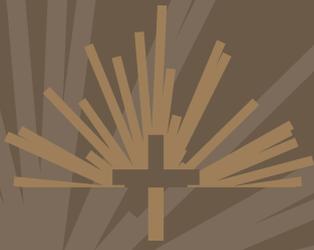


C21



RESOURCES

THE CHURCH IN THE 21ST CENTURY CENTER

A Catalyst and Resource for the Renewal of the Catholic Church



OUR FAITH *Our Stories*

FALL 2015



ON THE COVER

Fr. Michael Himes shares a personal faith story about his family at the popular monthly speaker series for students, Agape Latte.

The Church in the 21st Century Center is a catalyst and resource for the renewal of the Catholic Church.

C21 Resources, a compilation of critical analyses and essays on key challenges facing the Church today, is published by the Church in the 21st Century Center at Boston College, in partnership with featured authors and publications.

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“Human beings are called to be the people who do what God is. **God is agape** and we get to enact it. That is the most extraordinary statement about being a human being that I know.”

— Fr. Michael Himes, Agape Latte, November 2014

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Guest Editor *C21 Resources* Fall 2015

BRIAN BRAMAN is the guest editor of this issue of *C21 Resources*. He is a professor in the philosophy department at Boston College and director of the Perspectives Program, a four-year interdisciplinary program of the humanities and natural sciences. Braman is also on the faculty of the College of Advancing Studies. His areas of interest are the intersection of philosophy and art, and the work of Bernard Lonergan, S.J.

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GOD LOVES STORIES

DO YOU EVER wonder why stories are so engaging? One might attempt an explanation from the cognitive sciences or offer an analysis from literary criticism of the power of narratives. However, there is an old Chasidic tale that God made humankind because God loves stories (read it on page 13). With our being made in the divine image (Genesis 1:26), little wonder that we love stories, too. Indeed, the Bible requires us to tell stories, of faith both to God and to one another.

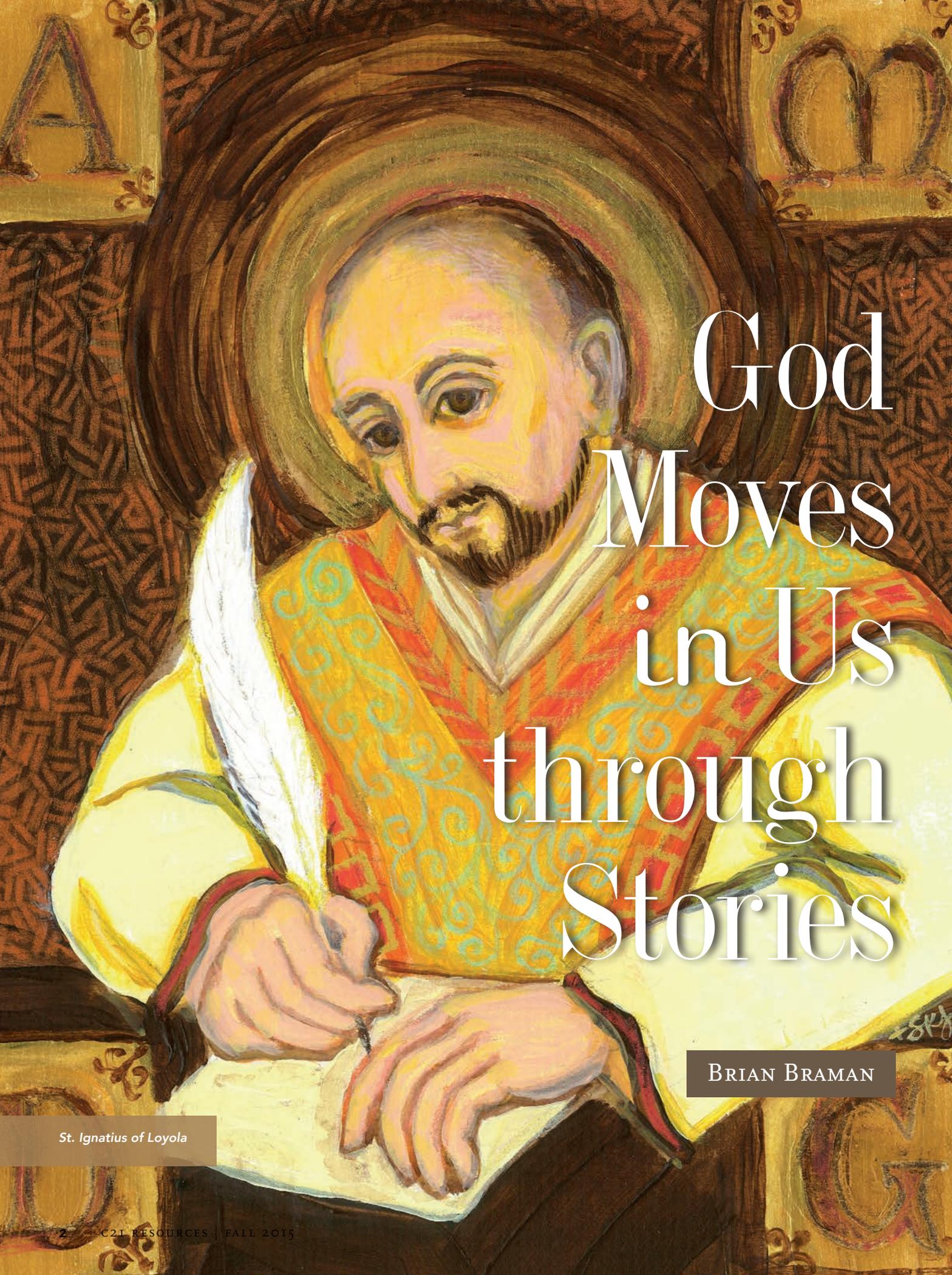
That we tell God the story is encouraged repeatedly. When offering “the first fruits of the land” in worship, Moses instructs the Israelites to tell God their story as God’s own people, beginning with the call of Abraham down to God’s liberating them from slavery in Egypt (see Deuteronomy 26:1-11). And what else is the celebration of the Eucharist but a reminding of God and ourselves of the story of Jesus’ Last Supper, and his redeeming self-gift on our behalf happens again—from retelling the story.

The Bible makes clear, too, that God’s people need to remember their story for their own faithfulness. A repeated mandate throughout the Old Testament is “Do not forget.” As the Haggadah instructs, when the youngest child asks at Passover, “Why is this night different from all other nights?” the adult response is to tell the story of their slavery and liberation by God.

Of course, the exemplar of storyteller par excellence in Christian faith is that Carpenter from Nazareth, and most obviously in his parables. We Christians have been telling the story of Jesus and the stories that he told ever since—all amounting to “the greatest Story ever told.”

This issue of *C21 Resources* reflects the continuing power of stories to both nurture and share our faith. In our postmodern world, there may still be nothing more effective for faith formation than to recall and tell our stories of God’s saving work in human history, including our own. I thank our editor of this edition, Professor Brian Braman, his assistant Conor Kelly, and our managing editor, Karen Kiefer.

Tom Groome
Director



God Moves in Us through Stories

BRIAN BRAMAN

St. Ignatius of Loyola

IN 1913 a brilliant young student transferred to Göttingen University to study under the guidance of Edmund Husserl, “father of Phenomenology.” She became his pupil and teaching assistant, and later Husserl advised her on her doctoral thesis. It was during this period of intellectual work with Husserl that her search for the “one thing needful” intensified. She had drifted away from the faith of her childhood and longed to be at home in a faith community. One night, when at some friends’ home, she happened to pick up St. Theresa of Avila’s autobiography. She became so captivated with this book that she stayed up all night and read it in its entirety. After finishing the book she is reported to have said: “This is truth.” She converted to Catholicism shortly thereafter: her name, St. Edith Stein.

In 1521 a young Spanish nobleman was wounded in a battle against French forces. One of his legs was shattered and upon being captured he was sent back to his home to recuperate. This young man grew up reading romantic tales of courtly love, knights rescuing damsels in distress, and knightly deeds of great valor. Unfortunately, as he lay convalescing from his wound, he had none of his beloved romantic novels to read. In fact, the only two books he had available to him were the *Life of Christ* and *The Lives of the Saints*. It was reading these stories about the saints and Christ’s life that began to fire his imagination in such a way

(summer), comedic (spring), satiric/ironic (fall), and tragic (winter). All of these plots in one way or another express our deepest longings, desires, and fears. Romantic plots entail a sense of adventure. Heroes and heroines embark upon a journey to test their characters. They encounter evil and harm, but they ultimately triumph over adversity. It is nearest of all literary forms to the wish-fulfillment dream. Tragedy, on the other hand, explores the limits of our power and desire to make our wishes and dreams come true. The central theme of a tragic plot is that catastrophe and death can befall a heroic character at any moment. Tragedy is an imaginative attempt to balance our potential greatness with our perishable nature. From tragedy we move to irony. Irony is a story of middle age. It is a parody of a romance plot; the hero is all too human; he or she is subject to the ills of the world; his or her quests remain unfulfilled, or they are wrongheaded or aimless and senseless; he or she just grows old and dies. Irony reflects the permanent discrepancy between what is and what ought to be. Finally, there is comedy. The comic vision reconciles as many characters as possible in the reconstitution of society. The comic vision embraces the limitations and follies of the world of experience but asserts faith in more powerful images of reconciliation, renewal, or rebirth. The story of Christ is the quintessential comedic plot.

Stories shape who we are, where we come from, how we understand ourselves.

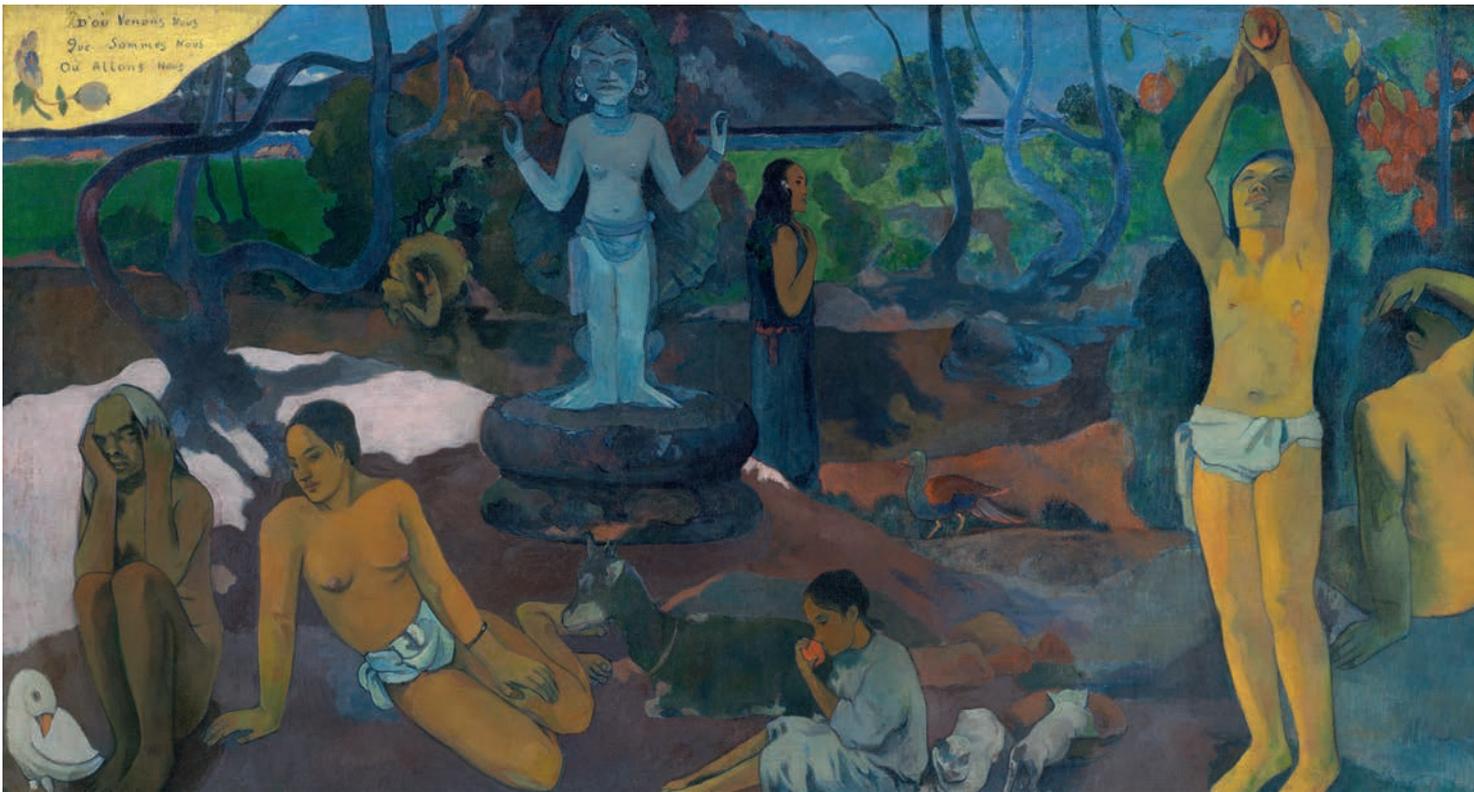
that he thought of himself as wanting to be a hero and a knight for Christ; he now wanted to do great deeds such as the saints had done, but in the context of the rediscovery of his Catholic faith: that young man as we all know was St. Ignatius of Loyola.

