

Articles of Interest
For
10 July 2022

Monday, 4 July 2022 *Independence Day in the U.S.*

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations
From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Twenty-Seven: Humanity Is a Community

From Me to We

Father Richard makes a distinction between first-half-of-life and second-half-of-life spirituality:

Most cultures are first-half-of-life cultures, and even sadder, most organized religions almost necessarily sell a first-half-of-life spirituality. In the first half of life, it is all about me: How can I be important? How can I be safe? How can I make money? How can I look attractive? And, in the Christian scenario, how can I think well of myself and go to heaven? How can I be on moral high ground? These are all ego questions; they are not the questions of the soul. It is still well-disguised narcissism, or even sanctified narcissism, which is surely the worst kind.

I'm sad to say, I think many Christians have never moved beyond these survival and security questions. Even "wanting to go to heaven" is language for securing *my* future, not a shared future, or a common future for humanity; religion becomes a private insurance plan for that future. It's still all about me, but piously disguised. It's not really about love at all!

Any sense of being part of a cosmos, a historical sweep, or that God is doing something bigger and better than simply saving individual souls (my soul in particular), is largely of no interest. This becomes apparent in the common disinterest of so many when it comes to Earth care, building real community, simple living, and almost all peace and justice issues. For many Christians—stuck in the first half of life—all that is important is their private moral superiority and spiritual "safety," which is somehow supposed to "save" them. It creates what I am now calling a "cult of innocence," not any real human or divine solidarity. [1]

Once God and grace move us to the second half of life, religion becomes much more a mystical matter rather than a moral matter. Then it's about union with all and participation in and with God. Indeed, this is the work of true religion: to help us transition from stage to stage, toward ever-deeper union with God and all things.

Those who fall into the safety net of silence find that it is not at all a fall into individualism. True prayer or contemplation is instead a leap into commonality and community. We know that what we are experiencing can only be held by the Whole and we are not alone anymore. We are merely a part, and as such a very grateful and totally satisfied part. This is "the peace the world cannot give" (see John 14:27).

Real silence moves us from knowing things to perceiving a Presence that imbues all things. Could this be God? When we begin to experience a mutuality between ourselves and all things, we have begun to understand the nature of Spirit. God refuses to be known as any kind of object, but only as a mutuality.

Tuesday, 5 July 2022

Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations

From the Center for Action and Contemplation



Week Twenty-Seven: Humanity Is a Community

The Communal Paradox

Benedictine sister Joan Chittister writes of humanity's inherent attraction to both community and individuality:

Life, we learn young, is one long, unending game of push and pull. One part of us pushes us always toward wholeness, toward a sense of connection with the universe which, in the very act of engagement with the human community, brings us a sense of peace. We are not here as isolates, we realize. We are here to become community. We are on an odyssey with potentiality, and we know it. We have been foreordained to make humanity more humane.

The other part of us, however, pulls us back into ourselves. It separates us from the universe around us and leaves us feeling distant and out of sync. We lack the sense of kinship that the human family is a family. It deprives us of the universal concern that drives us beyond ourselves to the center of humankind. . . .

And yet, it is this very paradox of life that stretches us not only to grow but to contribute to the growth of the rest of the universe around us.

We say we seek unity, yes. But lurking within every human act is the gnawing need

to be independent, to think of ourselves as distinct from the rest of life. [1]

Thomas Merton recognized this same paradox at the heart of what we think of as "salvation":

We cannot find ourselves within ourselves, but only in others, yet at the same time before we can go out to others we must first find ourselves. We must forget ourselves in order to become truly conscious of who we are. The best way to love ourselves is to love others, yet we cannot love others unless we love ourselves since it is written, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" [Mark 12:31]. But if we love ourselves in the wrong way, we become incapable of loving anybody else. . . .

The only effective answer to the problem of salvation must therefore reach out to embrace both extremes of a contradiction. . . .

Only when we see ourselves in our true human context, as members of a race which is intended to be one organism and "one body," will we begin to understand the positive importance not only of the successes but of the failures and accidents in our lives. My successes are not my own. The way to them was prepared by others. The fruit of my labors is not my own: for I am preparing the way for the achievements of another. . . .

Every other human is a piece of myself, for I am a part and a member of humankind. . . . What I do is also done for them and with them and by them. What they do is done in me and by me and for me. But each one of us remains responsible for our own share in the life of the whole body. [2]

Papal, ecumenical diplomacy appears unable to affect Russia's war in Ukraine

1 July 2022

by [Jonathan Luxmoore](#)

[Vatican](#)
[World](#)



Smoke rises from a destroyed building after a Russian military airstrike in Lysychansk, Ukraine, June 17. (CNS/Reuters/Oleksandr Ratushniak)

WARSAW, POLAND — When representatives of the World Council of Churches debated the war in Ukraine in late June, few expected the historic ecumenical organization to bow to demands for Russia's Orthodox Church to be excluded over its support of President Vladimir Putin's bloody invasion.

Yet the deep acrimonies surrounding the ruinous conflict have raised questions about interfaith ties, as well as about the realistic chances of religious mediation.

"The Ukrainian and Russian governments have themselves kept the path to negotiation open - and there's an even greater case for maintaining dialogue and not closing the channels between churches," Pallottine Fr. Slawomir Pawlowski, an ecumenism expert at Poland's Catholic University of Lublin, told NCR.

"But there's also no doubt that talks and meetings can be exploited for propaganda, so attention must be paid to this as well," he said.



Pallottine Fr. Slawomir Pawlowski (Wikimedia Commons/Artur Karbowy)

The World Council of Churches' central committee met in Geneva to set an agenda for the council's upcoming plenary assembly, which opens in Karlsruhe, Germany, Aug. 31 under the theme "Reconciliation and Unity."

There had been calls for the Russian Orthodox Church, usually a major World Council of Churches presence, to be barred because of the pro-war stance of its leader, Patriarch Kirill.

While condemning Russia's "illegal and unjustifiable war," however, the central

committee declared itself open to Russian participation. The late summer plenary will now go ahead, with [a 20-member Vatican observer group](#) headed by Cardinal Kurt Koch, head of the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity.

"War ... is incompatible with God's very nature and will for humanity and against our fundamental Christian and ecumenical principles," [said the committee](#), which represents 580 million Christians in 352 separate member-churches. The committee said it "rejects any misuse of religious language and authority to justify armed aggression."

"We acknowledge and welcome the commitment of the Moscow Patriarchate ... to engage in encounter and dialogue on the situation in Ukraine under the auspices" of the World Council of Churches, the committee said, adding, "Dialogue remains an obvious urgent necessity to address such a critical situation."

Meanwhile, although Pope Francis [pulled out of a planned June 14 meeting](#) with Kirill in Jerusalem, the pope [has said](#) he still hopes to meet the Russian Orthodox leader when he visits Kazakhstan Sept. 14-15 for a world congress of religious leaders.

With the patriarch facing Western sanctions for backing the war, some observers wonder whether such top-level encounters can achieve anything, beyond fueling Moscow's ruthless disinformation machine.



A boy fleeing Russia's invasion of Ukraine sleeps at a train station in Zahony, Hungary, March 15. (CNS/Reuters/Bernadett Szabo)

"At grassroots level, in social work and care for refugees, interchurch contacts are continuing as various groups pray for peace and reconciliation," Jesuit Fr. Stephan Lipke, secretary-general of Russia's Catholic bishops' conference, told NCR.

"But with everyone's energy and time now focused on Ukraine, it's become much harder to talk to people other than those you already know well," he said. "This has removed any great impetus for Catholic-Orthodox dialogue."

Doubts about dealing with Russian Orthodox leaders are understandable.

A day before the Feb. 24 Russian invasion, Kirill [lauded](#) Putin's "high and responsible service to the people," and assured his country's armed forces that they had "chosen a very correct path."

Four days later, as Ukrainian fighters struggled to hold back attacks on several fronts, he [endorsed](#) Putin's view that Ukraine had never been a genuine country, telling a Moscow congregation that Ukraine really formed part of "Russian land."

The patriarch's support for Putin's "special military operation" has continued.

Addressing Moscow audiences on Russia's May 9 Victory Day, Kirill [indignantly dismissed](#) claims he had made "militaristic speeches," while urging Russians to "ensure the Fatherland becomes strong and invincible."



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow visit an exhibition on National Unity Day in Moscow Nov. 4, 2019. (CNS/Reuters pool/Shamil Zhumatov)

On June 19, he [praised invading forces](#) for "defending Russia on the battlefield," and attributed the courage and self-sacrifice of Russian troops "not to high pay, encouragement by superiors or a wish for advancement, but to an inner moral sense nurtured through the Orthodox faith."

Orthodox theologians across the world [have condemned](#) Kirill's espousal of the notion of a Russian sphere of influence, or "Russki Mir," branding it totalitarian and heretical.

Meanwhile, the patriarch's stance has also been rejected by hundreds of Orthodox priests in Russia, who [have risked arrest](#) for criticizing the invasion, as well as by Russian Orthodox dioceses abroad and the Moscow-linked Ukrainian Orthodox Church, whose governing Holy Synod reaffirmed its independence [in a May 27 declaration](#).

Hundreds of parishes have [switched allegiance](#) since Russia's invasion to Ukraine's smaller independent Orthodox Church, formally established in January 2019, while many of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church's 54 dioceses no longer include Kirill in their prayers.

