butler Bass speaks about seeing Christianity in a fresh way:*

The question of how we see, and what the lenses are that allow us to understand our lives and the world more deeply is a question that I’ve cared about for a really long time. . . . How do we understand where and how the divine, where God, the Holy Spirit is operating in our lives, in our institutions, and the world around us? What gives us the capacity to even understand any of that? . . . In the latest book [*Freeing Jesus*], what I really wanted to do is settle down to the basic issue, or the basic central reality of Christianity. Because people

started asking me about ten years ago, “Why do you stay Christian?” . . . And I’d have all sorts of fancy answers and then I’d just say, well, it’s because of Jesus. . . .

That’s where I wanted to go, and think about: who is Jesus really? Who has Jesus been for me? And why has that been so central to my own life story? . . . And I think where *Freeing Jesus* has taken me is that somehow staying Christian is about staying in and with and through Jesus. Jesus has everything to do with it. And that really matters to me. Yet Jesus has not stayed the same for me through my whole life’s journey. And so, I’ve had to be open to understanding that, even though there’s one verse in Hebrews that says “Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever” [Hebrews 13:8], I have not stayed the same yesterday, today, and forever. The church does not stay the same yesterday, today, and forever. And so, in a very real way, Jesus has changed for me. Jesus changes for the world. Jesus changes for the institutions of faith, for the church. . . . If you’re not doing that kind of work, of letting the end of one image emerge for you and a new image of Jesus be born for you, you’re probably in a pretty static place in your own faith.

*In Freeing Jesus, Bass describes our relationship with Jesus as a dynamic opportunity to see God and ourselves perpetually anew:*

If we think that being with Jesus means getting the right answers from a creed or remembering points of doctrine from a sermon, we probably will not manage to truly know Jesus. We will only succeed in keeping the right responses scribbled on some back page of our memory. “Who are you, Lord?” [Acts 9:3–5] is the question of a lifetime, to be asked and experienced over and over again. That query frees Jesus to show up in our lives over and over again,

and entails remembering where we first met, how we struggled with each other along the road, and what we learned in the process. [1]

## On serving both God and guns, and banning someone from the Eucharist

1 June 2022

by [Daniel P. Horan](#)



People seen in front the Uvalde County Courthouse in Texas, May 26, mourn the victims of the mass shooting at Robb Elementary School. (CNS/Reuters/Veronica G. Cardenas)

Today the meaning of "religion" is universally recognized as tied to a particular institution, community, or system of beliefs and practices. We talk about "world religions" and interreligious dialogue. We ask people to identify their religious affiliation in surveys and censuses. We contrast the qualifiers "religious" and "secular" in determining spheres of influence and cultural differences.

While these contemporary usages are meaningful and worthwhile, I have been reflecting on the Latin origins of the English

word "religion" recently in light of several tragedies that have shaken the nation these last few weeks.

Let me explain.

The English word "religion" comes from the Latin word *religio*, which itself arose from a compound Latin verb *religare*. The suffix "re" is pretty self-evident in its meaning: to do again. But the root word *ligare*, which is the foundation of our modern English word "ligature," means "to bind" or "tie" or "connect."

Those of us in professed *religious* life understand the medieval usage of this term to describe being bound to a particular *regula*, a "rule" or way of life, such as that of St. Benedict, St. Francis, or St. Clare. You belong to a religion insofar as you are bound, tied or connected to a distinctive way of life, tradition or community.

In this sense, to talk about *belonging* to a religion is more fundamental than merely selecting from among and affiliating with one of a long list of recognized faith institutions. One's religion is more basic and more personal. It is about those matters of faith, those principles, those beliefs, and those communities we bind ourselves to in practice and deed, if not always in word. Our true religion is also that which we prioritize over other competing interests.

Therefore, and quite seriously, one might publicly claim to affiliate with an institution or community popularly identified as a "religion" (e.g., Christianity, Judaism, Islam, etc.) and yet bind themselves to something that is more fundamental, takes greater precedence, and is more deeply influential as a way of life or guiding force.