The point to these examples is to suggest that before anything else we are the type of beings who tell stories, listen to stories, and read stories. We are storytellers. Stories shape who we are, where we come from, how we understand ourselves. There are stories of origins, stories of destiny, and stories of faith. Stories are the life-blood of culture and faith. Stories articulate the fundamental meanings and values of a culture, of a faith life. Think of the story of George Washington crossing the Delaware, the story of “the shot heard round the world,” the story of “the death and resurrection of Jesus.”

So what type of stories do we tell? Northrop Frye has argued in his work *Anatomy of Criticism* there are four foundational plots, that is, stories, to all literature and these plots are associated with the seasons of our life: romantic

These plots form an entire cycle of life from birth to eventual death. Thus, to go beyond the youth (summer) of romance requires the ability to imagine the possibility that wishes and dreams can end in catastrophe and death (tragedy); to move from tragedy to irony/satire (fall) requires that one confronts the fact there is a permanent discrepancy between one’s dreams and the ambiguous reality of what actually is. The movement out of winter into spring, then, requires the transformation of this limited world into a new community freed from the power of death and sin to undo it (comedy).

When we think of how stories can shape our faith, we should be aware that our faith journey, and even our prayer life, is analogous to this plot cycle of life. Our faith is at once romantic, tragic, ironic, and comedic. The stories we read often reflect where we are on our own spiritual journey. When we think of stories and faith we automatically resonate with biblical stories; stories of the saints, or stories of someone’s faith journey. For example, Graham Greene’s *The Power and the Glory*, or Shusaku Endo’s *The Samurai*,



or *Silence*. All great literature either implicitly or explicitly touches upon the search for God.

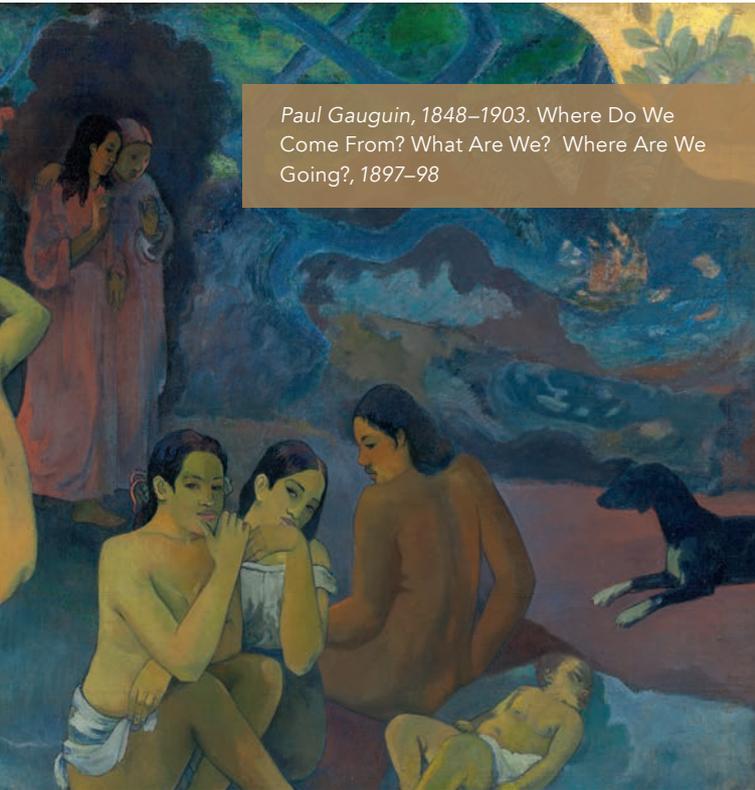
In addition to those cycle of stories that reveal our deepest longings, desires, failures, and triumphs, we have stories from holy men and women about their own quest for God. I imagine if you were asked by a friend to recommend a good book for spiritual reading you might suggest Theresa of Lisieux's *Story of a Soul*, or Julian of Norwich's *Reflections of Divine Love*, or the poetry of John of the Cross. Yet if I were to say to you, "How about reading Carl Boyer's *The History of the Calculus*, my guess is you would think me mildly demented. What on earth could a book on mathematics, particularly the history of calculus, do for my faith life, my spiritual life? Perhaps more than you can imagine.

Whenever we think of stories, or more specifically those associated with stories of faith, we usually think of the traditional narratives, or traditional forms of spiritual stories. Yet I always tell my students that the search for God is not unique to literature or poetry. There is music. For example Mahler's *Resurrection Symphony* or John Coltrane's jazz classic *Love Supreme*, a musical story of his religious conversion. There is architecture. Think of the gothic architecture of Boston College. It tells a story. It is a story that puts us in the Middle Ages, the story of faith and reason; more importantly, these buildings continue to tell the story of our own intellectual struggles, or our collective journey of faith. Painting is another vital way to tell stories of one's faith, or its absence. There is the icon tradition coming out of the Eastern Church. There are

the great artists of the Middle Ages and beyond: Giotto, Caravaggio, Titian, or the post-impressionist Gauguin and his powerful masterpiece: *Who Are We? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* We also find stories of despair and the loss of faith. Think of Edvard Munch and his depiction of psychological suffering. Or the German expressionist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner who like Munch was gripped by the fears and anxieties concerning man's place in the modern world, and the loss of a genuine sense of spirituality and faith. Sometimes photographs themselves tell powerful stories. Meditate on the photograph of Pope Francis washing the feet of prisoners. The story that this simple photo tells is the Gospel of Matthew: "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even* the least of *them*, you did it to Me." There are innumerable methods of telling stories about one's struggle and journey in faith; stories that can lead to light and life, or stories that reveal to us what a world or an individual life absent of God would mean.

Up to this point, I have written broadly about the nature of stories; the different kinds of stories, and the different ways that stories can be told. Yet there is another kind of story, and it is nontraditional. The story that I want to tell makes sense of why one might read Boyer's book on *The History of the Calculus* for spiritual reading. This story begins with St. Augustine. Augustine tells us that what makes us most like God is the fact that we are the created participation in the uncreated light. It is our intelligence that makes us most like God. When we think of stories

Paul Gauguin, 1848–1903. *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*, 1897–98



about our Christian faith we often fail to advert to the way that God's self-story is being communicated through our intellectual tradition. The Ignatian maxim of finding God in all things seems to include almost everything except the intellectual life.

I want to suggest that to immerse oneself in the intellectual story of Western culture is to expand the Catholic imagination in such a way that you open yourself up in a richer and deeper way to the experience of being loved by the Triune God. Think of our Western cultural story as a story about the relationship between faith and reason, or simply put, a love story between God and his creation. It is a tumultuous love story, but nonetheless a story. It is a story that is all at once romantic, ironic/satiric, tragic, and comedic, and to a large degree a story that has been forgotten or lost.

To remember and reappropriate this cultural story is to be educated in wisdom. Being educated in wisdom means understanding how our intelligence can be the foundation for an ordered love of God, of self, and of neighbor. Another way to think about this education in wisdom is to imagine how reading great books can help one fall in love with the Triune God. Falling in love with God opens us up to the wonders of the entire universe; the wonders of another human being, to the giftedness of the life that has been given to us, and to recognize the beauty of the world in which our lives unfold. It is in a true liberal arts education that we can encounter the mystery of God's self-story. For example, there is something profoundly beautiful and

even holy about Newton's new world order, or Einstein's general and special relativity theories. Think of the wonder and awe that can come from reading Darwin's *Origin of the Species* and reflect on God's infinite creative imagination, and how this dynamic and evolutionary universe is God's self-story. Galileo tells us that God is a geometer, the nature of the universe is written in the story of mathematics. How wondrous was the invention of the calculus. These are all stories about the human intellect's created participation in the uncreated light. A number of years ago, I heard an interview with a math professor at Rochester Institute of Technology. Her work was in multiple dimensional geometries. The interviewer asked her why she did this kind of work since it seemed to have no real-world applications; her response, "I do this because it is beautiful." As a Christian, I am firmly convinced that her work is telling a story of God's own mysterious beauty.

Let me end my story by rewording a comment from my friend and mentor Fred Lawrence here in our theology department:

"The intellectual life in the context of friendship with God underscores the fundamental point that God's self-communicating story is a story of Trinitarian love. This story is constitutive of who and what we are; it makes us to be persons in a communal story of faith. This intellectual friendship is not only a story of our faith life, but also a story of the cosmos as it struggles to become what God desires. The story that we are personally, communally, and historically is a story that is part of the unfolding of the divine storytelling in human history most profoundly told in the revelation of the Eternal Word made flesh."

Finally, what we have in this issue of *C21 Resources* is a rich series of essays and articles that introduce us to the power, strength, and diversity of storytelling and its relationship to faith formation. From Karen Kiefer's "The Story Power of Agape Latte" and its stories, to Andrew Greeley, and Alice McDermott and the power of the Catholic sacramental imagination, to the "Stories that Matter: Faith and Film," to stories of Latino/a spirituality, and theological accounts of storytelling and faith, each essay is designed to enlarge our Catholic imagination and help us become more sensitive to the way that God moves in us through stories. ■

BRIAN BRAMAN is the guest editor of this issue of *C21 Resources*.

PHOTO CREDITS: Page 2: Artwork by Sue Kouma Johnson. www.suekoumajohnson.com

Pages 4–5: Photograph© 2015 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



Watch Brian Braman's Agape Latte talk, "Intellectual Life and Friendship with God." Visit: www.bc.edu/c21stories

The Story Power of Agape Latte®

KAREN KIEFER



OUR FAITH STORIES matter. They remind us who we are and where we've been and help us see all that is possible through God's amazing grace. Although it can be scary and challenging, sharing our personal stories with others connects us to others in a more intimate way and can become a catalyst for powerful conversations. No question it is these kinds of conversations that transform and change perspectives, change directions, change lives.

That has certainly been the case with cleverly named monthly speaker series Agape Latte, launched at Boston College back in 2006 through a partnership with the Church in the 21st Century Center and Campus Ministry. The name "Agape Latte" is derived from the Greek word "agape" which is defined as the unconditional love of God and, of course, "latte" being the popular coffee drink.

Bringing together storytellers, God, and lattes in a coffee bar setting seemed like a perfect programming brew. By reflecting on someone's personal faith story, Agape Latte had the potential to help students broach tender conversations about their own deepest desires, challenges, happiness and relationships. Add to the brew an overflowing dessert buffet, coffee and music and the model had some staying power.

Like most big ideas, the program started small. Fifty or so students would gather each month on a Tuesday evening to hear well-known figures at Boston College—everyone from the president of Boston College to professors and coaches—tell stories about transformative moments in their lives where they saw God working. Their stories were powerful enough to uproot the comfort of a smartphone and get

students talking and showing up. Fifty students has grown to 500 at some Agape Lattes, and the success story continues.

What makes Agape Latte work? The stories and the students.

The program is student-run and student-driven. Members of the C21 Center's Student Board invite the speakers, coach the speakers, plan and market the event, and bring Agape Latte to life on campus. Students understand best what students want: an authentic story that relates to their journey. For many, these stories reveal what faith can deliver, while the conversations that characterize an Agape Latte make a "God talk" more comfortable and, yes, possible.

Due to the popularity of the program and the gift of an anonymous grant, the C21 Center has begun to export the Agape Latte program to other Jesuit, Catholic private and public colleges nationally, and with great success. Within the pages of this magazine, you will find student testimonials and excerpts from previous Agape Latte talks. The talks are all videotaped, so you can watch them anytime online. We invite you to share them with others and continue the conversation.

If you are interested in learning more about the Agape Latte program or watching the video presentations, please visit the website: www.bc.edu/agapelatte or send us an e-mail at: agapelatte@bc.edu. ■

KAREN KIEFER is the associate director for the Church in the 21st Century Center.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 7: BC acoustic group participate in *Acoustic Café* during *Espresso Your Faith Week*, September 29, 2013.

agape

[ah-gah-pey]

n. a greek word for selfless, sacrificial, **unconditional love** that seeks nothing in return; a love of and from God



Agape Latte was a cornerstone of my BC education. Each time I gathered with a group of friends or strangers in Hillside Cafe, **I left inspired** to further connect my faith to all that I do. From making mistakes to finding God in small acts to asking for forgiveness, each **Agape Latte started a conversation** that extended for weeks after the event. I think Agape Latte helps students to normalize conversations about God, spirituality, and faith. Without it, these difficult conversations may not exist on a regular basis.