Despite this, the pope has continued attempts at dialogue, sending Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the Polish-born head of his charity office, to Ukraine on three separate humanitarian missions. Francis has remained in contact with Moscow through Russia's Holy See embassy.



Archbishop Paul Gallagher, Vatican foreign minister, and Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine's foreign minister, shake hands after paying tribute to killed Ukrainian soldiers near the Wall of Remembrance in Kyiv, Ukraine, May 20. (CNS/Handout via Reuters/Ukrainian Foreign Ministry Press Service)

Visiting Kyiv and Lviv in Ukraine in late May, the Vatican's foreign minister, Archbishop Paul Gallagher, [reiterated](#) the pontiff's readiness to "aid a genuine negotiating process," if Russia and Ukraine agreed.

The pope's stance has shown signs of hardening.

In a Rome message for the church's World Day of the Poor, he [said](#) the conflict had

been complicated by "direct intervention of a superpower, aimed at imposing its own will in violation of the principle of the self-determination," while "extortionate demands made by a few potentates" were "stifling the voice of a humanity that cries out for peace."

Yet attempts by Francis to appear evenhanded have also caused controversy.

In an early May interview with Italy's *Corriere della Sera* daily, he [suggested](#) NATO had contributed to the war by "barking at Russia's door" and questioned whether Western countries should be supplying Ukraine with weapons.

The comments were [criticized](#) by the foreign ministries of Ukraine and Poland, as well as by a prominent Italian theologian, Archbishop Bruno Forte, who compared Russia's invasion to Hitler's 1939 attack on Poland and warned against "naive pacifism."

Some church leaders, even in Ukraine, have been content to accept Rome's judgment.

"Since fighting broke out in eastern Ukraine back in 2014, Vatican diplomacy has greatly assisted us, while the pope himself has devoted great care to our problems," Bishop Jan Sobilo, an auxiliary with Ukraine's eastern Kharkiv-Zaporizhzhia Diocese, told NCR.

"The Holy Father must speak as pope for all nations — including Russia itself, where there are also many Catholics," said the bishop. "He must also build bridges, even in the harshest and most threatening situations."

Not everyone has concurred.

After touring Ukraine in late May, the president of Poland's bishops' conference criticized the Vatican's "naive and utopian" attitude to the war, and said he feared it was

returning to its "old line" of the 1970s, focusing on ties with Moscow at the expense of Eastern and Central Europe.

"The Holy See is always neutral in its diplomatic activity and tries to be impartial toward warring parties — it knows Christians are often fighting on both sides, so it doesn't identify the aggressor," Poznan Archbishop Stanislaw Gadecki [told Poland's Catholic Information Agency](#).



Pope Francis meets Poznan Archbishop Stanislaw Gadecki, president of the Polish bishops' conference, during a private audience at the Vatican March 28. (CNS/Vatican Media)

"Of course, contact and dialogue are worthy goals, since Russia is great and merits respect," said Gadecki, whose country has received more than 4.1 million [Ukrainian refugees](#) in four months. "But the Holy See should also be more careful, knowing from the experience of Central and Eastern European countries that lying is second-nature to Russian diplomacy."

In Russia itself, Lipke also admits to doubts — not least as to whether the pope should be seeking a meeting with Kirill.

While Russian leaders have traditionally preferred to deal directly with Rome rather than with their country's Catholic Church, Russia's Catholic minority is itself divided, with some priests and laypeople backing the

"military operation" against Ukraine and others opposing it.

"Kirill has clearly dug himself in deeply — but Orthodox Christians here also hold contrasting opinions, depending on how the campaign is going," the Russian bishops' secretary-general told NCR.

"Although some bishops may think differently, I personally can't see any purpose in talking with the patriarch right now," said Lipke.

Pawlowski, the Polish church expert, agrees.

For now, at least, despite reservations, the contacts look set to continue.



Cardinal Konrad Krajewski prays over a mass grave near Borodyanka, Ukraine, April 15, during a humanitarian visit as a papal envoy to the country. (CNS/Vatican Media)

The World Council of Churches is organizing a "pilgrimage of justice and peace" to Kyiv and Moscow, and has braved angry Russian reactions by inviting Ukraine's independent Orthodox Church to send observers to its late summer assembly.

The late June statement affirmed the World Council of Churches' role "as a platform and

safe space for encounter and dialogue" and urged "members of the ecumenical fellowship in Russia and Ukraine to make use of this platform."

The final composition of the Russian church's large delegation, unveiled in March, was thrown into doubt by the [sudden dismissal](#) on June 7 of its projected leader, Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, the long-serving director of the church's foreign relations department — a move widely believed linked to Hilarion's lack of enthusiasm for the Ukraine war.

But observers say the Russian church is already working hard to gain support among the 200 Orthodox delegates, who will make up a quarter of the World Council of Churches assembly's participants from more than 120 countries.

In the meantime, with half a million troops engaged along a 1,900-mile front, the world's largest military confrontation since World War II looks set to continue.

In [a statement](#) ahead of a June 15 meeting of NATO defense ministers, Kyiv government officials said their forces currently needed 2,500 tanks and armored vehicles, as well as 1,000 drones and 1,300 howitzers and MLRS rocket systems "to end the war."

The United Nations put [the number](#) of Ukrainians forced to flee their homes at 14 million, almost a third of the population.

"In such circumstances, I'd be extremely surprised if the Vatican came up with some diplomatic solution acceptable to the two sides," Lipke, the Russian Catholic bishops' secretary-general, told NCR.

"As with previous papal efforts to end wars, the possibilities to use high-level encounters for propaganda seems much greater now

than any possibility that the pope could be accepted as a mediator," said the priest.



Jonathan Luxmoore

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Shared blame for Russia's war on Ukraine is not realism — it's irrational

5 July 2022

by [John J. Davenport](#)

[Opinion](#)
[Vatican](#)
[World](#)



An elderly Ukrainian woman looks on after Russian shelling in Mykolaiv, Ukraine, June 29. (AP/George Ivanchenko)

During Russia's terrible and ongoing total war on Ukrainian civilians, it has become clear that one strain of so-called "realist" thought in international relations theory is a source of confusion and an obstacle to human progress. In a May 19 interview, published in *La Civiltà Cattolica* and the newspaper *La Stampa* on June 14, Pope Francis reported that one (unnamed) foreign leader told him that "perhaps" [NATO may have provoked the war](#) "by barking at the gates" of Russia, which remained an imperialist power determined to control its region.

Patriarch Kirill, the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, has been criticized by the Vatican and many others for [offering similar excuses, including gay pride marches](#), to justify Vladimir Putin's campaign of mass murder in Ukraine.

The pope has not endorsed this "shared blame" objection to NATO's expansion after the end of the Soviet Union; rather, he is mainly concerned that this conflict could become the initial phase of a new world war. Moreover, popes generally see their role in foreign affairs as [aiming at peaceful reconciliation](#) among enemies. As scholars have noted, [the Holy See exercises a unique kind of "soft power"](#) in international relations.

But the controversy surrounding Francis' remark derives from its resonance with the political scientist John Mearsheimer's "offensive realism" theory that "great powers" will generally do whatever is necessary to dominate their region of the globe as a means to their own national security — whatever they pretend to believe about the human rights of civilians and codes of international law, which have banned annexation of territory by force for over a century.



John Mearsheimer (Flickr/Chatham House)

In his infamous [New Yorker interview](#), and in [a lecture](#) widely circulated online, Mearsheimer blamed NATO nations for provoking Putin's war on Ukraine by ignoring Putin's view that for Ukraine to become "pro-America liberal democracy" would be an "existential threat" to Russia.

Despite its shocking incompatibility with the "rules-based international order" established by 150 years of treaties rooted in [just war theory](#) and [natural law](#), Mearsheimer's view is popular because it claims to be brutally honest about "[harder, darker constraints of an anarchic world](#)," which follow from a few postulates about sovereign states and their leaders' motives.

But in fact, the spell it casts on thinking about foreign policy is deeply misleading for three main reasons, ranging from more to less obvious.

First, offensive realism is not merely an empirical or predictive device, as its defenders sometimes like to claim: It tells leading nations like the United States to allow other powerful states a limited "sphere" in which they act as hegemons, but also to "counterbalance" them when, like

China today, they threaten interests beyond their own immediate region.

This is an imperialist standpoint typical of 19th-century thinking, as [Mearsheimer readily admits](#): It tolerates, and thus encourages, the poisonous notion that a nation's great power permits it to turn otherwise-independent states around it into mere proxies and use their peoples as "buffers" against conceivable foreign attacks.

For example, in 2016, [Mearsheimer and coauthor Stephen Walt](#) wrote in *Foreign Affairs* that what "really matters" most for the United States is to preserve "U.S. dominance in the Western Hemisphere" while weakening other potential hegemons. They recommended leaving Syria to Putin, despite the Russian forces targeting thousands of civilian buildings and hundreds of hospitals during its air campaign in Syria.

This view, which once countenanced American attempts to control regimes in Latin America, has been rejected by popes at least since [Populorum Progressio](#) in 1967, and by the U.S. government since the late 1980s. As [Adam Tooze](#) explains, offensive realism traces back to the Nazi lawyer Carl Schmitt's belief in "a world order based on dividing the planet into large spatial blocs, each dominated by a major power."