Since my [last column](#) two weeks ago about the racist mass shooting in Buffalo, we have witnessed another horrific [mass shooting](#), this time at an elementary school, resulting in the murder of [19 children and two adults](#). In the wake of this unspeakable horror there have been a lot of self-identified Christians who have taken to social media and public forums to defend an unrestricted "right" to gun ownership, including that of personal weapons of mass destruction such as the [assault rifles](#) used in Texas and in so many mass shootings.

The irony has not been lost on me that many of these same self-identified Christians have also been some of the most vocal proponents of a narrowly defined "pro-life" movement that has sought to overturn *Roe v. Wade* under the guise of "saving the lives of children." And yet, when a classroom of children are murdered by weapons that have no business being in the hands of — frankly — anybody, the tune changes dramatically and the "right to bear arms" supersedes children's "right to life."

In addition to the rank hypocrisy on full display, there is another revelation that comes with such protestations favoring guns over the lives of children: the *true* religion of such people.

There is no accurate way to read the canonical Gospels and reflect on the breadth of Christian tradition and come away with a view that Jesus of Nazareth would support the "right" to bear arms without qualification.

The way to identify one's true religion is to see what they care about the most. What does one love more than anything else? What is one passionate about above all? When conflicting values or interests surface, what is chosen? What is prioritized? What is your nonnegotiable principle?

This is how you come to identify that to which one is truly bound or connected or tied, regardless of verbal claims to the contrary.

In the case of the defenders of unmitigated gun "rights," those who claim Christianity as their religion with their mouths betray the uncomfortable truth that they have embraced a false god they love more than the God of Jesus Christ with their actions.

There is no accurate way to read the canonical Gospels and reflect on the breadth of Christian tradition and come away with a view that Jesus of Nazareth would support the "right" to bear arms without qualification. This is especially true in the wake of the nightmarish context of 19 children's bodies disfigured, ripped apart, killed and identifiable in some cases only by DNA testing, lying dead on a classroom floor.

To paraphrase one of Jesus' own teachings, you cannot serve both God and guns. To those who find themselves trying to square the circle of their demonstrated love of guns and alleged love of God, I ask: Seriously, what is your true religion?

There has been another, albeit less serious and less consequential, tragedy that took place during these last two weeks. San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone took it upon himself to use the Eucharist as a political weapon and a fundraising rallying cry. Issuing [a statement](#) on May 20 that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) is not "to be admitted" to Communion because of her political support for legal access to safe medical abortions, Cordileone claimed to be acting in a manner "fulfilling [his] pastoral duty."

This sort of reasoning is common among culture warrior bishops and other clergy who

claim to be offering what might be described as pastoral "tough love," suggesting that such public denunciations of politicians is a form of "charity" to encourage said public figures to get their spiritual houses in order.



San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone speaks during a Nov. 17, 2021, session of the bishops' fall general assembly in Baltimore. (CNS/Bob Roller)

I don't disagree with a pastor's duty to care for the souls of his flock, as it were, but I do object in the strongest terms to the reduction of the Eucharist to an ideological pawn, a political weapon, and a tool of forceful coercion.

Recourse to the Code of Canon Law, which is often the thing such bishops rely on, is problematic in cases like this because it is not precedential but aspirational, not an answer book but a theological text.

It is a scandal, a stumbling block to the faith — as so many attest, including a [journalist in the San Francisco](#) area who recently wrote about this case — to treat the Blessed Sacrament with such sickening disrespect. Christ's sacramental presence in the Eucharist does not belong to the archbishop of San Francisco or any other bishop or any priest for that matter. It is a gift given to the

living body of Christ, the church, which is composed only of sinners, including Cordileone himself.

According to Christianity, God became human and in his relatively short public ministry, he prioritized ministering to and table fellowship with public sinners and those on the margins of society. Famously, he shared the sacrament of his body at the Last Supper with the betrayers, deniers, thieves, and other miscreants that he personally invited to follow him and to whom he handed on the ministry of his divine love. When church leaders like Cordileone act in the way that he has — contrary to the example of [Pope Francis](#) and Washington [Cardinal Wilton Gregory](#), among others — he not only commits pastoral malpractice, but also reveals his *true* religion.