— Peter Trainor '15

Agape Latte®

STEVE POPE, theology professor at Boston College, spoke to students about the importance of offering forgiveness. Here's an excerpt from the Agape Latte talk:

One day during Lent, I was giving a talk at a parish about sin and forgiveness. After the talk, a guy named Seamus came up to me. He was about 80 years old, a first-generation American whose parents had come from Ireland. Seamus told me, "I wish I'd heard that talk 65 years ago." I asked why, and he explained:

When I was 15 years old, my brother John was always beating me up. I told my parents, and my father said I've got to toughen up. My mother had eight kids and was trying to work two jobs, so she had no time to pay attention to me crying. I kept telling my brother to stop, but he was older and a lot bigger and stronger than I was. So one day I said, "I've had it." I had been beaten up again and felt humiliated. I left the house in tears, and I never came back. I talked to my parents and to my other siblings, but from that day I never spoke a word to my brother.

Well, about a month ago, my sister called me and said I ought to go see John. He's in the hospital dying of cancer. So I was going back and forth. I didn't know what to do. I thought, *OK, I'll go see him*, and then I pulled back: *If I go there, he'll just insult me again. I can't face that humiliation. I'm not going.* I go back and forth, back and forth for three or four days. Finally I go to the hospital. I arrive at my brother's room, and he's not there. He had died a few hours before.

I wish I had not been so unwilling to forgive. I wish I could've put the relationship ahead of my hurt. I've been carrying the burden around my entire life, and it would have been the time for me to be free of this anger toward my brother. But I'm still carrying it today because I never got to talk to him. I've gone to confession and been absolved, but I still have the feeling.

Seamus' is a cautionary tale.



JACK DUNN

A PROMISE TO A FRIEND

Jack Dunn, director of Public Affairs at Boston College, shared the story of a promise he made to his best friend, Nick, who was dying of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), Lou Gehrig’s disease. Here’s an excerpt from the Agape Latte talk:

I WENT OVER TO Greece to visit with Nick, and on my last day there I said to him, “There’s something I need to tell you: I love you, and I’ve cherished every day of my 30-year friendship with you.” He said to me, “I love you, too, and I know I’m going to die, but I need you to know that I’m happy, I’m at peace, and I believe that we’ll see each other again in the Kingdom.”

His words were the most profoundly beautiful thing a friend had ever said to me. Here I was angry at the world and feeling sorry for myself, and here he was confronting the cruelest of illnesses, and somehow he was happy, he was at peace, and he was thinking about God’s Kingdom.

I left him that day and promised that I would be back to see him as soon as I could. I fulfilled my promise and returned around six months later. Upon arriving, I noticed how much he had declined. He was confined to a bed and a chair, and his speech was now slurred. On the last day of my visit I said to him, “I can’t explain this, but I need you to tell me what I can do for you. It would do me wonders to do something for you.” He said, “There is something that I’d like you to do.” I said, “Anything, anything at all.” And he said, “*I want you to go to confession.*”

Confession? I was shocked. I thought he was going to ask me to run a marathon in his honor, start a scholarship, find a cure, paint his house, anything. But confession? I had not been to confession in years. I guess I just could not go there. I went to Mass faithfully every Sunday and offered

my sins up to God, but I could not embrace the sacrament of reconciliation. I was hurt and angry over the losses I had endured, and I selfishly felt that I was owed more than I was getting in return.

So I returned home, having made a deathbed promise to a dying friend that I would go to confession. And I did what guys always do: I put it off. I put it off until the week before I was scheduled to return to Greece to see my friend. That Sunday before my trip, the priest talked at Mass about an Archdiocesan initiative called *The Light Is On for You*, where local parishes offer the sacrament of reconciliation on Wednesday evenings from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

The Wednesday evening before my Thursday flight, I set out to fulfill my promise. I went to my parish in the town where I live. I walked up the stairs, still not embracing the concept, but knowing what I had to do. I entered the church and saw my pastor entering into the confessional to hear confessions. I said, “Time out. I know him. He knows me. This is too personal. This won’t work for me.”

So I left and went to a different church on the other side of my town. The format in this parish is to go into a small room, shut the door, and sit face-to-face across from the priest for an open confession. I did not like it. I thought, “This is too informal. I’m out of here.” So I left and I drove to a different town.

I went into a church in a neighboring town and was sitting in the pew, awaiting my turn to go into the confessional,

I thanked him and as I got up to leave, he said and one more thing: “You have a hell of a friend.”



After going to Jack Dunn’s Agape Latte, my roommate and I stayed up until 3 a.m. talking about how it is so important to forgive yourself for your mistakes, because life is too short to live with regrets.

— Lauren Henehan ‘14

when I looked to my right and suddenly saw the mother of an ex-girlfriend—a girl I had dated in college—enter the church. I thought, “I have 20 years’ worth of sins, and the mother of my ex is going to see me in confession for a half an hour!” All I could picture was her calling my ex-girlfriend and saying, “I saw that no-good former boyfriend of yours at confession last night, and he was in there for 30 minutes—30 minutes’ worth of sins. It’s a good thing you dumped him when you did!”

I got in my car, drove down the street, and eventually came to St. Anne’s Parish—St. Anne, the mother of the Blessed Mother. I walked into St. Anne’s and as I was going up the stairs, the church lights were suddenly turned off. I looked at my watch. It was 8:30. I had blown my chance. I could not believe it. I had reneged on a promise to my dying friend. I was furious with myself. Then, amazingly, the parish priest looked out and realized that I was standing on the steps. So he turned the church light back on, unlocked the door, and went into the confessional, illuminating the light above. I entered the confessional, knelt down and said, “Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It’s been 20 years since my last confession, and I’m here only because I promised my best friend that I’d do this. So please forgive me. Here are my sins...”

I let it all out—20 years’ worth of sins, regrets, mistakes, everything. And when I finished, in the kindest of voices, the priest said to me:

“You have to understand that God loves you. He loves you unconditionally and He forgives your transgressions because He made you and He understands you. God wants more than anything for you to be happy. So all this baggage that you’ve been carrying around for 20 years, let it go. Let it go, because God wants you to be free to live your life to the fullest. All He asks is that you go forth and do your best to sin no more.”

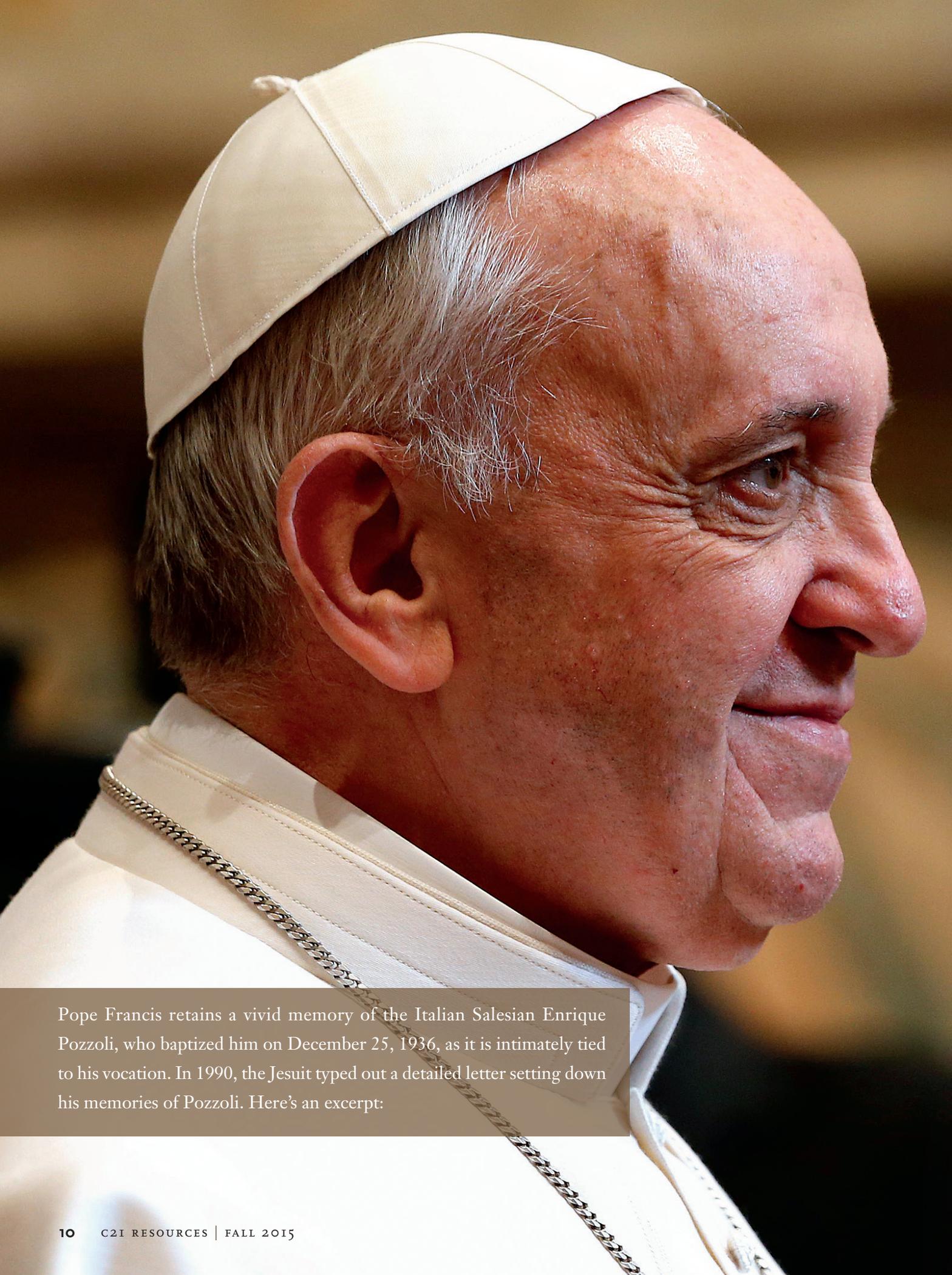
Overcome with emotion, I thanked him, and as I got up to leave, he said, “And one more thing: You have a hell of a friend.”

I cannot explain it in any other way, but I felt as if the weight of the world had been lifted from my shoulders. I felt joyous. I felt liberated from the burdens I had carried in my heart for years. I went home, and the next day I kissed my wife and my kids and flew to Greece to see my dying friend. Upon arriving, it was clear that he had worsened. He was very thin, and could no longer speak, but his eyes lit up when I walked in. I said, “Nick, I have something to share with you. I went to confession as you asked and I feel wonderful. I have never felt better. I will never be able to thank you for what you did for me.”

And he burst into tears. ■

JACK DUNN is the director of News and Public Affairs at Boston College.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 8: Jack Dunn, director of Public Affairs at Boston College, speaking at Agape Latte (student image). Page 9: ©iStock.com/Alina555



Pope Francis retains a vivid memory of the Italian Salesian Enrique Pozzoli, who baptized him on December 25, 1936, as it is intimately tied to his vocation. In 1990, the Jesuit typed out a detailed letter setting down his memories of Pozzoli. Here's an excerpt:

The Story of My Vocation

POPE FRANCIS

FR. POZZOLI WAS very close to the Sívori family—mama’s family—who lived on Quintino Bocayuva 556. Mama’s brothers, especially the eldest, were very close to him.... As a family, we always turned to him whenever there was a problem, or when we needed help or advice. He baptized us all, except my second brother because (in January–February 1938) Fr. Pozzoli was in Usuaiah. Several times during the year (generally for Sant’Enrico) he came to lunch at Quintino Bacayuva 556, the home of my maternal grandparents...and we would all get together there and celebrate with ravioli. He was the spiritual father of the family.

In 1955 he played a decisive role in the story of my vocation. On September 21, 1954, I got thrown from a horse.... I went to confession... and there—and without sitting at the tax desk like the saint of the day [Matthew]—the Lord was awaiting me *“miserando et eligendo.”*

Then and there I had no doubts that I should become a priest. I felt my vocation for the first time at Ramos Mejía, during the sixth grade, and I spoke about it with the famous “fisherman” of vocations, Fr. Martínez S.D.B. But then I began secondary school and “goodbye!” I was studying chemistry at the Scientific School of Industry and I used to pass long periods of time (especially in the summer) at my maternal grandparents’ home....

I didn’t say anything at home until November 1955: that year I was qualifying at the Industrial School (it

was a six-year program) and I enrolled for technical chemistry. At home they were doubtful. They were practicing Catholics...but they wanted me to wait for some years while studying at the university. Since I knew how the conflict would end, I went to Fr. Pozzoli and told him everything. He examined my vocation. He told me to pray and to leave everything in God’s hands. He gave me the blessing of Mary Help of Christians. Every time I recite *Sub tuum praesidium...* I think of him.