The moral idea that legitimate sovereignty depends on protecting human rights, or the common good more broadly understood, which underwrote the [U.N.'s "responsibility to protect" doctrine](#), has no place in this framework.

Second, while Mearsheimer has been lauded for "predicting" the war in Ukraine, he got Putin's motives mostly wrong. Putin knows that NATO is a defensive alliance that has [no plans or desire whatsoever to invade](#)

[Russia](#). Kremlin experts understood that NATO admitted Eastern European nations only to secure them against any return to the horrors they suffered under the totalitarian fist of the Soviet Union — fears that have now been fully justified.

Two decades ago, Putin even wanted [Russia itself to join NATO](#); this tragically wasted opportunity runs contrary to offensive realism theory. Instead, as [Robert Person and Michael McFaul](#) argue, what Putin feared was never NATO expansion but rather the spread of democratic values. Kremlin complaints about NATO were correlated with upsurges of democratic reform movements within Russia inspired by the Arab Spring in 2011 and later by Ukrainians ousting Putin's puppet ruler in Kyiv.



Russian President Vladimir Putin delivers a speech during a meeting with graduates of the country's higher military schools at the Kremlin in Moscow June 21. (AP/Kremlin Pool Photo via AP/Sputnik/Kirill Kallinikov)

In sum, Putin sees that the main threat to his kleptocratic dictatorship is not NATO forces within his geographic region, but rather ideals of democratic self-governance and global standards that clamp down on corruption. Add to this, as [Ross Douthat](#) notes, following [Anne Applebaum](#), Putin's "very personal desire to restore a mystical vision of a greater Russia."

More generally, as [Applebaum](#) and Garry Kasparov argue, the dictators in Russia, China, North Korea, Belarus, Iran and Nicaragua "understand that the language of democracy, anti-corruption, and justice is dangerous to their form of autocratic power."

Offensive realism theory massively understates the influence of such big ideas that move hearts and minds. It would have us believe that governments should focus only on material wealth and physical protection of territory. Political leaders' motives in foreign relations are more complex than this [naive deterministic picture](#) implies.

For example, Chinese leaders fear uncensored Hollywood movies as much as they fear [insecure supply chains for food](#) and raw materials, which they are shoring up through increasing their influence in Africa. Their terror that "Western" ideals — they mean individual autonomy and independent thought — will harm Chinese "interests" has more in common with Taliban religious dogma than with military or economic strategy.

This ambiguity about "national interests" explains why offensive realism theory offers no clear criteria to delimit a great power's "natural" sphere within which we should recognize its suzerainty. For example, are small islands near the Philippines in China's putative sphere, despite an [international tribunal's ruling against Beijing's claim](#)?



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addresses leaders via a video screen during a roundtable meeting at a NATO summit in Madrid June 29. (AP/Manu Fernandez)

Similarly, in 2014, one could have invoked [Mearsheimer's own power-balancing rationale](#) to argue for admitting Ukraine into NATO as a way to "contain" Russia's rising power not only in Belarus but also in Syria, Iran, Libya and Mali, which are far from any romanticized ancient [Slavic empire](#).

Third, the strategic axioms on which offensive realism is based only remain plausible while not enough world leaders believe in a rules-based order founded on the common goods of humanity. Thus, offensive realism helps foster and maintain the very attitudes of distrust and expectations of success through conquest that force peoples who only want peace and prosperity instead to adopt a war footing.

In other words, offensive realism's attraction is like the proverbial emperor's new clothes: It is a partly self-fulfilling prophecy that would predict little in a world where a global alliance of even moderately just republics established trust in minimum thresholds of decency for all governments.

Therein lies the saddest irony. Mearsheimer's influential dogma, which has

even gained a hearing in Rome, is helping to preserve precisely the global anarchy and cynicism that it takes as starting postulates. Offensive realism theory may have emboldened Putin and motivated some European leaders to resist admitting Ukraine into NATO when that could have saved its people from ruin.



People display a Ukrainian flag as Pope Francis delivers the traditional "urbi et orbi" ("to the city and the world") blessing at the end of the Easter Sunday Mass he led in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican April 17. (AP/Alessandra Tarantino)

These liabilities reveal the extreme opposition between offensive realism theory and Francis' calls for a global system in which nations cooperate to reduce poverty, stop environmental destruction, and prevent new arms races that waste trillions of dollars.

In an [interview concerning his 2021 book, *God and the World to Come*](#), the Holy Father said, "We can heal injustice by building a new world order based on solidarity." By denying that such ideas can inspire a world with less war and arms trafficking, Mearsheimer and his allies perpetuate a self-fulfilling kind of despair masquerading as tough strategic wisdom. They have even said that we should have [kept a billion Chinese people in lethal poverty](#) as long as possible in order to check China's rise to power.

With respect to offensive realism theory, there are viable ways to end aggressive wars and mass atrocities without promoting poverty for strategic gain. [As I have argued](#), the path begins with extending the G7 group of nations to include South Korea, Australia and eventually India, Indonesia and Brazil, thereby turning the G7 into "[Democratic 10+](#)."

Such an expanded group should become the core of an alliance broader than NATO, which can meet rising threats, enforce minimum standards worldwide, and reduce corruption. This would help fulfill [Catholic social teaching](#). Christians of all denominations should support a global order in which Mearsheimer's theory is regarded as merely an archaic historical artifact.



[John J. Davenport](#)

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Catholic groups outline priorities for defense of oceans, biodiversity ahead of UN summits

5 July 2022

by [Brian Roewe](#)



(Unsplash/Anne Nygård)

As nations work this year to reach agreements on safeguarding the world's oceans and biodiversity, Catholic groups in Africa and Oceania have raised their voices on behalf of their regional biomes, pressing for strong actions to conserve creation in light of accelerating threats.

Separate gatherings in June brought together Catholic organizations and leaders in an effort to shine a light on the dangers facing oceans and biodiversity around the globe and to outline church positions in defense of both.

The latest event came during the United Nations Ocean Conference, held June 27–July 1 in Lisbon, Portugal. The summit was the second hosted by the U.N. focused on protecting the world's oceans, which together cover 70% of the Earth's surface, house 80% of all species on Earth, generate half of all oxygen and serve as a vital carbon sink of heat-trapping emissions causing climate change. More than 3.5 billion people rely on the oceans for food, with another 120 million people, mostly in small islands and developing countries, depending on the seas for work.

Despite playing such vital roles, the oceans are often an afterthought in international environmental talks, said Antonio Gueterres, U.N. secretary-general.

"Sadly, we have taken the ocean for granted, and today we face what I would call an 'ocean emergency,'" he said in a speech opening the conference June 27. "We must turn the tide. A healthy and productive ocean is vital to our shared future."

A day later, Catholic groups held a [panel discussion in Lisbon](#) on the importance of oceans. Modeled as a Talanoa dialogue — a Pacific approach to deep, inclusive communication — participants, many from islands like Fiji, Tonga and the Philippines, shared personal stories of their relationship to the ocean. Several speakers became emotional as they spoke about the critical roles the seas have played for their families and local communities, whether as sources of food and work or as vital in transportation, relaxation or their culture.

Teresa Ardler, director of an aboriginal cultural center in Australia, described how her Gweagal community dip their newborns into the ocean shortly after bringing them home from the hospital, "just like baptism," as a way to connect with their totem, the humpback whale, and as a reminder that they came from the ocean and one day will return to it.

"It's actually quite beautiful to still have that strong connection with the ocean. And I'm very proud, it's very much in my heart," Ardler said.

Panelists also spoke to the present threats facing the seas and communities that live near them.

Roughly [11 million tons of plastic enter the ocean each year](#). UNESCO estimates 30-35% of critical marine habitats, like seagrass, mangroves and coral reefs, have been destroyed, and the combination of pollution and climate change has put half of

marine species at risk of extinction by the end of the century.



Municipal workers unload bags of garbage collected from the shore during World Oceans Day at Kali Adem Port in Jakarta, Indonesia, June 8, 2021. As designated by the United Nations, World Oceans Day is celebrated to inform the public of the impact of human actions on the ocean and to develop a worldwide movement of citizens to protect them. (CNS/Reuters/Willy Kurniawan)

The oceans have been rapidly warming, and ocean acidity has increased 26% since pre-industrial times. Rising temperatures have led to rising seas, placing the more than 680 million people living in low-lying coastal areas at risk of flooding or even losing their homes altogether.

The potential of relocating communities — a reality already in some places — makes loss and damage payments to island nations especially critical, said Jesuit Fr. Pedro Walpole of the Philippines, coordinator of the [River Above Asia and Oceania Ecclesial Network](#).

Archbishop Peter Chong, head of the Suva, Fiji, Archdiocese and president of the Federation of Catholic Bishops Conferences of Oceania, said much attention has rightly focused on preventing deep-sea mining but also urged people not to lose sight of other mining already destroying environments.

Chong also called for greater space for discussions of spirituality in deliberations about protecting oceans and the planet.

"The ecological crisis is because there's an inner crisis. So there has to be a language that reaches the heart, and that's the limitation of the scientific and academic language," he said.

Panelists also called for Indigenous people and youth, especially from Oceania, to have a larger voice in the international deliberations, as those with deep knowledge about ways to live in harmony with oceans and as the generations who will inherit today's world and waters.