To what or whom does Cordileone bind himself? What takes priority in his decision-making and administrative choices?

Some people might say, "We can't judge somebody's true religion based on this one instance." However, there is a pattern of public positions, statements and actions that seem to reveal a more foundational binding commitment, one that is not regularly aligned with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

His public behavior reflects that of one seeking political gain with a passionate commitment to scoring points from his [culture warrior colleagues](#) and [financial supporters](#). This pattern often fails to reflect the inclusive ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, choosing instead to double-down on anti-LGBTQ [policies](#) and [rhetoric](#); rejecting public health recommendations and [refusing to get vaccinated](#); and even receiving accusations [of mistreating the homeless](#) outside his cathedral.

I have a hard time seeing how Cordileone and his like-minded fellows reconcile their narrowly conceived understanding of God's grace in terms of scarcity with the consistent message of God's abundant love and capacious invitation to relationship in the Gospel. This pattern of behavior and worldview reflects a small, sad understanding of God. It is no wonder those who espouse such an outlook are so [threatened](#) by the authentic pastoral message and inclusive ministry of Francis.

It is easy to check a box on a survey, put a "Jesus is my Lord and Savior" bumper sticker on your car, or wear a Roman collar and pectoral cross and claim that Christianity is your religion. But when one examines one's own conscience, honestly and sincerely, to identify that which he or she most identifies with, cares about, and binds oneself to, the answer may be very surprising.



[Daniel P. Horan](#)

Franciscan Fr. Daniel P. Horan is the director of the Center for Spirituality and professor of philosophy, religious studies and theology at Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana.

# Guns are an idol in American life. It's time for the bishops to say that.

1 June 2022

by [Michael Sean Winters](#)



A bipartisan group of U.S. senators are trying to find common ground on background checks for gun purchasers. This common-sense measure, supported by [88% of the electorate](#), failed to pass after the Sandy Hook massacre 10 years ago, and it likely would not have prevented the massacre in Uvalde, Texas, but at least it would be something.

"We need to show Republicans that they can strengthen the background check system in a meaningful way and get politically rewarded for it," Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, a Democrat, [told The New York Times](#).

"That's why I'm willing to look at things that might be less than what I would like."

President Joe Biden has [called on Congress](#) to reconsider an assault weapons ban like the one that was implemented in 1994 but allowed to lapse in 2004. [FactCheck.org](#) argues that the evidence is mixed about the effectiveness of

such a ban, but the operative fact is that a ban on the sale of weapons takes time for its effectiveness to become clear, but that effectiveness is cumulative. As that organization noted in 2013:

Ultimately, the research concluded that it was "premature to make definitive assessments of the ban's impact on gun crime," largely because the law's grandfathering of millions of pre-ban assault weapons and large-capacity magazines "ensured that the effects of the law would occur only gradually" and were "still unfolding" when the ban expired in 2004.

Coupled with an aggressive buy-back provision, the effects might be felt sooner. A Republican member of Congress, Chris Jacobs of Buffalo, New York, has [indicated his willingness](#) to consider an assault weapons ban. It is a start.

[The Washington Post](#) interviewed a former schoolteacher who said he dismissed talk about gun control in years past, thinking it was "nothing more than politically driven finger-pointing that would do little to stop the violence while infringing on his rights as a gun owner."

But then he was looking at a photo of one of the children gunned down in the Uvalde school. "He looked like my grandson. I mean, they could have been twins. They have the same face," the man told the Post. "It just stirred something in me."

The man later turned in his AR-15 to the police. "I'm a gun advocate. I believe in the Second Amendment. But this AR, after what I saw in Uvalde, I'm done with it," he said.

It is difficult to maintain the hope that there will be more such people, people for whom enough is enough, that this time will be different. On this issue, more than the others, every time you get your hopes up,

you end up feeling like Charlie Brown trying to kick the football — flat on your back, hopes dashed. Only instead of Lucy holding the football and sneering at you, it is the National Rifle Association sneering at us and our collective inability to bring moral sanity to bear on our public life.