Naturally at home the idea came up [from my parents]: why not talk to Fr. Pozzoli? And I, with the best face in the world, said “yes.” I can still remember the scene. It was December 12, 1955. Papa and Mama were celebrating their 20th wedding anniversary. The celebration was a Mass (only my parents and the five children) in the San José di Flores parish. Fr. Pozzoli was to celebrate it. Once the Mass had ended, Papa invited him to breakfast at the “Pearl of Flores” pastry shop.... Papa thought that Fr. Pozzoli would not accept because he asked him if he could (I think that otherwise we would have gone home, six blocks away), but Fr. Pozzoli (who knew what the topic of discussion would be) accepted without hesitation. What freedom of spirit and readiness to help a vocation!

Halfway through breakfast the subject was raised. Fr. Pozzoli said that university was a good thing but that things should be undertaken when God wants them to be undertaken, ...and he began recounting various vocation stories (without taking

sides), and at the end he told the story of his own vocation. He told us how a priest had suggested that he become a priest, how in just a few short years he had become a subdeacon, then deacon and priest... how he had been given what he had not expected....

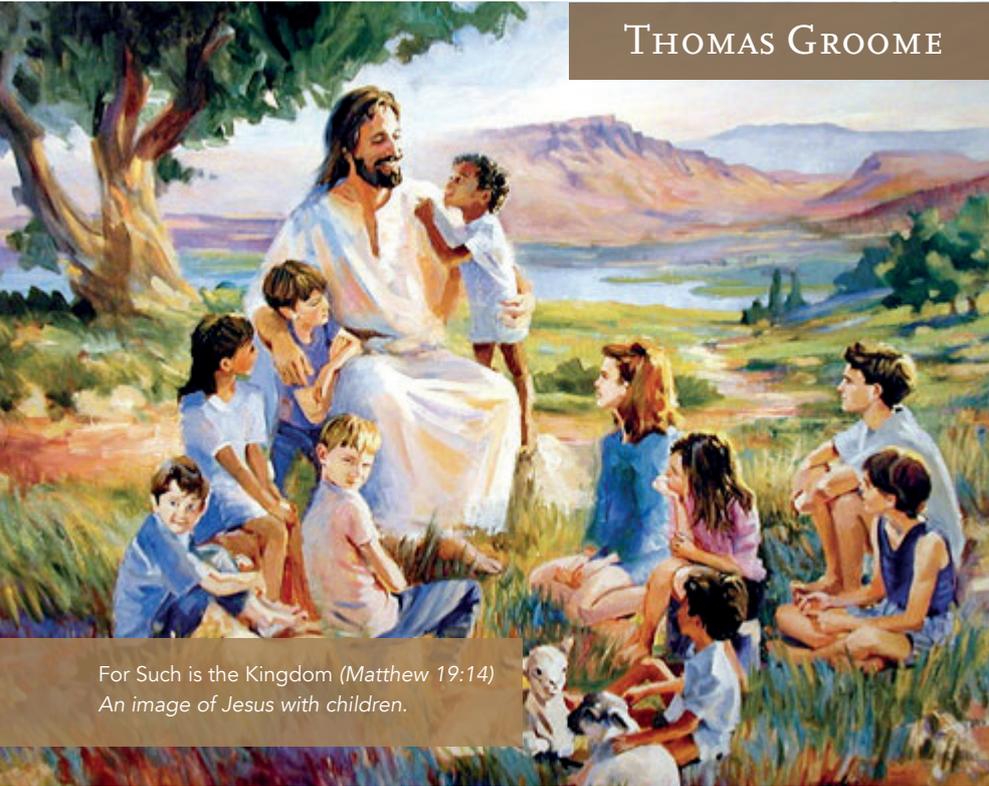
Well, at this point “finally” my parents’ hearts had melted. Naturally, Fr. Pozzoli didn’t end by telling them to let me enter seminary nor did he demand a decision from them... He simply knew that he had to “soften” them... and the rest took care of itself. It was just like him: *“una de cal y otra de arena”* the Spanish would say [“lime and sand,” which is equivalent to the English “the carrot and stick approach”]. One didn’t know his intention...but he did; and generally he didn’t want to reach the point where one would recognize that “he had won.” When he “whiffed” that he was about to get what he wanted, he withdrew before the others realized it. Then the decision came on its own, freely from those with whom he was speaking. They didn’t feel forced...but he had prepared their hearts. He had sown, and [sown] well...but he left the enjoyment of the harvest to others. ■

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PHOTO CREDIT: Page 10–11: Pope Francis looks on during an audience with the diplomatic corps at the Vatican March 22, 2013. Pope Francis urged the West to intensify dialogue with Islam and appealed to the world to do more to combat poverty and protect the environment. REUTERS/Tony Gentile.

Share Your Faith Stories

THOMAS GROOME



For Such is the Kingdom (Matthew 19:14)
An image of Jesus with children.

"SO TELL ME about your First Holy Communion next Sunday," asked Nana Peg of her granddaughter Cara, "do you have great plans?" And little Cara bubbled on about the rehearsing she and her second-grade friends had been through, her new outfit, and the great party afterwards in her backyard, adding, "You're coming Nana, right?" Peg assured Cara that she wouldn't miss it for the world and said, "Oh, you'll have lovely memories of your First Communion day, Cara, you'll remember it all your life as I do." Then Peg, beginning with "I remember so well . . ." told a great story of her own grand day, and Cara was enthralled. Peg reminisced on and wound down

with, "When I finally received, the first thing I said was 'Welcome Jesus and thanks for coming to me today.'" "Ah," said Cara, "that's what I'll say to him, too, Nana."

As I reflect on now my eavesdropping on that lovely round of stories, I'm reminded again of what gifts we have to share in our personal stories of faith. Indeed, there is probably no more effective way for us to share "the greatest Story ever told"—Christian faith—than through the filter of our personal stories. This is heightened all the more when parents and grandparents share such stories with their children and grandchildren (and maybe aunts and uncles, too?). Surely

nothing is more effective in evangelization than the storied witness of lived faith.

If a key strategy for passing on the faith to the rising generations is through our own faith stories, this begs the question of how best to do so. As Aquinas advised, sharing the faith should be done "according to the mode of the receiver." To just launch into a big pious story with our children could have the very opposite effect to what we hope for. At least, this would be hazardous with *my* 14-year-old son. So, how best to go about it?

To return to my eavesdropping, I note well how Peg drew out Cara's story first before she shared her own. And I propose that there is no better example of such pedagogy than that of Jesus himself. There are numerous examples of him drawing out people's story in the midst of sharing his own great story—the Gospel of God's reign. Recall the dynamic of his conversation with Nicodemus (John 3), or with the Samaritan woman (John 4), or with the disciples on the road to Caesarea Philippi (Matthew 16).

Indeed, stretching the word "story" a bit, Jesus almost always began his teaching with some familiar narrative from his listeners' daily lives. So, the reign of God is like fishermen sorting fish; I bet he was talking to those sorting fish or at least with people familiar with this morning work. Or the reign of God is like a woman baking bread; I imagine him talking to the women at the well. Or to farmers about sowing seeds, and so on. Then, in the midst of such familiar stories of his listeners' lives, he taught them "with authority" (Mk 1:22) the story of faith and invited their lived response for God's reign (Mk 1:15).

Though this "story to Story" pedagogy is present throughout Jesus' public ministry, nowhere is it more evident than with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). Recall how they are leaving Jerusalem

(running away?) for Emmaus—a seven-mile journey. Jesus, now the Risen Christ, approaches, joins their company, and “walks along with them.” For some reason (their overwhelming pain?) they don’t recognize him. Even more amazing, however, is that he doesn’t tell them what to see. Instead, he first draws out their own tragic story of how Jesus was taken and crucified, and now their shattered hopes for “one to set Israel free.”

Only when he has drawn out their own painful story and lost hope does he begin his own version of the great Story of the faith community. So, “beginning with Moses and all the prophets he interpreted for them every passage of Scripture that referred to himself,” and explained how the Messiah had to suffer “so as to enter into his glory.”

So, now their own stories and the Story of Faith are on the table, yet the Stranger still doesn’t tell them what to see but waits for them to put the two together and come to see for themselves. Which they do, after they have offered him hospitality and he sits with them at table for “the breaking of the bread.” In that great moment, they recognize the Risen Christ, whereupon he vanishes from their sight. In many ways, his work was done; he likely was off to another Emmaus road—as to the table in *your* family.

I warrant that at least once a day every child asks a question or raises an issue or makes a protest or takes a stand that demands the attention of their caregivers. When this happens, take the time to draw out their “story”—the narrative of what is going on with them or happening to them. Not always but often, we can find an entrée in such moments to share a faith perspective, to sow a seed by sharing our own faith story.

There will be moments to share an explicit faith story, as with Nana Peg and Cara; be sure to take them—they are golden for handing on the faith. And there will be implicit faith moments, when you are simply encouraging their faith in themselves, in others, in life. Here again, you have great faith-based stories to tell—even if without explicit God talk. Take those opportunities, too. However, like Nana Peg and that Stranger on the road to Emmaus, draw out their own stories first. That is how you will know how best to share your own faith stories. We have no greater gift to give them! ■

THOMAS GROOME is a professor of theology and religious education at Boston College and the director of the Church in the 21st Century Center.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 12: Gaye Lynne LaGuire. www.paintedlight.com

God Loves Stories

ACCORDING TO ELIE WEISEL, God created people because God loves stories—a conclusion Weisel reaches based on the Chasidic tale of the Baal Shem Tov:

When the great Rabbi Israel Bal Shem-Tov saw misfortune threatening the Jews it was his custom to go into a certain part of the forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and the miracle would be accomplished and the misfortune averted.

Later, when his disciple, the celebrated Magid of Mezritch, had occasion for the same reason, to intercede with heaven, he would go to the same place in the forest and say: “Master of the Universe, listen! I do not know how to light the fire, but I am still able to say the prayer.” And again the miracle would be accomplished.

Still later, Rabbi Moshe-Leib of Sasov, in order to save his people once more, would go into the forest and say: “I do not know how to light the fire, I do not know the prayer, but I know the place and this must be sufficient.” It was sufficient and the miracle was accomplished.

Then it fell to Rabbi Israel of Rizhyn to overcome misfortune. Sitting in his armchair, his head in his hands, he spoke to God: “I am unable to light the fire and I do not know the prayer; I cannot even find the place in the forest. All I can do is to tell the story, and this must be sufficient.” And it was sufficient.

God created humankind because God loves stories.

Stories that Explain and a Message that Transforms

N.T. WRIGHT

JESUS...TOLD STORIES. NOT just any old stories. These stories were, for the most part, not “illustrations,” preachers’ tricks to decorate an abstract or difficult thought, to sugarcoat the pill of complicated teaching. If anything, they were the opposite. They were stories designed to tease, to clothe the shocking and revelatory message of God’s kingdom in garb that left the hearers wondering, trying to think it out, never quite able (until near the end) to pin Jesus down. They were stories that, eventually, caused some to decode his deep, rich message in such a way as to frame a charge against him, either of blasphemy, sedition, or “leading the people astray.”

The stories were full of echoes. They resonated with ancient Scriptural promises; they reminded their hearers of Israel’s future hopes and claimed by implication that these hopes were now being realized, even if not in the way they had imagined. These explanatory stories—the “parables”—were not, as children are sometimes taught in Sunday school, “earthly stories with heavenly meanings,” though some of them may be that, as it were, by accident. Some, indeed, are heavenly stories, tales of otherworldly goings-on, with decidedly earthly meanings. That’s exactly what we should expect if Jesus’ kingdom announcement was as we are describing it, with God’s kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven....

The parables, in fact, are told as kingdom explanations for Jesus’s kingdom actions. They are saying: “Don’t be surprised, but *this* is what it looks like when God’s in charge.” They are not “abstract teaching,” and indeed if we approach them like that, we won’t understand them at all. Specialists who have studied the way in which Jesus’ language works describe a “speech-act” effect, whereby telling a story creates a new situation, a new whole world. That was indeed what Jesus was aiming to do, and by all accounts he was succeeding. But what such specialist studies do not always point out is what this new world actually was. It was the new world in which God was in charge at last, on earth as in heaven. God was fixing things, mending things, mending *people*, making new life happen. This was the new world in which the promises were coming true, in which new creation was happening, in which a real “return from exile” was taking place in the hearts and minds and lives of both notorious sinners and of people long crippled by disease....

Frequently...the main thrust of a parable must be left unsaid. The parable of the prodigal son...is a case in point. The story ends without resolution, with the father remonstrating with the older son. We want to know what happens next, and presumably Jesus wanted his hearers to think it out and to apply what they were thinking to their own situation. Like a good advertisement, a parable

may be much more powerful in what it doesn't say than in what it does. But with Matthew 13 (and the parallels) something else is going on. Here we are faced not so much with "allegory" in some technical sense, but with something much more like *an apocalyptic vision*....