"The youth are picking up this problem already. They should be able to practice their skills and their integrity, because at this stage they have integrity. They haven't been bought off," Walpole said.

The U.N. Ocean conference concluded with leaders of 20-plus nations agreeing to a joint declaration that called for a global response to reverse ocean degradation. Work also took place on treaties on the conservation of marine biological areas beyond national jurisdiction and addressing plastic pollution in the oceans.

Improving the health of oceans is one piece of a wider global pursuit to safeguard the planet's biodiversity. More than 70 nations, including the U.S. and European Union, have signed onto the "30x30" campaign to conserve at least 30% of the world's lands and seas by 2030. That target will garner additional attention later this year at the 15th U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity, COP15.

Originally scheduled for 2020 in Kunming, China, but delayed by the coronavirus pandemic, COP15 is now set to be held in

Montreal, Canada, Dec. 5–17. Along with the 30x30 campaign, the conference is expected to negotiate a post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework to reverse biodiversity loss and outline a roadmap for humanity to live in harmony with nature by 2050.

"The ecological crisis is because there's an inner crisis. So there has to be a language that reaches the heart, and that's the limitation of the scientific and academic language.'

— Archbishop Peter Chong

A preparatory meeting, held mid-June in Nairobi, Kenya, [yielded little progress](#), prompting NGOs to warn that a deal is "in peril."

During that pre-COP15 negotiating session, Catholic organizations from Africa's Congo Basin also gathered in Nairobi to devise and deliver a Catholic position on protecting biodiversity.

A [statement](#) issued by the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, or SECAM, said that the Earth is suffering due to "irresponsible use and abuse" by humans, with nature declining at increasing rates. In the Congo Basin, the world's second-largest tropical rainforest and a critical "lung" of the Earth, land grabs, industrial agriculture, illegal logging and conflict over natural resources have destroyed wildlife habitats, damaged local communities and fueled climate change.

"The science is clear: an extractive, unsustainable economy is causing the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis, which is destroying God's creation and harming the most vulnerable among us, those who have done little to cause the crisis, the poor and the Earth," the statement said.

SECAM, joined by the Ecclesial Network on the Congo Basin Forest, or REBAC, and the Laudato Si' Movement, called on governments to commit to at least protecting half of all lands and oceans by 2030. They also pressed nations in the Global North to deliver long-promised financing, urged the protection of Indigenous peoples' rights, and demanded an immediate stop to construction of the East Africa Crude Oil Pipeline.

"We strongly urge all our brothers and sisters to understand that we humans are uniquely created in God's image and likeness and are called to exercise responsible stewardship over creation on behalf of our loving Creator," the statement read.

A copy of the statement was given to Iyad Abumoghli, director of the U.N. Environment Programme's Faith for Earth initiative, who attended a [panel discussion](#) where it was presented.

During the discussion, Catholics described the importance of safeguarding areas like East Africa's Lake Victoria; Lake Albert on the border of Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo; and Murchison Falls, Uganda's largest national park, for their roles in sustaining human and nonhuman life and as valued parts of God's creation.

Jesuit Fr. Rigobert Minani, head of REBAC, described Earth as the only source of biodiversity in the known galaxy, and thus a gift from God.

"This degradation of biodiversity is a major challenge for environments of our time," he said. "We have then historic responsibility to stop the decline and to reverse the trend."



Brian Roewe

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Catholic Theological Society of America resolves to divest from fossil fuels

Jun 28, 2022

by [Brian Roewe](#)



A tugboat in New York City pushes a fuel oil barge past the Statue of Liberty Oct 13, 2021. (CNS/Reuters/Brendan McDermid)

The Catholic Theological Society of America at its annual conference resolved to divest its financial funds from fossil fuels, a move great in moral weight and one backers hope is rich with potential to inspire similar actions at its members' institutions in light of the current urgent "global environmental disaster."

The board of directors of CTSA, the world's largest organization of theologians, counting more than 1,300 members, passed three

resolutions related to fossil fuel divestment during its June 9-12 conference, held this year in Atlanta and in person for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic.

The resolutions freeze any new investments, as of June 30, in companies included in the Carbon Underground 200, a list of oil, gas and coal companies with the largest fossil fuel reserves worldwide. The resolutions direct CTSA to divest all direct or commingled investments in those companies by the society's 2025 convention.

The divestment resolutions, which CTSA said follows guidance on environmentally responsible investing from the Vatican, note 2025 is when scientists have projected that global greenhouse gas emissions — whose primary source is the burning of fossil fuels — must peak in order for the world to have a greater-than-50% chance to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, the more ambitious temperature goal under the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change.

"Given the global environmental disaster that grows more urgent each day, it was necessary that the CTSA finally make these decisions and thus move irreversibly toward divestment," Jesuit Fr. Francis Clooney, incoming CTSA president, said in a statement. Clooney is the Parkman Professor of Divinity at Harvard University, which itself divested in the fall.



Jesuit Fr. Francis Clooney (Wikimedia Commons/Caorongjin)

While the size of CTSA's investment pool is unclear, the power in the theological society's move away from fossil fuels may well rest more in its moral heft, as a long-respected voice in the Catholic Church with the potential to send a ripple effect through its membership and the wider church.

"Ours is a small contribution to a great cause, but we hope that it will also inspire CTSA members to work all the more vigorously toward divestment at their home institutions," Clooney said.

A third resolution directs Clooney as CTSA president to create a task force to develop a plan ahead of next year's conference to carry out the fossil fuel divestment process.

Christine Hinze, a theologian at Fordham University and outgoing CTSA president who oversaw the resolutions' passage, called the decision "most fitting."

"It is a move which culminates over a decade of cumulative research, consultation, and deliberation concerning fossil fuel divestment by dedicated CTSA members and leadership," she said in the statement.

CTSA becomes one of the most notable U.S. Catholic institutions to publicly declare

intentions to cease financial investments in companies whose primary business is the extraction and refining of coal, oil and gas.

Seven U.S. Catholic universities have made public divestment pledges:

- [University of Dayton](#) (2014);
- [Seattle University](#) (2018);
- [Georgetown University](#) (2020);
- [Creighton University](#) (2020);
- [Loyola University Chicago](#) (2021);
- [University of San Diego](#) (2021);
- [Marquette University](#) (2022).

So too have the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests, the SSM Health medical system, the philanthropic network FADICA, and more than a dozen religious congregations, including the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace, who in June completed the divestment process.

Globally, approximately 300 Catholic institutions have committed to divest their finances from or to avoid future investments in fossil fuel companies.

The Laudato Si' Movement, [which has played a leading role in pushing divestment within the Catholic Church](#), has planned its next joint divestment announcement for July.

In its statement, CTSA said the resolutions "enact the Vatican's divestment endorsement." In recent years, the Vatican has recommended divesting from fossil fuels and companies responsible for environmental degradation in guidelines for implementing Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical, "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home," and as part of its [Laudato Si' Action Platform](#).

CTSA's decision also came on the recommendation of an ad hoc committee appointed to study the topic. The committee was chaired by [Erin Lothes](#), an associate professor of theology at St. Elizabeth University and a senior program manager for the Laudato Si' Movement. Lothes has been a leading theologian on environmental and climate issues, including energy ethics on which she led a three-year study of the U.S. bishops' 1981 statement on energy.

That statement came after the country faced several oil shortages throughout the 1970s. CTSA's decision to divest comes as new fuel anxieties have emerged as prices soar globally amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine and inflation in the wake of the pandemic.

Lothes told EarthBeat that even with today's rising fuel costs, she believed moving away from fossil fuels was still the right move.



Erin Lothes (Courtesy of St. Elizabeth University)

"Gas prices go up and down but what isn't changing is the scientific fact of the worsening climate crisis," she said in an email.

"Now is the time to act by rapidly scaling up the positive technologies of renewable energy that already exist and by replacing

the polluting, unhealthy fossil fuels that are driving the climate crisis. We can't have change if we continue to invest in fossil fuels, and we have options," she added.

A report from the ad hoc committee, submitted on Earth Day (April 22) this year, reviewed the latest science on climate change alongside the papal teachings of Francis, Benedict XVI and John Paul II as well as the work of theologians like [Leonardo Boff](#), [Ivone Gebara](#) and Daniel Castillo. It also reviewed environmental justice principles and the recently updated socially responsible investment guidelines from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, which in a section on environmental concerns encourage engagement with companies but allow for divestment as an option with "companies that consistently fail to initiate policies intended to achieve the Paris Agreement goals."

The CTSA ad hoc report noted that the planet has already heated roughly 1.1 C above preindustrial times and at current emissions rates is set to reach 1.5 C as early as 2030. Surpassing that level is expected to bring about disastrous consequences, they wrote, as floods, wildfires, droughts and storms increase in strength and frequency, and "poses an existential threat to civilization" — particularly upon poor and marginalized communities.

"Simply put, our use of fossil fuels is incontrovertibly changing the global climate," the ad hoc committee wrote in its report.

It also pointed to church teaching on social sin and the role of the market economy, citing John Paul II's warnings against the "idolatry of the market," Benedict XVI's emphasis on the moral consequences of every economic decision, and Francis

in *Laudato Si'* stating, "The environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces."

'Divestment morally interrupts the status quo, shifts the social narrative around fossil fuels, and has the potential to move legislators away from accepting the support from fossil fuel companies.'