What should be the stance of the Catholic Church at this moment of national reckoning?

The ferocity of [a tweet](#) by the preternaturally calm Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville, Texas points the way for the church.

"Don't tell me that guns aren't the problem, people are," the bishop tweeted, contradicting a frequent talking point of gun rights advocates. "I'm sick of hearing it. The darkness first takes our children who then kill our children, using the guns that are easier to obtain than aspirin. We sacralize death's instruments and then are surprised that death uses them."

The jeremiad is the most abused form of discourse in American public life today, as Boston College theologian and law professor Cathleen Kaveny demonstrated in her book *Prophecy Without Contempt* (which I reviewed [here](#) and [here](#)). When people normally claim to be speaking in, or call for others to speak in, a "prophetic voice," I cringe. The phrase has become a cliché, like "speaking truth to power," and it usually is applied to something that has nothing to do with prophecy.

The late Cardinal Francis George, in his second doctoral dissertation, on inculturation of the Gospel, wrote about the cheapening of prophetic discourse:

Americans, especially missionaries, who break out of this cultural conditioning and begin to see their native country through the

eyes of a truly different people sometimes turn American moralism on America itself. If the United States is not to be a beacon, the universally inclusive "city on hill," then it must be a sinkhole, the evil source of global exploitation. Sometimes this judgment is religiously justified as a prophetic stance. Sometimes, in more sociological terms, disillusion calls itself countercultural. Criticisms of institutions and social structures is not, however, countercultural in an anti-authoritarian society such as that of the United States, a country where the mass media lionize dissent. Nor is every social criticism prophetic. The Hebrew prophets, critical though they were, never told their people that they should renounce their past and cease to be Israelites. Rather, the prophets pointed to God and called their people back to their original covenant, to the best in themselves and their history. Modern alienation is not a biblical virtue.

Those words have always resonated with me.

Flores actually was calling the Christian people of this country "back to their original covenant" and identifying a true cause for a jeremiad, that most ancient of sins: idolatry. And it fits. Fits like a glove. Americans do not fetishize their guns; they idolize them.

In the beautiful hymn "[Sing Praise to God, Who Reigns Above](#)," which we normally sing to the tune "Mit Freuden Zart," we sing in the fourth verse:

Cast each false idol from its throne,  
for Christ is Lord, and Christ alone:  
To God all praise and glory.

Let those be the words of the Catholic anti-gun campaign! It is the argument for gun control that the Catholic Church is uniquely placed to make: Americans idolize their guns and that offends God. And, given the fact that the church's defense of human life

has been so overwhelmingly affiliated with abortion, demonstrating a similar concern to stop the epidemic of gun violence that is killing too many children might be uniquely powerful.

This kind of prophetic indictment, normally so stale and predictable, is not so stale, and not so predictable, if coming from the U.S. bishops.



Michael Sean Winters

Michael Sean Winters covers the nexus of religion and politics for NCR.

## I don't think we should be banning anyone from the Eucharist.

John Whitney, S.J., is associate pastor of St. Ignatius Church in San Francisco, Calif.

I love the Eucharist.

Indeed, there is no time in my day when I feel more myself than when I am celebrating, with a community of faith, the mystery of love given to us on the altar. At this table, the spirit of God fulfills the promise of Christ by transforming the gifts of field and vine into the body and blood of the Lord. Here bread and wine—gifts freely given to us, which we now return in offering—become the presence of God. This occurs not through the power of the priest nor through the merit of those present, but through the fidelity of Christ,

who constantly responds to the faith of the people of God with incarnate love. Here the gift of the Spirit is offered to us through this living memorial of Christ's death and resurrection.