Apocalyptic visions are not simply special divine revelations for their own sake. Nor, on the other hand, are they about the "end of the world." Apocalyptic visions of this sort are about *the coming of God's kingdom on earth as in heaven*. The point of "apocalyptic" is that the seer, the visionary—Daniel, Jesus—is able to glimpse what is actually going on in heaven and, by means of this storytelling technique, the strange-story-plus-interpretation, is able to unveil, and therefore actually to set forward, the purposes of heaven on earth. The very *form* of the parable thus embodies the *content* it is trying to communicate: heaven appearing on earth....

Not all stories, of course, work in this way. Jesus is anything but a wooden, stilted teacher, a one-string fiddle or a one-tune wonder.... Jesus'

stories build to a crescendo, keeping pace with the wider narrative of his brief public career. The kingdom is coming, on earth as in heaven; but the people of the kingdom, "the children of the kingdom," are missing out on it! Everything is coming right at last—and everything is going wrong at the same time. There is a dark twist in the way God's plans are working out, in the way that Israel's destiny is being fulfilled.

All suggestions that Jesus was simply a "great religious teacher" telling his contemporaries about a new pattern of spirituality or even a new scheme of salvation must be set aside (unless, of course, we are to rewrite the Gospels wholesale, which is what many have done in their efforts to domesticate Jesus and his message). Jesus' parables, never mind for the moment anything else about him, tell us in their form alone, but also in their repeated and increasingly direct content, that the purposes of heaven are indeed coming true on earth, but that the people who in theory have been longing for that to happen are turning their backs on it now that it is actually knocking on their door....

If this is what it looks like when God's kingdom comes on earth as in heaven—if this is what it looks like when God's in charge—then there must have been more wrong with "earth" than anyone had supposed.

That indeed is the conclusion we are forced to draw at every turn. It isn't that God, coming to rule on earth, is picky or grouchy, determined to find fault. It is, rather, that the patient is deathly sick, and the doctor must prescribe an appropriately drastic course of action.... Jesus had grasped that, if God was to become king on earth as in heaven, something deeper than outward reform would be required.... Jesus had a different sort of "moral reformation" in mind... [insisting] *Hearts will be transformed*. ■

N.T. WRIGHT is the former bishop of Durham in the Church of England and one of the world's leading Bible scholars.

Selection from *Simply Jesus: A New Vision of Who He Was, What He Did, and Why He Matters* (Harper Collins, 2011), 87–88, 91–93, 95–96, 97–98, 99. Reprinted with author permission.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 15: Vintage typewriter with paper. Валентин Агапов/123RF.COM

par • a • ble (s)
an earthly story
with a spiritual truth



CHRIST IS OUR STORY

JOHN NAVONE, S.J.

THE EXODUS AND the Christ story are the fundamental biblical [quest] stories that shape the Judeo-Christian community's sense of reality both in expressing what the community is trying to do (be) and what it does (is) without trying. How dominant these stories are among others in the lives of individual members of the faith community is difficult to determine; nevertheless, they reflect that community's heritage of religious experience and, like all stories that tell us about the world and how the self is situated in it, give its members a way of being in the world that is oriented toward action deriving from a basic trust in a loving God.

These stories articulate the meaning of a religious experience that involves knowing and doing. They attempt to lessen the distance between knowing and doing in such a way that the community's knowing is conceived as a species of action. They are meant to help us become a certain type of person that is actively engaged in the creation of a certain type of society. The knowers and the doers of this community bring the meaning of these stories into the tangled texture of the world they are trying to shape in the spirit of justice and self-sacrificing love. They are acting out the meaning and value of these stories in a quest for the fulfillment of their promise...

The [Christ] story contained in the Gospels, according to Stanley Hauerwas, is not meant to provide a worldview, but rather to position the self (and the faith community) appropriately in relation to God.¹ ... The authentic Christian has [therefore] chosen the Gospel story of Jesus as his basic story because he believes that this is the most truthful and worthwhile story that our lives have been empowered to tell. It corresponds to his most deeply felt need for the honesty, courage, freedom, and ability to accept himself, others, and God in the ongoing quest and questioning of his examined life. He believes that the Church's travel story of Jesus, the Gospel truth, discloses the true excellence of his ultimate possibilities, of his authentic destiny. The authentic Christian believes that this is available for him in the process

of self-sacrificing love's daily dying and rising or conversion, deepening and developing in other-centeredness the self-transcending exodus journey of agapic love disclosed in and empowered by the story that tells of God's action in the words, deeds, and destiny of Jesus....

The dramatic action of the story that Christ's life told, and continues to tell, through the gift of his spirit in the Church is the story of God's love for us. The life story of Jesus Christ communicates the Good News of God's life-giving love for us. It specifies the Christian understanding of how God acts in relations with mankind. Especially important, therefore, is prayerful reflection on the life and teachings of Jesus and on the action of the Holy Spirit in him, in his saints, and in the historical development of the community of faith. Through the gift of his Holy Spirit, the Christian community learns the prayer that characterized his perfect responsiveness to his Father....

Through the same Holy Spirit, we have the heartfelt realization that nothing can separate us from the love of God that summons us in Jesus Christ to the discovery of our true story.... Our commitment to God in Jesus Christ is a commitment to finding our true life story through our commitment to others and the world with the same love that was and is in Jesus himself; consequently, it involves our prayerful discernment of our authentic gifts for serving others, allowing God to shape our lives in accordance with the service value of particular gifts with which he has endowed us.²...



We all have a **deep longing** to reveal ourselves to someone and to let them reveal themselves to us. **And that is the point of love.** And it's the point of dating, too, on a smaller scope. **To reveal yourself to somebody** and to let those feelings about that revelation unfold and unfurl and to **let it happen at a usual pace.**

— Professor Kerry Cronin,
Agape Latte, February 2010

Prayer expresses an awareness of God's reality that discloses itself in various ways throughout one's life story.... Prayer is a particular way of being related to God in our search for fulfillment and renewal of life. Prayer is a way of seeking to live in accordance with God's healing and enlightening will for our life story. If prayer expresses our need for help, it should also express our awareness that the help we receive may be other than what we had in mind; for God wills only what contributes to the discovery and realization of our true life story of filial communion with Himself and fraternal communion with others....

Prayer expresses our responsibility for our life stories in the presence of God, a responsibility that cares for one's self and for one's neighbor. Intercessory prayer implies our conviction that the Giver of life stories cares for them, a belief whose foundation is our present experience of God's compassionate love enabling

us to welcome the true meaning of Jesus Christ's life story, death, and resurrection. Prayer, the dialogue in our ongoing life story of our relationship with the Other, expresses our reciprocity with the divine Love that is creating our true life story and self. Love of God creates and sustains and unites life stories, summoning them to their ultimate fulfillment and goodness. ■

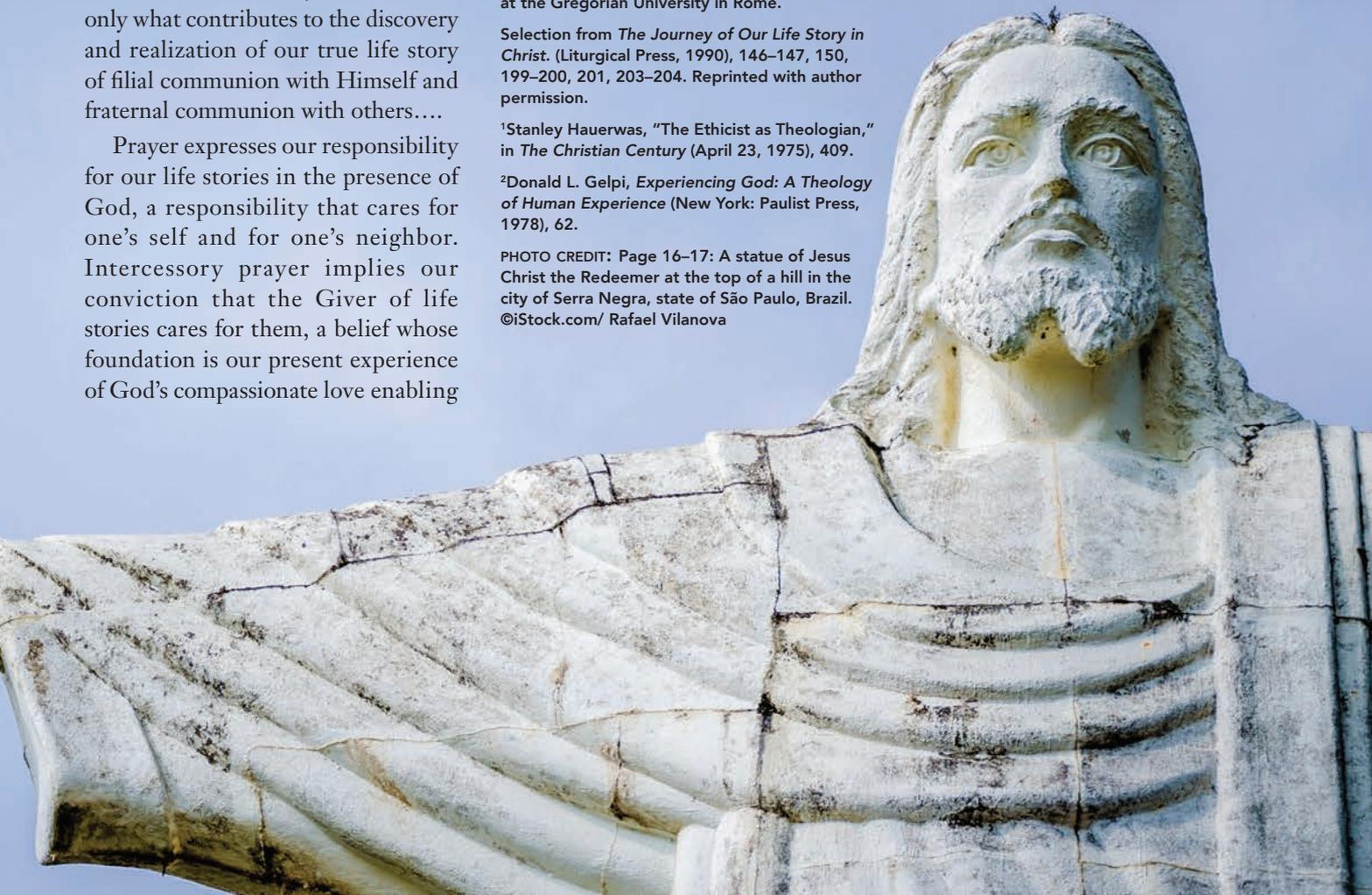
JOHN NAVONE, S.J., is a professor of theology at the Gregorian University in Rome.

Selection from *The Journey of Our Life Story in Christ*. (Liturgical Press, 1990), 146–147, 150, 199–200, 201, 203–204. Reprinted with author permission.

¹Stanley Hauerwas, "The Ethicist as Theologian," in *The Christian Century* (April 23, 1975), 409.

²Donald L. Gelpi, *Experiencing God: A Theology of Human Experience* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 62.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 16–17: A statue of Jesus Christ the Redeemer at the top of a hill in the city of Serra Negra, state of São Paulo, Brazil. ©iStock.com/ Rafael Vilanova



Clearing God's Name

NATHAN ENGLANDER

God planted a garden in Eden, to the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed.

– Genesis 2:8

THERE IS A common misconception about the order of things. When the Earth was *tobubobu*, and Up did not have the slightest inclination to separate from Down, and Wet did not intend to give way to Dry, God looked Earthward with Adam at His side.

“I will send you to that place,” said God.

“I don’t want to go,” Adam told Him.

God began to lift the sky from under the sea. The roiling mass tried to hold its formlessness, earth clinging to the hand of God, trailing up toward the sky until it could go no further, the mountains born from failure.

“I will not go,” insisted Adam.

God laughed. It was only the start, a gessoing of the canvas. With a giant spoon of stone, God scooped out the oceans, scraped out the lakes, and, as if considering a half-eaten slice of custard pie, turned the spoon over and scratched out all the rivers of the world. Adam was not impressed.

For Adam, He added color to the fish in the sea, placed billy goats on rocky ledges, and added to the ibex a second horn. Still Adam refused to descend. Eternity piled onto itself as the discussion continued, as God, laughing all the while, spruced up His little world. He hung fruit from the trees, hid milk inside coconuts and the udders of cows, turned some bees into hummingbirds and half the mice into bats. Still Adam would not go down.

God put lightning in the clouds, then thunder to chase after it. He taught the chameleons to hide and hinged the armadillo’s once-solid shell. All this was for His own entertainment as much as Adam’s; He knew what offer must be made.

“Keep your stubbornness. You can go about your business without any interference.”

“I will go, then,” said Adam.

God placed Adam on Earth, his body atop a hillock, his weight flattening the long virgin grass, the air around him at its sweetest, simply for never having been breathed by man before.

But Adam would not awaken.

God, that one and only time, came down to Earth. He sat on the right side of Adam at the top of that hill and whispered into his ear, entreated him, most politely, to come alive.