"The Church's social teaching suggests that the economic patterns of production and consumption that contribute to the destruction of the natural environment, and the carbon fueling climate change in particular, should be considered social sins or structures of sin," the ad hoc committee wrote.

The committee members cited a study published in the scientific journal *Nature* that roughly 60% of global oil and methane gas and nearly 90% of coal must remain in the ground to keep the 1.5 C target within reach. The International Energy Agency has said that countries must halt all new fossil fuel exploration in order to achieve global net-zero emissions by 2050.

While some religious organizations have supported dialogue and shareholder engagement with energy companies, the committee said the combination of the fossil fuel industry's decadeslong opposition to addressing climate change and the shrinking window to avoid its worst impacts make that approach ineffective today.

"Divestment morally interrupts the status quo, shifts the social narrative around fossil fuels, and has the potential to move legislators away from accepting the support from fossil fuel companies that ties their hands regarding fossil-free legislation," they wrote.

Lothes in a statement added that the decision to divest doesn't have to be an either-or

choice between that and shareholder efforts, noting that in some cases groups have maintained a minimal amount of stock to continue engagement with fossil fuel companies.

"Many very well-regarded institutions have already chosen divestment," she said. "In joining them, the CTSA signals the critical moral importance of divestment for Catholic institutions, for whom the impact of climate change on human dignity and life, especially among the poor, is a preeminent concern."



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Faith groups announce \$1.25 billion to be divested from fossil fuels

6 July 2022

by [Catholic News Service](#)



Oil refineries in Montreal, Canada.
(Unsplash/Chris Liverani)

VATICAN CITY — A growing number of Christian churches, dioceses, religious orders and organizations are announcing they will divest from fossil fuels.

"In total, 35 faith institutions from six countries with more than \$1.25 billion in combined assets announced today their divestment from fossil fuel companies," said a news release distributed July 5 by the Catholic Laudato Si' Movement.

The divesting institutions include five Catholic dioceses in Ireland and two in Canada, the movement said. "Catholic institutions' divestment amounts to over \$500 million."

The July announcement was a joint project of the Laudato Si' Movement, the World Council of Churches, the ecumenical Operation Noah, Green Anglicans and GreenFaith, a U.S.-based organization.

Fr. Joshtrom Kureethadam, coordinator of the ecology sector in the Vatican Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, was quoted in the statement as saying, "In 2020, the Vatican called on Catholic institutions to divest from fossil fuel companies given their harm to the environment. I applaud these prophetic institutions divesting today and encourage every institution in the world to reduce our dependence on such harmful energy sources by divesting from fossil fuels."

"If we want to achieve peace and ensure a livable planet for all, including the future generations, we need to end our dependence on fossil fuels that fuel the current climate crisis," the priest said.

The news release noted that in June, [the board of directors of the Catholic Theological Society of America voted to halt new investments in oil, gas and](#)

[coal](#) companies and to sell any existing investments by 2025.

Eleven Catholic religious orders also recently announced divestments, the statement said. They include the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada, the Religious Institute of the Sacred Heart of Mary in Brazil, and the Jesuits of the U.S. East Province. The Jesuit-run [Marquette University in Milwaukee](#) and [Loyola University, Chicago](#), also are among the divesting institutions.

Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh, Northern Ireland, said, "It is clear that many members of our congregations, especially our young people, feel we have a responsibility to take action with regard to the challenges of climate change and climate justice. We all share responsibility for the problems facing our world, but equally, we share responsibility for finding the solutions."



A sign at a global climate change strike in Lorenzer Platz, Nuremberg, Sept. 20, 2019. (Unsplash/Markus Spiske)

"Climate change," he said, "is already having a disproportionate impact on those who are on the margins, those most dependent on fragile ecosystems and most vulnerable to famine, to drought, to food and water insecurity and conflict, to exploitative and 'predatory economic interests,' to the destruction of their homes and displacement of their families."

"I support fully the decision of the directors of the St. Patrick's Archdiocesan Trust," which funds the activity of the archdiocese, "to continue its commitment to a policy of divestment from fossil fuels, and I encourage others to consider similar action."

The Congregation of the [Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace](#) said in late June that their [investment portfolio is 100% fossil-free](#) after they decided to begin the divestment process in 2018. The portfolio managed in the United Kingdom was fully divested in 2019, the sisters said, while their U.S.-managed portfolio achieved the goal in June.

Sr. Susan Francois, assistant congregation leader and treasurer of the order, was quoted in the statement as saying, "We believe that care of creation is an essential element of peacemaking. The time is now to act. We have a fiduciary responsibility to the earth. Today we see the ethical use of our financial resources through the lens of our vow of poverty. We decided it was morally imperative to divest fully from fossil fuels rather than profit from activities which hasten the climate crisis."

Pope Francis' new apostolic letter is about more than 'liturgy wars'

Jul 6, 2022

by [Michael Sean Winters](#)

[Theology](#)
[Vatican](#)



Two members of the Congolese community in Rome present the offertory gifts to Pope Francis during Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican July 3. (CNS/Vatican Media)

Pope Francis' apostolic letter about the sacred liturgy *Desiderio Desideravi*, which he [issued last week](#), is a remarkable document. As he states in the opening paragraph, this is not an exhaustive treatment of such a rich topic, but his insights are profound and speak, or should speak, to us all.

Coupled with the [interview](#) the pope gave to Philip Pulella of Reuters over the weekend, we see the Holy Father continuing to invite the church to bestir itself, prodding us to engage the mystery that is at the heart of all we do.

Most of the reporting on the letter rightly focused on its significance for the pope's earlier decision to [repeal](#) *Summorum Pontificum*, Pope Benedict XVI's initiative that permitted wider celebration of the Tridentine rite. Francis was crystal clear in this new letter on the reason for his insistence on the priority of the Vatican II rite:

The problematic is primarily ecclesiological. I do not see how it is possible to say that one recognizes the validity of the Council — though it amazes me that a Catholic might presume not to do so — and at the same

time not accept the liturgical reform born out of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, a document that expresses the reality of the Liturgy intimately joined to the vision of Church so admirably described in *Lumen gentium*.

It amazes me too!

Some [commentators](#) have focused on the evident influence of theologian Romano Guardini on the pope's thinking. Francis quotes him at several points, but adds his own emphasis. For example:

Guardini writes, "Here there is outlined the first task of the work of liturgical formation: man must become once again capable of symbols." ... The task is not easy because modern man has become illiterate, no longer able to read symbols; it is almost as if their existence is not even suspected.

The observation stings because, once uttered, it is so obviously true.

It is remarkable that so much of the so-called 'liturgy wars' are not about the place of the liturgy in salvation history, but about human tastes and stylistic preferences. The pope, instead, gets to the heart of the matter.

I wish to focus on the very beginning of the letter, which should not be dismissed as mere throat-clearing. Francis recalls the Last Supper, writing, "Peter and John were sent to make preparations to eat that Passover, but in actual fact, all of creation, all of history — which at last was on the verge of revealing itself as the history of salvation — was a huge preparation for that Supper." It is remarkable that so much of the so-called "liturgy wars" are not about the place of the liturgy in salvation history, but about human tastes and stylistic preferences. The pope, instead, gets to the heart of the matter. "The disproportion between the immensity of the gift and the smallness of the one who receives it is infinite, and it cannot fail to

surprise us. Nonetheless, through the mercy of the Lord, the gift is entrusted to the Apostles so that it might be carried to every man and woman."

This understanding of the liturgy as a gift, first and foremost, is what allows Francis to make the simple, straightforward claim: "No one had earned a place at that Supper. All had been invited. Or better said: all had been drawn there by the burning desire that Jesus had to eat that Passover with them."

From this conviction, it is not hard to understand why, in his interview with Reuters, when asked about San Francisco Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone's [decision to ban](#) U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi from receiving Communion, Francis said, "When the Church loses its pastoral nature, when a bishop loses his pastoral nature, it causes a political problem. That's all I can say."

The follower of Christ, and especially a minister of Christ, is supposed to attract people to the Supper, not bar them from it.

One of the achievements of post-conciliar theology is the renewed focus on grace and gift in all areas of our Catholic theology. During the long years of hostility to modernity, the focus was on law and identity, "*semper idem*" and the Neo-Scholastic categories. The Second Vatican Council, beginning with *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, but also in the other two great dogmatic constitutions, *Dei Verbum* and *Lumen Gentium*, renewed virtually every aspect of Catholic theology, but none more than this emphasis on grace and gift, which had perhaps been minimized by the polemics of the Reformation — although not in the decrees of the Council of Trent! There, the decree on justification stands out for the clarity of its teaching on the gratuitousness of God's saving action.

The *Communio* school of theology, named for the theological journal begun by Henri de Lubac, Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar, gets a large part of the credit for restoring this emphasis on grace and gift in the post-conciliar era. Pope John Paul II, with his philosophic bent, introduced important notes from 20th-century personalism into our social doctrine, but it was Benedict XVI who emphasized the importance of gratuitousness in any Catholic economic and political models worthy of the name Christian.

Benedict wanted to achieve the same in liturgy but he misjudged the intentions of certain collaborators intent on putting the Vatican II liturgical toothpaste back in the tube. Now, Francis brings together the pre-conciliar insights of Guardini and the post-conciliar insights of the *Communio* school.