In such an exchange, the priest's role is that of minister—servant of the one who prepares the feast, and spokesperson for the church who gathers to receive it. This communion with God is not magic. The words of institution and consecration are not incantations that force God to act. Rather, it is a miracle, a free action of God, beyond anything nature can achieve or human beings can rightfully expect. Of all the sacraments, the Eucharist is the most treasured, because in its simplicity it proclaims all that is accomplished through the incarnation: the welcome of the stranger, the healing of the sinful, the inclusion of the alienated, the sanctification of the people of God through constant and irrevocable communion in Christ. These are not things that we accomplish or earn, but things that God accomplishes in us and for us, whenever we stand hungry at the altar, whenever we open our hearts and hands to receive God's gift.

The original sin of the church, clericalism, emerges when those called to minister the sacraments begin to believe that the sacraments belong to them, or are a product of their special power as God's chosen vessels. In such cases, instead of being a servant at the table of the Lord, the ordained minister begins to act like he is the host, empowered to set up criteria of reception not present in the example of Christ. The Eucharist itself, the mystery of Christ's presence given to the people of God, becomes a tool to be used according to the discretion of the ruling cleric. In such times, access to the sacrament is denied or granted, not according to the

conscience by which God speaks to the heart of the individual, but according to the power of the clerical authority.

Such a vision is contrary to the practice of Jesus in the New Testament and to the notion of ministry exemplified in the early church. Far from being the gatekeepers of the Eucharist, the ordained are called to help the gift of the Eucharist become fully visible for God's people by welcoming and inviting all people in imitation of Christ. In this role, one might well quote St. Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20). As Pope Francis reminds us, such ministry should inspire humility in all those called as pastors, for the gifts we minister do not belong to us. It is not by our goodness that the table is set, not by our power that the common elements of bread and wine become vessels of grace and divine presence, not by our virtue that the spirit of God moves in the hearts of believers. All of these are the work of Christ, through his body the church.

Unlike the priesthood of Aaron in the Old Testament, the ministers of Christ's church are not uniquely chosen to pass through the curtain of the sanctuary and make sacrifice to God on behalf of the people. Jesus Christ—the Son of God—has offered that sacrifice once and for all, and through the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the holy sanctuary has now become the whole world. This is what the Second Vatican Council meant by "the priesthood of all believers." While some of us may be called to lifelong service through ordination, such ordination does not place a cleric above the church. It does not make the priest or bishop a mediator between God and God's people. Rather, ordination makes one a servant of the mediation that Christ himself has achieved through the blood of his cross.

Today, while Pope Francis [promotes humility in pastoral leadership](#), where "those who preach...recognize the heart of their community and...see where the desire for God is lively and ardent," there are others in the church who wish to control access to the Eucharist, and to use the body and blood of Christ as a cudgel to punish or train. Ignoring that the sacrament both is Christ and belongs to Christ, such church authorities, on their own initiative and often in opposition to the larger church, take on the role of guardian of the altar or the bouncer from the feast—usurping the role of Christ who calls all to the table.

In this sacrament, Jesus speaks to the heart of his people and forms them as he feeds them. Christ never withholds food to impose obedience; rather, he sets his table among the sinners and gains their hearts by pouring out his own body and blood. Submission to him comes from his submission in love to us. His teaching comes in word and act, in the healing of the leper and the calling of the tax collector. Jesus never comes with a threat, never teaches by withholding his presence, even to the spending of his life. While we must, in humility, respect the authority of teachers in the church, those who seek to teach by withholding the Eucharist abuse the very sacrament they claim to defend. Even if we bracket the question of intercommunion among different Christian churches, and acknowledge that—through a just process and in extreme circumstances—a baptized Catholic may be sanctioned by the church, we must question the individual bishop who uses the Eucharist in a preemptory manner, without process or appeal. One who seeks to teach by withholding the Eucharist abuses the very sacrament he claims to

defend. For if it is Christ, alive in the church, who sets the table and draws up the guest list, who gives his body as food to show the vastness of his love, who am I, even if I have been given high office, to amend his invitation in a way contrary to the example of Jesus? No individual who is called to wait at table is greater than the One who sets it, but should submit in humility to his guidance, or leave the table to others.

I love the Eucharist, and though I know I don't deserve it, I am happy to be here, with all the other sinners.