“There will be ostriches,” He said, “and ospreys, and aardvarks, and sun-showers.” A warm rain began and the new animals, unafraid, sniffed the feet of the body not dead but not born to life. God started the flowers pollinating and put a moon in the sky that would, throughout time, occasionally eclipse the sun. He made it so stars were not eternal, He sent meteors flying, started the sun spinning, and gave all the birds teeth. Looking up at the sky, God decided against the last two. He stopped the sun in its place and took

the teeth from the mouths of the birds and gave them to the fish who were already blessed with brilliant color. The birds became jealous, and God gave them feathers without a second thought. He was most concerned with man.

Finally, He said, “There will be Eve.” He fashioned her right there on the hill and placed her at Adam’s left side. She waited in a most peaceful fashion to be woken into the world.

Obstinate and unalive, Adam offered no welcome, no commentary on the weather or the pleasant sensation of resting in the sharp, cool grass.

Adam had become shrewd at God’s side. He had learned that dawn and dusk threw the same shadows, though they fell on opposite sides of the tree. He had learned, also, that Good and Evil were a single force—just as rain, if God deems it, will flood the bounty it creates. It was only in His image—with a sin for every kindness, a decision in every deed—that Adam was willing to walk the land. But God, so in love with His new Earth and His man and His woman, and excited, like any father, for all the joy to come, did not want to see pain in the eyes of His children. He did not want to hear the endless crying as night moved in a circle around the globe.

He was only trying to protect them.

“Fine,” He said, reluctantly. “Fine, Adam. What is freedom without choice? You may have it.” God pressed His lips against Adam’s ear, to whisper into it the last of the gifts. “There will be Evil, Adam. You may have Evil as well as Good.”

And Adam knew this to mean that he was free, a god himself, a maker of choices, that the future was no longer closed. Adam opened an eye and rolled over toward Eve, placed a hand on her shoulder to wake her, a kiss on that shoulder to welcome her to life, his head light, still dizzy with that first long breath.

God, then, went back, forever, to Heaven.

I only tell you this to set the story straight, out of fairness to God. For it is time that the misconception was corrected, that God’s name was finally cleared of guilt.

In the beginning, on a hill, it was man who first turned his back on the Lord. ■

NATHAN ENGLANDER is currently the Distinguished Writer-in-Residence at New York University.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 18: *Hand of God Lighting over Pacific Ocean in Hawaii*. Alvis Upititis/Getty Images.

Agape Latte

MARINA MCCOY, philosophy professor at Boston College, spoke to students about learning to trust in God’s lead. Here’s an excerpt from the Agape Latte talk:

It was Advent, and I was praying a style of Ignatian prayer where you use your imagination and let God speak to you through your desires, your feelings, as well as your intellect.

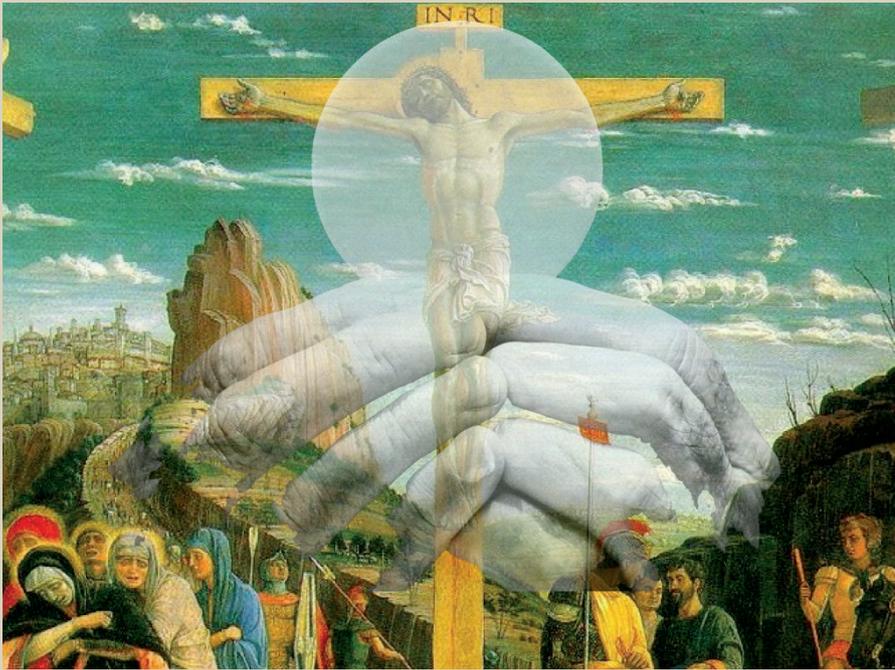
In the prayer, Jesus gave me a beautifully wrapped box. I opened up the box, and there was nothing inside. I was so happy and deeply consoled that there was nothing inside this box.

As I thought about it and reflected about it—I realized that this was “indifference.” Jesus was offering me this gift of indifference. I think he was trying to say that part of being able to put God at the center of our lives is being able to stay open—not to close things off.

Many of us feel closed off when we feel empty, or we have needs, or we have something missing inside of us. We want to make sure that the gift box, so to speak, is not empty so as to make sure that we do not have to deal with that emptiness. The image of the gift box reminds me that emptiness is less about absence than about continued openness to receive.

If we stay open, Jesus is going to come and give us new things. In fact, if we do not stay open, we are not going to notice the new things that come.

Watch the full videos of
Agape Latte talks at:
www.bc.edu/c21stories



The Catholic Imagination through Story

ANDREW GREELEY

RELIGION BEGINS IN the imagination and in stories, but it cannot remain there. The stories that are our first contact with religion (“A decree went out from Caesar that the whole world should be enrolled...”) are subject to rational and critical examination as we grow older to discover both what they mean and whether we are still able to believe them. Bethlehem becomes the Incarnation. The empty tomb becomes the Resurrection.... These are all necessary and praiseworthy developments. Nonetheless, the origins and raw power of religion are at the imaginative (that is, experiential and narrative) level

both for the individuals and for the tradition.

The doctrine of the Incarnation has less appeal to the whole self than the picture of the Madonna and child in a cave.... The doctrine of the Real Presence is less powerful than the image of the final meal in the upper room. None of these doctrines is less true than the stories. Indeed, they have the merit of being more precise, more carefully thought out, more ready for defense and explanation. But they are not where religion or religious faith starts, nor in truth where it ends.

Catholicism shares these stories with the other Christian churches.

However, Catholicism invests the stories with its distinctive sensibility, developing Easter lilies and Santa Claus and the Feast of Corpus Christi.... Most other Christian denominations do not engage in such devotions. Indeed, they dismiss them as superstition and perhaps idolatry. It is not my intention to defend Catholic devotional practices but rather to show that they illustrate how the Catholic religious imagination differs from the Protestant religious imagination....

The fundamental insight that guides this exploration comes from the word of David Tracy.... Tracy noted that the classic works of Catholic theologians and artists tend to emphasize the presence of God in the world, while the classic works of Protestant theologians tend to emphasize the absence of God from the world....

[T]o put matters in different terms, Catholics tend to accentuate the immanence of God, Protestants the transcendence of God. Tracy is consistently careful to insist that neither propensity is superior to the other, that both need each other... Nonetheless, they are different from one another....

[If one] is willing to concede, based on the empirical evidence, that Catholics view reality somewhat differently, the question then arises as to how this comes to be.... How does one acquire a Catholic sensibility, a Catholic perspective on time and space and community and creation and salvation?

The answer is that a religious sensibility is passed on by storytellers, most of whom are not aware that they are telling stories because their narratives reside more in who they are and what they do rather than in what they say. Religious heritages are transmitted, not necessarily by official teachers and preachers, but more likely by intimates, those who are closest to us in our lives. The stories are told by the way in which they react to the ordinary and especially the extraordinary events of life—failure,

disappointment, suffering, injustice, death, success, joy, love, intense pleasure, marriage, birth.

In our study of young Catholics, my colleagues and I...found that the Catholic sensibility is passed on first through the stories one hears at the dawn of consciousness and that slip, via images and pictures (the Madonna, the crèche), subtly into that consciousness during the early years of life. Then through the various socializing influences in the young person's life—parents, siblings, relatives, teachers, friends, the parish community, the spouse, the liturgy, and religious and even theological

reading. The playing field is tilted in favor of the Catholic sensibility from the beginning of consciousness and remains tilted—not perfectly, not necessarily permanently, more strongly in some than in others, but tilted nonetheless.

Thus, even well-educated and sophisticated Catholics have acquired their Catholic sensibility almost entirely through stories told by local socialization agents. The mistake of many Catholic leaders is to assume that what they say and do really matters or has ever mattered *unless local socialization agents are willing to tell the same stories.*

Who has more influence on religious preference, the pope or a warmly loving spouse? If you are not sure of the answer to that question, then you are kidding yourself. ■

ANDREW GREELEY (1928–2013) was a priest, sociologist, and author.

Selection from *Handing on the Catholic Imagination Through Story* (University of California Press, 2000), 4–5, 174–176, 179, 180. Reprinted with permission.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 20: Andrea Mantegna's 1457 *Crucifixion* with a photo overlay. Courtesy of Karen Eifler, professor of education and codirector of the Garaventa Center for Catholic Intellectual Life and American Culture, University of Portland.

Storytelling and the Sacramental Imagination

ALICE McDERMOTT

I HAVE BECOME AWARE in my travels as an “author”—as opposed to my travels as a writer, which all take place at my desk—that many readers are more interested in acquiring a lesson from a serious novel than they are in participating in the “magic” of it, the magic of art. I suspect this is the reason that novelists are more often invited to “give talks” rather than to read from their work. I also suspect this is why the most frequent questions we hear are variations of “what were you trying to say...” or “...is that what you intended?”...

I have nothing against hidden meaning, or any kind of meaning. I have been known, in fact, to quote T.S. Eliot's lament to both my students and to my children, “We had the experience but missed the meaning.” But I would argue that the experience, the experience of the conjured world, how a novel happens, is primary...

So what then of the idea of the sacramental imagination, or

better yet, as the phrase seems to imply, what of the sacramental imagination of the Catholic writer? Doesn't the very notion of a story told by an author with a sacramental imagination imply that the author begins with a conviction, a motive—in this case, that God reveals himself through the physical world—and then attempts to create just such a world by telling a story that upholds, or illustrates, this conviction?

If the sacramental imagination is something that exists prior to the storytelling, if it is part of some conviction, some belief, then doesn't the motive for the story constitute its reason for being? Isn't the novel's world merely secondary, a cartoon that runs beside the editorial, a picture meant to convey an idea?

In the early days of my writing career, I allowed myself one motive, one goal, for the fiction I would write. I would, as Joseph Conrad put it, seek “to render the highest possible justice to the visible universe.”...It is

the motive I continue to serve, 30 years on.

Of course, I am not unique in this. I daresay Conrad's injunction operates to some degree in all of us who write. Flannery O'Connor agreed with it, but then added, with all the conviction of her great faith: “For me the visible universe is a reflection of the invisible universe... The artist penetrates the concrete world in order to find at its depths the image of its source, the image of ultimate reality.”

Personally, I am...a born and bred Catholic, even a somewhat public Catholic, a “practicing Catholic”—if “practicing” means still working at it, still not doing it very well, certainly not yet ready to take the stage. I approach my faith with none of O'Connor's breathtaking certainty.

But what I am certain of, through long experience, is the validity of the conjured world, of a universe made visible by the magic of art.

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GOD CAN WORK in STRANGE WAYS

MARY TROXELL

Mary Troxell, professor of philosophy at Boston College, spoke to students about how God has used her mistakes and failures to bring her closer to Him and bring her to the kind of joy she experiences today. Here's an excerpt from the Agape Latte talk:

THERE IS NO greater pain than deliberately choosing to do something that you know is going to devastate somebody you love—that was a man I was engaged to be married to, my fiancé.

He was a graduate student at Catholic University. The reason why things were not quite right from the beginning was because a lot of my impetus to fall in love and get married was misguided. I was 28 at that point. I was in graduate school. I was about to turn 29. There was something that happened to me in my twenties. All my friends started getting married, having babies, buying houses, and here I was—28 years old and living in a dorm. I had no money, husband, children, or car. I was a student. I was itching to mark something off my list.

I met this great guy. If you were to fill out a checklist of a good guy to marry, he was it. He was smart. He was good-looking. He was funny. He was charming. He had a beautiful faith life. We fell in love and we got engaged rather quickly. I think we were dating for six months when we got engaged. I was madly in love with him. I could not wait. After we got engaged, I started having misgivings. They were not anything I could articulate. I just had a bad feeling about it. The bad feelings got more intense. I had to go home for my bridal shower, and I brought him with me, because a lot of my friends from home were going to meet him for the first time. My feelings were so strong that I felt physically sick to my stomach when he walked in the room. I thought, “This is more than wedding jitters.” I could not

stand having him near me. I loved him. I really loved him. I did not know what was going on.