A final point. Francis writes:

If there were lacking our astonishment at the fact that the paschal mystery is rendered present in the concreteness of sacramental signs, we would truly risk being impermeable to the ocean of grace that floods every celebration. ... The astonishment or wonder of which I speak is not some sort of being overcome in the face of an obscure reality or a mysterious rite. It is, on the contrary, marveling at the fact that the salvific plan of God has been revealed in the paschal deed of Jesus (cf. Eph 1:3-14), and the power of this paschal deed continues to reach us in the celebration of the "mysteries," of the sacraments.

This astonishment, this wonder, is what makes reading the church fathers so exhilarating: They were still amazed at the outrageous claims made about this Jesus who was crucified and yet raised. They were not engulfed in ideological debates about minutiae. They did not reduce the enormity

of the paschal mystery to an agenda of social conservatism or of social justice. Their awe lent the liturgy all the grandeur it requires.

Francis invites us, because Vatican II invited us, to rekindle that awe.

Our wonderful pope continues to teach in ways that are, above all, accessible to the people of God. He is informed by theological expertise, but not constrained by it. Francis, in this document, asks us to recognize the ecclesial character of our worship, and what we could call the liturgical character of our lives as Christians.

We can make his concluding words our own: "Let us abandon our polemics to listen together to what the Spirit is saying to the Church. Let us safeguard our communion. Let us continue to be astonished at the beauty of the Liturgy. The Paschal Mystery has been given to us. Let us allow ourselves to be embraced by the desire that the Lord continues to have to eat His Passover with us. All this under the gaze of Mary, Mother of the Church."



[Michael Sean Winters](#)

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

Pope Francis to appoint women to Vatican office responsible for selecting bishops

6 July 2022

by [Christopher White](#)

[Vatican](#)



Pope Francis is pictured with Claretian Missionary Sister Jolanta Kafka, president of the International Union of Superiors General, during an audience with participants in the plenary assembly of the UISG at the Vatican May 5, 2022. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

ROME — Pope Francis intends to appoint two women to the Vatican's Dicastery for Bishops, marking a historic first for the office tasked with advising the pontiff on which Catholic priests to appoint as bishops across the world.

"Two women will be appointed for the first time in the committee to elect bishops in the Congregation for Bishops," Francis told Philip Pullella, the Reuters' Vatican correspondent, in [an interview](#) that took place on July 2 and was published on July 6.

Under the Vatican's [new constitution](#), which took effect on June 5, all Vatican congregations and councils have now been renamed with the newly streamlined title of "dicastery."

The constitution also notes that "any member of the faithful can preside over a dicastery," and in the newly published interview, Francis said that Vatican's office for Education and Culture and the Apostolic Library are among those that could be headed by a lay man or woman in the near future.

The pope did not say when such changes or the new appointments to the Dicastery for Bishops will take effect. The office is currently headed by [Canadian Cardinal Marc Ouellet](#). The 78-year old cardinal is likely facing the end of his mandate in office, having served beyond two five-year terms as head of a curial department.

U.S. Cardinals Blase Cupich of Chicago and Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey are among the [current members](#) of the dicastery, which is currently made up of all male clerics and regularly meets in Rome to discuss episcopal appointments.

Following the publication of the new constitution in March, Cupich [told NCR](#) that the Vatican's constitution now makes clear that "we're not just having clerics involved in the selection of bishops, but we're involving laypeople."

Francis' decision to include women in the membership one of the Vatican's most influential departments comes on the heels of [his appointments](#) of three religious sisters to high-ranking posts inside three prominent Vatican offices and the appointment of lay Argentinian theologian [Emilce Cuda](#) as the co-secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, all within the last year.

"Things are opening up a bit," the pope told Reuters.



[Christopher White](#)

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After Supreme Court climate ruling, Catholic leaders say legislation is 'critical'

7 July 2022

by [Brian Roewe](#)

[Leaders](#)



Road signs rest on the side porch of a house near Kermit, West Virginia, Aug. 20, 2014. The Supreme Court ruled in *West Virginia v. Environmental Protection Agency* on June 30, 2022, to limit the Environmental Protection Agency's ability to regulate carbon emissions from power plants. (CNS/Tyler Orsburn)

The U.S. Supreme Court's decision last week to curtail the Environmental Protection Agency's ability to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from power plants was met with disbelief and disappointment by Catholic and other faith groups, calling it "a moral travesty" with serious repercussions for both people and the climate.

The consequential ruling, issued June 30 in one of the final cases of a monumental term for the court, dealt a major blow to one of the federal government's tools to reduce the heat-trapping gases, which are driving climate change, from one of the nation's largest emitting sources: coal- and gas-fired power plants. It also raised questions about what leeway other federal agencies will have to interpret laws and directives they've been tasked to enforce.

In a statement, the Catholic Climate Covenant said it was "[deeply disappointed](#)" by the Supreme Court's decision.

"We know the emission of carbon dioxide through the burning of fossil fuels is one of the largest causes of the climate crisis," said Catholic Climate Covenant's executive director, Jose Aguto, pointing to rising global temperatures that are driving more dangerous and frequent droughts, heat waves and extreme weather events.

"We must bring these emissions down. Yet today, the Supreme Court chose to limit EPA's authority to regulate these emissions, rendering less resourced our collective imperative to care for creation and address the climate crisis. We ask: how is this decision upholding the life and dignity of every person?" he said.

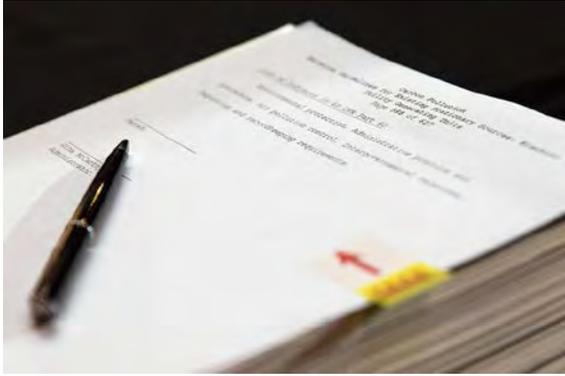
In a 6-3 decision in *West Virginia v. Environmental Protection Agency*, with the conservative justices —

five of whom are Catholic — all in the majority, the court ruled that EPA acted without explicit authority from Congress when it issued [in 2015](#) the Clean Power Plan, which sought to reduce emissions from the power sector.

That rule never went into effect — the high court [put it on hold](#) in 2016, before the Trump administration [rescinded](#) and [replaced](#) it with a weaker version, which was then blocked by an appeals court days before President Joe Biden took office. But Republican state attorneys general and coal companies still sought the court's intervention. Environmental groups viewed the effort as an attempt to limit EPA's power in future emissions-reductions rules, including one the Biden administration is currently crafting.

"Capping carbon dioxide emissions at a level that will force a nationwide transition away from the use of coal to generate electricity may be a sensible 'solution to the crisis of the day,' " Chief Justice John Roberts wrote in the majority opinion, referring to a past court precedent. "But it is not plausible that Congress gave EPA the authority to adopt on its own such a regulatory scheme in Section 111(d) [of the Clean Air Act]."

"A decision of such magnitude and consequence rests with Congress itself, or an agency acting pursuant to a clear delegation from that representative body," Roberts wrote.



The proposal under the Clean Air Act to cut carbon pollution from existing power plants is seen before a news conference in Washington June 2, 2014. (CNS/Reuters/Joshua Roberts)

The majority justices based their decision on the "major questions doctrine," which Roberts said stipulates direct authorization from Congress for federal agencies to act on matters of "economic and political significance." The chief justice wrote that the Clean Air Act directed EPA to regulate polluting sources to operate more cleanly, "not to direct existing sources to effectively cease to exist."

In a scathing dissenting opinion, Justice Elena Kagan said the majority's decision strips EPA, the nation's primary greenhouse gas regulator, "of the power Congress gave it to respond to 'the most pressing environmental challenge of our time.' "

Kagan argued that utilities were already using the "generation shifting" approach that the majority called an overreach by EPA, and noted that many power companies supported the Clean Power Plan and EPA in the case.

"Whatever else this Court may know about, it does not have a clue about how to address climate change. And let's say the obvious: The stakes here are high," Kagan wrote. "Yet the Court today prevents congressionally authorized agency action to curb power plants' carbon dioxide

emissions. The Court appoints itself — instead of Congress or the expert agency — the decisionmaker on climate policy. I cannot think of many things more frightening."

'An unwelcome obstacle'

While the decision hamstringing how EPA can regulate emissions from coal-fired power plants, it doesn't block the agency from imposing new rules on power plants at all or halt it from regulating greenhouse gases altogether — both big worries for environmental groups and lawyers following the case.

"It could have been much worse," Robert Verchick, the Gauthier-St. Martin chair in environmental law at Loyola University New Orleans, told EarthBeat.

Kate Zyla, executive director of the Georgetown Climate Center, in a statement called the decision "an unwelcome obstacle" that will make it harder for EPA to reduce emissions, making efforts at every level of government even more essential.

Tseming Yang, an environmental lawyer at Santa Clara University and director of its Center for Global Law and Policy, said in an email, "The decision is huge in that it shows how much the Supreme Court is willing to second-guess federal climate policies implementing federal environmental laws."

"The Court essentially thought the Clean Power Plan was too radical in its regulatory approach ... instead of relying only on small incremental measures, such as efficiency improvements, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Of course, given the urgent need to address climate change, significant change is what is necessary," Yang said.

The U.S. is the largest historical source of greenhouse gas emissions, with a [quarter of present-day emissions](#) from electricity production, mostly through burning fossil fuels. Since the late 1800s, average global temperatures have risen roughly 1.1 degrees Celsius, and at current global emission rates the planet is on track to heat 1.5 C sometime next decade — a threshold scientists have said will bring about more dangerous heat waves, flooding, droughts and extreme storms.



People in Grant Town, West Virginia, protest the Grant Town Coal Waste Power Plant April 9. (CNS/Reuters/Stephanie Keith)

EPA administrator Michael Regan called the *West Virginia* decision "disheartening" but added, "Make no mistake: we will never waver from that responsibility" to protect people's health from environmental pollution.

"While I am deeply disappointed by the Supreme Court's decision, we are committed to using the full scope of EPA's authorities to protect communities and reduce the pollution that is driving climate change," he said in a statement.

While the Clean Power Plan never went into effect, the country has still shifted away from coal. The U.S. Energy Administration reports that coal production has fallen 35% since 2015, and its share of power

generation has fallen to 22% — lower than the Clean Power Plan's goal of 27% by 2030.

Verchick, who worked at the EPA from 2009 to 2010, called the ruling "a blow to the mechanisms by which agencies normally work." He said it undercuts EPA's ability to rely on its expertise in interpreting statutes and laws that Congress has directed it to enforce.

"Congress is not always able to pass a law the instant that we learn something new about a virus or about a pollutant, or about, you know, machinery that fails on the workplace. ... Since almost the beginning of the republic, the whole idea behind having agencies is that we give them directives, and that they act in ways that are flexible, and smart, and based on expertise to protect people," he said.



A mountaintop-removal coal mine on Kayford Mountain south of Charleston, West Virginia, is seen in 2014. (CNS/Tyler Orsburn)

Now, the *West Virginia* case appears to set a higher standard when a potential regulation could have major implications on the economy.

"It's hard to imagine an air pollution rule that doesn't have a significant effect on the American economy," Verchick said.

'A moral travesty'

From the proposal of the Clean Power Plan through the rulemaking process, faith groups were [strong supporters](#) of the plan. The Catholic Climate Covenant, [along with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops](#), lobbied [on its behalf](#) and issued [letters](#) and [testimony](#) endorsing its adoption.

In a statement, Archbishop Paul Coakley, chair of the bishops' conference committee on domestic justice and human development, said the bishops were "disappointed" by the court's interpretation of the Clean Air Act and the significant restrictions it will place on EPA's ability to regulate emissions from power plants. He added the bishops call on Congress to step in and provide EPA "the necessary authority to meaningfully regulate greenhouse gas emissions."

"Both reasonable regulation and legislation are critical for addressing the threat and challenges of climate change," Coakley said.

The Supreme Court's ruling in *West Virginia v. EPA* 'prioritizes polluters, especially the coal industry, over people.'
—Susan Hendershot of Interfaith Power & Light

Bill O'Keefe of Catholic Relief Services joined in calling on the other two branches of government to step up in light of the Supreme Court's decision, with which the judicial body "has failed to recognize the severity of the climate crisis." O'Keefe, CRS' executive vice president for mission, mobilization and advocacy, said in a statement that the court's move has consequences outside the U.S., including in Africa's [Sahel region](#) from where he recently returned.

"In the Sahel and other vulnerable regions, climate-change driven catastrophes can decimate a country or a region, rolling back decades of progress against hunger and anti-poverty and costing the U.S. millions — if not billions — of dollars in emergency response funding. The Supreme Court's decision stands to aggravate these consequences on the most vulnerable," O'Keefe said.

Yang added that the decision could also dent U.S. leadership on the international stage if other countries view it as a sign that the United States isn't serious about achieving its commitments under the Paris Agreement.

Susan Hendershot, president of Interfaith Power & Light, called the decision "a moral travesty."

"Make no mistake, the Supreme Court's ruling today risks the lives of thousands of people by limiting the ability of the U.S. government to regulate carbon pollution from power plants. It prioritizes polluters, especially the coal industry, over people," she said in a statement.



A train carries coal near Ravenna, Kentucky, in 2014. (CNS/Tyler Orsburn)

The Climate Justice Alliance said in a statement the Supreme Court decision will harm most the communities it represents — Black, Indigenous, Hispanic, Asian Pacific

Islander and the poor — who are on the frontlines of the impacts of climate change.

"The Environmental Protection Agency, at minimum, should be able to regulate emissions, however now even that is being called into question with this ruling by the largely Republican-influenced Supreme Court," said its co-executive director Bineshi Albert.

The American Medical Association, which advocated in support of the Clean Power Plan, said that regulating and reducing greenhouse gas emissions is critical in addressing climate change — which it has declared a public health crisis — and also in reducing the toxins released into the air from burning coal that are "impacting the respiratory, cardiovascular, and immune systems of the U.S. population, with minoritized populations disproportionately impacted."

High concentrations of airborne pollutants like mercury, lead and sulfur dioxide have been linked to respiratory conditions like asthma, as well as neurological and cardiovascular issues and cancer. At the time the Clean Power Plan was rolled out, the Obama administration estimated it would prevent annually upward of 150,000 childhood asthma attacks, 3,300 heart attacks and 6,600 premature deaths.

"There are a lot of health impacts of burning coal," especially for those living near power plants, often due to past city planning and racist policies like redlining, said Indu Spugnardi, director of advocacy and resource development for Catholic Health Association.

'We ask: how is this decision upholding the life and dignity of every person?'
—Jose Aguto of Catholic Climate Covenant

More broadly, climate change is one of the major threats to human health, she added. "We need all the tools that are at hand to address this issue, and it's disheartening to see this limitation being put on the EPA to address such a major issue," Spugnardi told EarthBeat.

The *West Virginia* decision could have significance beyond the EPA, depending on how the court applies it in future cases involving federal agencies' ability to address societal problems.

On one hand, Roberts' opinion could be read as limited to a specific application of the Clean Air Act and what is and isn't allowed under that law in regulating greenhouse gas emissions, Verchick said. A broader reading, though, could extend it to other federal agencies, from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to the Department of Health and Human Services, and also rein in their capacity to make rules and take actions in their respective areas, as well as future EPA rules.

Already, Republican attorneys general have begun looking at other challenges to environmental rules under the major questions doctrine, including emissions standards for vehicles and requirements for publicly traded companies to disclose their emissions and climate risks.

"Roberts really is writing something that looks like it is chipping away at the regulatory state, chipping away at agency authority without blowing it up in one fell swoop," Verchick said.

"The question is, is this one chip or is this going to be the beginning of many chips?" he said.



Brian Roewe

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**AND YOU WELCOMED
ME**
A Reflection from the
Interpath Traditions
by Thomas P. Bonacci, C.P.

One cannot celebrate liberty unless one is alive. The proliferation of guns encourages nothing but violence and what John Paul II called “the culture of death.” Major court decisions enhancing the personhood of companies and compromising the human rights of people contribute to the trivialization of human life and civil society. The constant rhetoric against minorities and the enactment of legislation threatening their right to freedom and self-determination has led otherwise well-meaning people to be suspicious and fearful. Civic, governmental, and religious leaders have a responsibility beyond their own self-interest.

The combination of hostile rhetoric and governmental policies attacking the human rights of immigrants is a case in point. For years, in order to advance their political ambitions, unscrupulous politicians have blamed immigrants for everything from crime to unemployment. Immigrants, who

have every right to live where they please, are vilified for seeking what some of us have. Yet, corporations who require their labor are protected in the highest places of government. The hypocrisy is murderous.

Take, for example, the latest atrocity in San Antonio, TX. Over fifty immigrants from several countries were found dead in a trailer. Overcome with heat and the lack of food and water, they suffered in ways unbecoming human decency. These were our brothers and sisters seeking to find what we as a Nation are rapidly losing.

Religious, political, civic, and governmental leaders must do all in their power to stop the rhetoric compromising the dignity of minorities. They must foster and enact legislation and reforms by which this Nation of immigrants welcomes immigrants seeking life, liberty, and justice.

The Bible teaches us not to suppress the stranger and the alien within us (see Exodus 22: 21). Let us call to mind the words and the prayer Pope Francis spoke in response to the San Antonio tragedy: “Let us pray together for these brothers and sisters who died following their hope of a better life; and for ourselves, may the Lord open our hearts so these misfortunes never happen again.”

Gratitude to you, Holy Community, for all the times you welcomed the stranger, honored the dignity of others, and worked for the benefit of the poor and displaced. Thank you for

all the times you worked to fulfill the dreams of the one who said, "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me."



I am happy to share with you that the Brentwood Community Chorus is returning to our parish on Sunday, December 4th, for a Christmas Concert with Handbells. The concert will take place in our sanctuary at 3:00 p.m. More details as we get closer to December and the Christmas Season. Please mark your calendars now and plan to attend!

Eucharist: Sacrament of unity and source of division

8 July 2022

by [Thomas Reese](#),
[Religion News Service](#)

[Vatican](#)



You will know that we are Christians by our love, but you will know that we are Catholics by our fights.