It had to get to the point where I had this very visceral feeling. I thought, “What am I going to do?” This was a point where we had the venue, we had the band, we had everything planned. I had to cancel everything. A thousand times more important, I had to go to this man I loved, and who had told me repeatedly that he would love me forever, and that I was what made his life complete, and I had to tell him that I did not want to be with him anymore. To this day, I can hardly talk about it because it is so painful thinking about doing that.

But, God works all things into good. My fiancé ended up becoming a priest. Looking back, he was meant to be a priest. Actually, my friend Sr. Prudence said to me one time, “Have you ever thought that maybe your fiancé’s meant to be a priest? Because the way he talked about his faith, it was a way that somebody who’s got a vocation of priesthood talks about the Church.” All these years later, it is so obvious that he was meant to be a priest. His vocation makes him happier and more himself than he could have ever been if he had stayed with me. I am quite convinced we would have made each other miserable, with all of our good intentions, because we were doing it for the wrong reasons. ■

MARY TROXELL is a philosophy professor at Boston College.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 22: ©iStock.com/maximkabb



Born on third base

WILLIAM B. NEENAN, S.J.

William B. Neenan, S.J., spoke to the students about some of the lessons he learned in life; he passed away two months later. Here's an excerpt from the Agape Latte talk:

I'VE LEARNED THAT there's nothing to be learned from losing a game twice. When you lose once, you learn something. The second time around, you ain't learned nothing. That's one thing.

The second thing I've learned is the longest river in the United States is the Missouri River. Not the Mississippi River, which all of you people that somehow sneaked into Boston College erroneously thinking that the Mississippi River was the longest—you are dead wrong. Google it when you get back to your apartment. So those are two things I've learned.

The third thing I've learned is you were born on third base—all of us. We have people here of a lot of different traditions. Whether you're Catholic, Jewish, Unitarian, Methodist, Muslim—whatever you are, this has been passed on to you. It's been passed on to you. And here we are.

John Bapst was a Jesuit in 1855-ish. He used to come down from Canada and celebrate Mass

with the French Canadian Catholics. Maine, at that time, had very few Catholics. In fact, there was a lot of anti-Catholic prejudice against the French Canadians. He came down to this French Canadian family, and he was celebrating Mass in the home. And this family had three kids in the Ellsworth public schools.

In those days, you had to read the Bible, and you had to have the King James translation of the Bible. The King James is named after King James of England. I grew up as a little boy—that was the Protestant translation. Well, this was a Catholic family, and they had the Catholic translation, which was called Douay-Rheims—two towns in Europe where the Bible was translated. They had that. But they wouldn't allow this family to use the Catholic translation. Fr. Bapst said no, you got a right to do it. Use it. Well, he got in trouble. And the people in Ellsworth, Maine, drove him out of town and said, don't come back, because if you come back, you're in real trouble.

Well, he came back about six months later. And he was celebrating Mass in this house, and the people of Ellsworth knew he was there. They got him. They dragged him out. They tarred and feathered him. Now tar—you know what tar is? It's that hot black stuff. They poured that hot black stuff on him. Then they took feathers. You guys know what chickens are—you've seen a chicken—that's feathers. They stuck the feathers on him. And they tied him to a tree, and they started a fire at his feet. They were going to burn him to death. And the Presbyterian minister in Ellsworth intervened and saved his life.

That's Bapst—John Bapst. He was the first president of Boston College. We are here today, all of us, on third base because people like Bapst did what they did and founded Boston College. ■

WILLIAM B. NEENAN, S.J. (1929–2014) was Boston College vice president and special assistant to the president.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 23: ©iStock.com/DNY59

Becoming a Somebody

ROBERTO GOIZUETA



THE STORY OF Guadalupe is also the story of an indigenous man, Juan Diego, who at the beginning tells Guadalupe, “I am a nobody.” He literally uses the term “piece of dung” or excrement. “You’re asking me to go to the bishop in Mexico City and tell him to build you a chapel on this hill, Tepeyac?” It sounds crazy to him. “I’m a nobody. Find somebody else.”

But, during the series of conversations he has with her, she continually refers to him as “my most beloved Juan

Diego, my dear child.” And as a result, he gradually goes from being somebody who experienced himself as having no dignity to, finally, being eager to go to the bishop. “Let me go. I want to go.”

Not only that, but at a certain point in the story—when Guadalupe tells him that she needs to see him—he even avoids seeing her because his uncle is sick and he has to go look for a priest to give his uncle the last rites. He tries to sneak around her and, in fact, disobeys

her. But that very act of disobedience in that story is also a reflection of how he’s gone from seeing himself as a nobody to seeing himself as somebody who is now even able to go against the wishes of the Virgin.

It is the story of somebody who goes from being an object of other people’s actions to somebody who is now capable of being the subject of his own actions and his own life. Why does that happen? The only reason is the relationship he develops with Guadalupe. It’s through that relationship, in which he comes to see himself as lovable and loved, that he becomes a self, an agent, a person.

This is very different from the way we tend to think of human agency in our individualistic society. We tend to think of relationships as burdens upon or limitations upon our agency. Whereas in the story of Guadalupe—as in the Latino community and in Christian faith—our human agency, our human dignity, our autonomy even, are not burdened by relationships; they are given birth by relationships.

I want to raise my children in such a way that they will have the strong sense of self to eventually disagree with me, and maybe even reject some of what I have taught them. But that can only happen to the extent that they’ve been raised in strong relationships of love. And also, by the way, to have the sense of self and strength that they don’t have to be beholden to their peers and to the culture and to the larger society.

I want them to be able to say, “No, that’s not what I think.” So that relationships are not limitations on freedom, but at least normally and ideally, are the source of real freedom. ■

ROBERTO GOIZUETA is the Margaret O’Brien Flatley Professor of Catholic Theology at Boston College.

This article originally appeared in *U.S. Catholic*, a monthly magazine that explores faith in real life, and is reprinted by permission. To subscribe to *U.S. Catholic*, visit www.uscatholic.org/subscribe.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 24: *Me haras un Templo* by Jorge Sanchez Hernandez. Used with permission of artist.

C21 FALL EVENTS

Our Faith, Our Stories

September 22, 2015 | Luncheon Lecture

Presenter: Brian Braman, Professor, Philosophy Department

Location/Time: Murray Function Room, Yawkey Center, Noon

Sponsors: The C21 Center and Perspectives Program

Catholic Sacraments:

A Rich Source of Blessings

October 19, 2015 | Book Launch

Presenters: John F. Baldwin, S.J. and David F. Turnbloom

Location/Time: Murray Function Room, Yawkey Center, 6:00 p.m.

Sponsors: The C21 Center and STM

Sowing and Growing the Seeds of Faith: It is (Almost) All in the Family

October 22, 2015 | STM Religious Education Lecture

Presenter: Thomas Groome, Director, C21 Center

Location/Time: The Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 5:30 p.m.

Sponsor: STM

Thomas Merton: A Prophet for Our Time

October 29, 2015 | Lecture

Presenter: Colleen Griffith, Associate Professor of the Practice of Theology and Director of Spirituality Studies

Location/Time: The Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 5:30 p.m.

Sponsors: STM and The C21 Center

Sharing Our Faith Stories

November 9, 2015 | Episcopal Visitor Lecture

Presenters: Bishop Frank J. Caggiano, Diocese of Bridgeport

Location/Time: Gasson Hall 100, 4:30 p.m.

Sponsor: The C21 Center

My Faith Story within the Story of Liberation Theology

November 16, 2015 | Lecture

Presenter: Gustavo Gutierrez, John Cardinal O'Hara Professorship of Theology at the University of Notre Dame

Location: The Heights Room, Corcoran Commons, 4:30 p.m.

Sponsor: The C21 Center

Working for a Better World:

The Story of Catholic Relief Services and Carolyn Woo

November 30, 2015 | Lecture

Presenter: Carolyn Woo, President, Catholic Relief Services

Location: Gasson Hall 100, 6:00 p.m.

Sponsors: The C21 Center and University Mission and Ministry

Storytelling for Healing

December 3, 2015 | Lecture

Presenter: William Casey, Director of Restorative Justice Program for the Northern Virginia Mediation Service

Location: Gasson Hall 100, 5:30 p.m.

Sponsors: The C21 Center and VOTF

Our Common Home: An Ethical Summons on Climate Change

Boston College, September 28 – October 1, 2015

www.bc.edu/commonhome

Espresso Your Faith Week

Boston College, September 27 – October 2, 2015

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STM: BC School of Theology and Ministry

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Reading Into Faith

NICHOLE DEVANEY



BORN AND RAISED in a family of devout Catholics, it seemed only natural that I would grow up to be the same. I've attended Catholic school since kindergarten, 13 years and counting. I've had all the prayers memorized from an early age, I have always gone to church on Sundays, and I have a Bible on my bookshelf. For my entire childhood, this was pretty much the extent of my faith. I thought being a real Catholic meant simply doing all these things, but never really thought that it could mean something more. I wasn't an active religious person, but rather a passive bystander who only went through the motions, never putting in anything more than

the minimal effort. I was Catholic because my parents were and they raised me according to their beliefs, but at this point in my life I had yet to make those beliefs applicable and significant to my own life.

One Christmas morning, I unwrapped a thick, heavy book titled *The Christy Miller Collection Volume 1*. I love to read, but in the excitement of Christmas morning and all its unfortunate secular glory, the book was tossed aside in favor of other, more exciting presents. However, one night during that same vacation I picked up the book and began reading it. I finished the entire first volume, about 500 pages, in three short days.

I was absolutely enthralled with the stories, the characters, and most especially with the way the author, Robin Jones Gunn, wove in Christian beliefs and values throughout the story. I immediately went out and bought the rest of the books in the series, and read them all in a similarly accelerated fashion.

The series is about a teenage girl named Christy and her faith journey. All the people she meets, the relationships she forms, and experiences she has assist her in enriching her faith. My 14-year-old self had never really thought about the idea of a personal relationship with God. Religion to me had always been

a very stoic, traditional, almost forced idea. I went through the motions because I felt it was what I should do, but my heart was never fully in it. These simple books, however, somehow managed to capture me and literally change the way I thought about God, religion, and even how I perceived myself. I began to view religion as a personal relationship with God. It was something I could count on no matter what. I found solace, support, love, guidance; a whole new world opened up once I began to find out what it really means to be a person of faith.

Reflecting back on the great impact these books had on me, I have come to realize that the stories and messages resonated with me on such a deep level because they offered me a new way of looking at something that had been part of my life since I was born. Even though I always viewed myself as a Catholic, these books opened a new avenue for me. They brought about a new faith journey that broadened and deepened my view of what being a Catholic actually meant. The books follow Christy Miller, a typical 14-year-old girl, as she moves to California and meets people who inspire her to pursue her faith journey. She develops a relationship with a cute surfer named Todd whose faith in God helps her discover the power of His never-ending love for us. The books are filled with drama, religion, and romance, the perfect combination to captivate my teenage mind and heart and make me excited about reaffirming my own belief in God. Christy's everyday struggles were so applicable and relevant to my own life, making the messages that much more important to me. The stories intertwined a personal relationship with God with the ideas of love, friendship, and self-discovery. The very basic level of faith I had previous to reading this series suddenly seemed so lacking and boring; the books inspired me to become an active

member of my faith community and develop a personal, meaningful relationship with God.

The books were the initial factor that motivated me to pursue my own faith journey. Instead of viewing church as a chore, I began to enjoy it. I got involved in the Campus Ministry program at my high school and found some of my very best friends. I developed a newfound appreciation for prayer and even started reading the Bible. The books offered me a fresh perspective on the Catholic faith, and it planted the seed that continues to help me form my ever-evolving identity even today.

My faith is a large part of who I am. It helps guide me in the decisions I make, the people I surround myself with, and ultimately the way in which I choose to live my life. My relationship with God allows me to better myself, and to strive to spread His message through my actions. It has shed light onto the myriad of blessings I have in my life, from my family, friends, opportunities, education, and even the challenges that I face each and every day. I'm still amazed and overwhelmed by the endless love and mercy God has for all of us. One of my favorite quotes from the series comes from *Island Dreamer* and reads, "[A God-thing is] when something happens in your life, and you look at it and can't explain how or why it happened, but you know there's a reason for it. You know that God is doing something in your life, and it changes you. There's no other way to explain it except to see it as a God-thing." I think the book I received that Christmas morning was truly a God-thing, and I'm eternally grateful. These books were the first chapter in the narrative of my faith journey, but it is a journey that will continue to grow and shape who I am as a person for the rest of my life. ■

NICHOLE DEVANEY is currently a student at Boston College.

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 26: Artwork by Magdalena Valcárcel. www.facebook.com/MalenaValcarcel.