Sadly, one of the things Catholics fight over is the Eucharist. In his June 29 apostolic [letter](#) to the Catholic people, Pope Francis decries this division while describing the Eucharist as the sacrament of unity.

The letter, *Desiderio Desideravi* ("I have earnestly desired"), gives full-throated support to the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council, which called for full, conscious and active participation of the laity in the Eucharist. Francis is clearly saddened by those who reject the reforms that the council found absolutely necessary.

The pope does not see the pre-Vatican II liturgy as equal to the reformed liturgy, which was meant to be the liturgy of the entire church. "I intend that this unity be re-established in the whole Church," he writes. "We cannot go back to that ritual form which the Council fathers, cum Petro et sub Petro, felt the need to reform."

The pope has allowed himself to be distracted by dissenters, focusing on the concerns of a small but vocal minority opposed to the reforms of the council.

The Eucharist is essential to the life of the church, according to Francis' letter. In the Eucharist, "we are guaranteed the possibility of encountering the Lord Jesus and of having the power of his Paschal Mystery reach us," he wrote. But this is done not as individuals but as a community: "the liturgy does not say 'I,' but 'we.' "

He connects the Eucharist to Pentecost, when, according to the Book of Acts, the Christian community received the Spirit after Jesus ascended to heaven. "It is the community of Pentecost that is able to break

the Bread in the certain knowledge that the Lord is alive, risen from the dead, present with his word, with his gestures, with the offering of His Body and His Blood," he wrote. "Only the Church of Pentecost can conceive of the human being as a person, open to a full relationship with God, with creation, and with one's brothers and sisters."

"Liturgy is about praise," requiring docility to the Holy Spirit, who appeared on Pentecost in the form of tongues of fire on the apostles' head. The pope said, "It does not have to do with an abstract mental process, but with becoming Him." He cites Pope Leo the Great, who wrote, "Our participation in the Body and Blood of Christ has no other end than to make us become that which we eat."

Francis does not want the Eucharist to "be spoiled by a superficial and foreshortened understanding of its value or, worse yet, by its being exploited in service of some ideological vision, no matter what the hue." The art of celebrating the Eucharist "cannot be reduced to only a rubrical mechanism, much less should it be thought of as imaginative — sometimes wild — creativity without rules."

Both types of celebrants tend to make themselves, rather than Christ, the center of the liturgy.



A priest elevates the Eucharist after consecrating it during a Latin Mass. (Creative Commons/ Andrew Gardner)

Francis speaks extensively of the paschal mystery but distinguishes this from "the vague expression 'sense of mystery,' " which conservative critics say was removed from the liturgy by the reforms.

"The astonishment or wonder of which I speak is not some sort of being overcome in the face of an obscure reality or a mysterious rite. It is, on the contrary, marveling at the fact that the salvific plan of God has been revealed in the paschal deed of Jesus (cf. Eph 1:3-14), and the power of this paschal deed continues to reach us in the celebration of the 'mysteries' of the sacraments," the pope wrote, referring to the Letter of Paul to the Ephesians.

Francis' letter contains numerous quotable lines, like those cited above, that can inspire and educate Catholics in their participation in the Eucharist, but despite Francis' intentions, this letter will be more helpful to seminary professors than the faithful at large. It is filled with exhortations on the necessity of liturgical formation, but it is not itself a catechetical work.

The letter is a heartfelt cry to end the liturgical wars and enter into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. Francis explicitly notes this in his first line by linking it to his 2021 *motu proprio* [*Traditionis custodes*](#), which put [limits](#) on the celebration of the old rite.

"The non-acceptance of the liturgical reform," he writes, "distracts us from the obligation of finding responses to the question that I come back to repeating: how can we grow in our capacity to live in full the liturgical action? How do we continue to let ourselves be amazed at what happens in

the celebration under our very eyes? We are in need of a serious and dynamic liturgical formation."

In truth, this is why I do not find the letter all that helpful, because he never fully answers these questions. The pope has allowed himself to be distracted by dissenters, focusing on the concerns of a small but vocal minority opposed to the reforms of the council. This makes the letter of little interest to the vast majority of Catholics who do not oppose the reforms, but need to be drawn deeper into the mystery of the Eucharist.

Sadly, there is much ignorance among Catholics (including bishops and priests) about the Eucharist. Too many Catholics still think that the purpose of the Eucharist is to make Christ present on the altar so that we can adore him.

That is fine for Benediction, but the Eucharist is where the Christian community remembers the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, gives praise and thanks to the Father, unites itself with the sacrifice of Christ and asks that the Spirit transform us into the body of Christ so that we can continue his mission on earth.

This is the heart of the Eucharist as seen in the eucharistic prayer proclaimed at Mass.

Francis, we need another letter, one that helps the average Catholic understand and participate in the Eucharist.



Thomas Reese

Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese's column for Religion News Service, "Signs of the

Times," appears regularly at National Catholic Reporter.

Where and when has God given you the grace of place?

8 July 2022

by Sr. Kathryn Press



The author looks at the sunrise over Ireland's County Wexford and the River Barrow in January 2022. (Kathryn Press)

The coffee mug in our kitchen reads: "Every day is a gift; that's why they call it the present." I think this saying would have made Jesuit Fr. Jean-Pierre de Caussade smile. In his book *The Sacrament of the Present Moment* (sometimes translated as *Abandonment to Divine Providence*), de Caussade challenges us to look for God in the ordinary, everyday events of life — indeed, to expect Him!

Seeing God in everyday life takes practice. It is a lens that colors what we see and how we see it. The key is to recognize that it's God who takes the initiative, not us. He is the giver of all good gifts and it is our job to recognize and receive them. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI, this is the work of

grace: "being looked upon by God, our being touched by his love."

The teacher in me likes categories. The theology teacher in me likes defining grace according to category: sanctifying and actual. (On the topic of grace, [YOUCAT](#) or an adult catechism published by your bishops' conference, will provide give detail beyond what I've written here.)

Sanctifying grace makes us children of God and sharers in his divine life. We see this especially clearly through the sacrament of baptism. That's good and beautiful and I'm thankful for it. But it's the *actual* graces that have captured my attention lately.

Actual graces are all those other ways God assists us in life. This kind of help is totally free and completely undeserved. It doesn't violate our free will. Categories for actual grace include:

- Sacramental grace (e.g., receiving the grace of forgiveness for my sins through the sacrament of reconciliation)
- Graces of state (e.g., graces given to parents for raising their children)
- Charisms (particular expressions of the Holy Spirit given for the good of the church).

There are other categories to describe actual graces that are less frequently discussed. In his [Spiritual Exercises](#), St. Ignatius of Loyola counsels us to ask for a grace of retreat. If God is constantly giving us the help we need, St. Ignatius advises us to expect it and then look for it. There is also the grace of the office, which God gives to people in leadership roles, such as to the pope, or the leader of a country or religious congregation. The roles and responsibilities associated with leadership are many and human capabilities are limited. With their openness, God gives those in authoritative positions help beyond their capacity.

Without wishing to sound heretical, I propose an additional kind of actual grace: grace of place. Are there be physical, geographic locations we find ourselves where, when we are open to them, God gives us an outpouring of divine assistance?

When the Israelites wandered through the desert for 40 years, they received manna daily until they reached the Promised Land. Sounds like a grace of place. Surely St. Joseph experienced this grace when the Holy Family fled Nazareth to Egypt. He would have had to have found work to support Mary and Jesus during their time there, a kind of divine assistance unique to that place in his life.

As a young girl, Edel Quinn wanted to join the Poor Clares. When poor health made this impossible, God called this young Irish missionary to serve as an ambassador for the Legion of Mary. She gave her whole heart to the people of East Africa and is buried in Kenya. Grace of place. Mother Teresa writes about teaching in the Loreto convent in Kolkata and how her heart yearned to be with the poor in the slums just outside her door. Her call within a call was a grace of place. The shanties and hovels were holy ground for her. It's where God longed to meet her and she God.

Two years ago I returned to Ireland as a missionary. Moving and changing ministries in the middle of a pandemic had its challenges. When I look back on this time, I'm struck by how many graces God has given me and I name them as graces of this place.

I don't especially like meeting new people or talking to strangers. Making small talk doesn't come easily to me. In Ireland God gives me the grace of joy in the encounter. I like knowing what I'm doing and doing it well. The grace of place for me is the

freedom to be in the present moment. I like planning, punctuality, and efficiency. Here God gives me flexibility and peace.

For each of my natural desires or preferences, God has given me a strength beyond. (I know, because I've tried on my own faculties!) The graces he's given me these past two years seem more tangible than ever before. Maybe they'll last and become habitual graces. Maybe they won't. Either way, I'm thankful.

St. Patrick tells us in his Confession how the voice of the Irish people came to him in a dream and begged him to "walk again among us." He writes, "Where did such a great and life-giving gift come from then, to know and love God, even at the cost of leaving homeland and parents?" It was a grace of place!

Where and when has God given you the grace of place?



Kathryn Press

Kathryn Press is an Apostle of the Sacred Heart of Jesus from Georgia. She professed her final vows in 2018. With a Master of Divinity and a background in religious studies, she has taught every grade from pre-K through high school. After opening a convent in Ireland, she taught in New York City for three years before returning to Ireland in September 2020 to work in evangelization and parish ministry.