Storytelling

continued from page 21

And if in the course of delineating this fictional world, of making you see, I should discover, even as my narrator discovers, as my reader discovers, something absolutely astonishing: that love is redemptive, for instance, that love is a mystery that outruns time, physical change, mortality—much as our Christian faith tells us it does—well, I'm as surprised at this as you are. This is not a message or a meaning I set out to discover, or to illustrate, or to confirm. It's simply what happened—what happens—when, through the magic of art, through the grace of that holy trinity of writer/narrator/reader a world is conjured via the written word, a world where the concrete shimmers with the light of the unseen, where life conquers death, where love redeems us.

"Is that what you meant to say?" the chattering classes well may ask. "As a practicing Catholic, do you think this is true? Is that what you were trying to prove?"

I repeat my disclaimer. I set out to prove nothing. I know nothing about the real world. I cannot speak with certainty about what the creator does or does not do in it.

But as one part of that holy trio that constitutes the necessary and silent confluence of minds that transforms marks on a page into a world, I can point to what we see together, in all its vividness and clarity, and say, as astonished as narrator and reader alike, by love, by grace, by God in all things, "Look, it is there." ■

ALICE MCDERMOTT is an American writer and the Richard A. Macksey Professor of Humanities at Johns Hopkins University.

From *Boston College Magazine*, Fall 2014.



Watch Alice McDermott's C21 video presentation: www.bc.edu/c21stories

Stories That Matter:

Faith and Film

THOMAS HIBBS

IN TOLKIEN AND Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings*, at a late stage in Frodo and Sam's quest to reach Mount Doom and destroy the ring of power, Sam recalls the tales of adventure, "full of darkness and danger," that they enjoyed hearing as children. These, he says, are the "great stories, the ones that really mattered." Then Sam asks, "What kind of tale do you think we've fallen into?" That's a good question, not just for self-conscious characters in books and films but for all of us and especially for those of us who believe in a God who is providential author of the whole of creation.

Christians have told stories in a wide variety of forms: oral, written, and visual—icons, facades of gothic churches, and more recently in films. Sometimes well-intentioned films made by Christians are artistically and theologically deficient. Indeed, 2014 might be remembered as the year of the bad religious film, with the appearance of didactic films like *Left Behind*, *Heaven Is for Real*, and *God's Not Dead*. Less interested in telling a good story than they are in providing testimonials of faith, such films tend to be ponderous, predictable, and preachy.

Films that prompt us to reflect on the narrative structure of our lives need not be Christian or even religious and come in an array of genres, even comedies. One of the best is *Groundhog Day* (1993), the story of Phil Connors (Bill Murray, in a magnificent performance), a jaded, self-indulgent, and cynical weatherman covering Groundhog Day in rural Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, with a media team that includes Rita (Andie MacDowell). *Groundhog Day* is the story of how one man's life, through a conversion of mind and soul, moves from despair to hope, from base to noble motives, and from lust to love. Hoping to escape small-town Pennsylvania as soon as possible, Connors ends up having to spend the night when an unexpected snowstorm buries the town. The next morning, Phil awakens to discover it's Groundhog Day again. And so on repeatedly. Commiserating with two locals at a bar, Phil asks, "What

would you do if every day was the same, and nothing you did ever mattered?" The men's faces grow solemn, and one of them finally belches, "That about sums it up for me." These are lives trapped in a repetitious experience of emptiness. Phil's highest aspiration is to seduce Rita, a project to which he devotes himself with great zeal and increasingly sophisticated types of deceit. Each of these ruses ends with her slapping him in the face. So he despairs and tries to kill himself—repeatedly. Phil observes, "I've killed myself so many times, I don't even exist anymore." Yet repetition also contains the possibility for change and transformation, a lesson Phil takes an awfully long time to learn.

Another comedy with serious undertones is *Stranger than Fiction* (2006), starring Will Farrell as Harold Crick, an IRS auditor, leading an utterly uneventful life. The tedium is shattered when he starts to hear a female voice (Emma Thompson), who accurately describes the details of his life. From this point forward, Harold becomes a character in search of his author. An amusing side note with serious implications has to do with whether Harold's life is a tragedy or comedy. The question here, one that has hitherto never dawned on Harold, is what kind of shape will the story of his life ultimately have. Is he merely a pawn—in which case, as the author says, "You have to die. It's a masterpiece." Or does he have some active role to play—some way of responding freely to the "story he's fallen into"?

Falling into a story can also be experienced as a direct call from God, although in our skeptical times depicting such a call in a believable way is quite difficult. *The Book of Eli* (2010), a theological twist on the standard sci-fi post-apocalyptic narrative, succeeds where other films have failed. *Eli* features Denzel Washington as a latter-day prophet on a quest to deliver a mysterious book to a place where it can become the basis of a new civilization. The former civilization was a place in which people had "more than what they needed and didn't know what was precious."

The film reflects nicely on the way in which cultures can, through lack of practice, simply lose customs or rituals of hospitality and prayer.

In both *Stranger than Fiction* and *Book of Eli*, an intervention from above and outside the linear, horizontal flow of events disrupts and reshapes the story. But this means that a standard way of thinking of storytelling, with beginning, middle, and end seamlessly integrated, will be inadequate for Christian stories, into which a transcendent author can enter at any moment.

Such disruption of the vertical by the horizontal is a pervasive feature of one of the most profound but also most forbidding films of recent years, Terrence Malick's *Tree of Life* (2011). On one level, this is a story about a family recovering from the death of one member—the memories and joys and regrets that loss provokes. On another level, this is a story about the place of human persons in the entirety of the created cosmos. The film is

an ambitious artistic exploration of questions rarely formulated by religious believers: How are we to think about cosmology, about the place of human existence in the capacious orders of time and space? What does it matter to God or even to us that we occupy a speck of seemingly insignificant space in an incomprehensibly vast universe? This makes the Psalmist's question even more weighty: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" (*Psalms* 8:4).

The lost customs of hospitality are on display in the engrossing film *Of Gods and Men* (2010), based on a true story of Trappist monks living in harmony with the largely Muslim population of Algeria until an Islamic fundamentalist group threatens their community during the Algerian civil war. The monks lead lives of prayer and service, especially medical, to the local Muslim community. They practice the Christian art of hospitality. As the threat becomes imminent, the

monks must decide individually and communally whether to flee or stay. Through their lives, viewers come to appreciate the extraordinary cost of providing ordinary hospitality to others. Some scenes underscore the Eucharistic character of the monks' lives, the way in which they discover that the story they've fallen into is the story of Christ's sacrificial offering of himself to the Father on our behalf, a story that stretches back before Christ to the covenant with Abraham and even to the foundations of the created universe.

That calls to mind a scene from *Tree of Life*, in which a son asks his mother, "Tell us a story from before we can remember." Those, as Frodo observes, are the stories that really matter. ■

THOMAS HIBBS is currently Distinguished Professor of Ethics & Culture and dean of the honors college at Baylor University.

Selection from *Faith & Film: A Guidebook for Leaders* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 253–254, 256. Reprinted with permission.

Faith and Film: A Guidebook for Leaders

The Church is called by Christ to proclaim and explore the Gospel. In every age Christians have used current art forms in this task—from frescoes and carved sarcophagi of the catacombs to the glittering mosaics and stained-glass windows of the cathedrals and the magnificent Renaissance paintings in chapels and homes. In our task of spreading the Good News we still need all the help we can get—and that help could be in the filmmakers who, like the Man from Nazareth, are telling stories that challenge our accepted values and inspire us with new visions. Such films are already drawing those who have not found much challenge or inspiration in sanctuaries, the young adults. It just might be, if we follow them into another place of gathering and ephemeral community, the movie

theater, we might connect with more of them than we are currently able to reach.

Here's a list of 27 films that can help young people develop "eyes that see and ears that hear" that reveal God's messages of hope and love and can serve as a catalyst for conversation.

1. *American Beauty*
2. *Amistad*
3. *Babe: Pig in the City*
4. *Beyond the Sea*
5. *Chocolat*
6. *The Color Purple*
7. *Crash*
8. *Dogma*
9. *Erin Brockovich*
10. *Final Solution*
11. *The Grapes of Wrath*
12. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

13. *Hotel Rwanda*
14. *The Insider*
15. *The Iron Giant*
16. *Lés Miserables*
17. *The Matrix*
18. *Million Dollar Baby*
19. *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*
20. *Pieces of April*
21. *Road to Perdition*
22. *Shawshank Redemption*
23. *The Spitfire Grill*
24. *Tender Mercies*
25. *The Thin Red Line*
26. *To End All Wars*
27. *Walking across Egypt*

Edward McNulty's theology of movies guidebook, *Faith and Film* can be found: www.wjkbooks.com

YOU ARE MADE WORTHY

THERESA O'KEEFE

WE LIVE BY stories. They shape our daily practices and decisions. But they also communicate something of what we believe makes life valuable, even what makes us valuable.

For Christians, our most important stories that tell us of our purpose and profess our worth are found in the Bible. In multiple narratives, God's deep care for and valuing of God's creation is echoed. But the Bible is also full of other stories recounting how we humans are reluctant to believe in our deep worth and God's care. So for millennia Christian believers have needed to repeat the stories that remind us who we are, whose we are, and that we are deeply worthy already. They tell us that our worth and security are not for something that we have done, but for what God has done in and for us.

Yet in our world there are many compelling stories that tell us otherwise. They seem so true because everyone is repeating them. It takes time and maturity to recognize which stories to believe. As adults we can choose more consciously. However, adolescents and even young adults are only coming to recognize the stories that surround them. They are not choosing their stories; the stories are already functioning in their world. Their task is to figure out those stories and live into them. In doing so they also learn their worth implied in those stories; they are given purpose and direction.

One particularly prevalent story that a young person hears in all sorts of settings today is: "If you don't improve you don't advance." This has been heard by many North American youth from their earliest years. Activities entered into because they were fun, or to develop interests, or because the other kids were doing it, quickly become investments of family time, energy, and money if the young person wishes to continue.

Intentionally or unintentionally, the central or dominant narrative functioning in many young people lives is competi-

tion, in which their worth is found in their ability to perform, present, and advance. Regardless of what adults may intend, this measurement of their worth is what many adolescents interpret.¹ Some young people respond to this message by engaging wholeheartedly, quick to please others and seek validation. While others respond by disengaging; they would rather not try than try and not succeed.

As these young people enter their later teen years, the refrain becomes more frequent and serious. Since their social connections are made in competitive environments—the classroom, the team, or the recital studio—the consequences of not improving and not advancing can be the loss of these social connections. The story's message is clear: Perform better to stay connected. This is especially true in the platform of social media where all manufacture their best selves while consuming the curated images of others.² Relentlessly, their latest and greatest post is immediately pushed down the feed by that of someone else.

For those who thrive in this story, competition touches more and more areas of life. Recreation, education, friends, family life, and even service experiences become opportunities to perform and build résumés. The competition takes on economic implications, as the story moves on to tell us, "The best grades and the best performance lead to the best applications, which lead to scholarships, which lead to the best universities, which lead to the best jobs." All of which, the story goes, leads to a compelling promise of worth and security.

Today many older adolescents have been well trained into a story that says their worth is found in their performance value. At the same time, they wish someone would love them just as they are. As they spend more and more time in spaces of constant performance and competition, that is the story that becomes dominant and those are the skills they sharpen.

It is unsurprising, then, that professionals on high school and college campuses are reporting many young people lack resilience and are unable to cope with what seem like minor disappointments, such as poor grades or fights with friends. These situations are resulting in students' high anxiety and in the most extreme cases, suicide. Appropriately schools are looking for ways to respond, and there is great debate as to the causes.³ I suggest in part it might be due to the stories we have been telling these young people for years that have framed their sense of worth and purpose.

While there are some goods in competition, as the primary narrative of life's purpose and direction, it is a dead end. It is unforgiving of failure and posits that our worth is provisionally determined. It encourages insularity, for we fear letting anyone know of our vulnerability or see how desperate we are to be loved as is. As the dominant story, competition can leave us too exhausted to keep up the unending effort to succeed. For competition begets competition; it is never finished.

We need to tell other stories, such as those Jesus offers when he calls:

Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take up my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matt 11: 28-30, NAB)



Since we hear the story of competition in so many ways in so many places, it is hard not to believe that it is true, that is how the world works. However, as Christians we profess that the world works otherwise; it works best through love, justice, and care. It takes discipline, care, and community to maintain that faith in the face of stories that say otherwise. While competition may be one story, it should not be the only story, or the strongest story that shapes the world of the young. For

their own lives depend on hearing and believing otherwise.

To help facilitate this, we can also recount stories of how we have seen and known God's care and mercy in our own lives. We all need to be reminded that God has made us worthy beyond measure. There is nothing we can do to perfect what God has already accomplished. Parents, and other adults, must communicate especially to adolescents and young adults that the dominant story we profess as Christians is that God has made them worthy even when they fail, even in their vulnerability. It is a hard story to believe, so it is a story that needs repeating. ■

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¹Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenager* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

²Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

³Richard Kadison and Theresa Foy DiGeronimo, *College of the Overwhelmed: The Campus Mental Health Crisis and What to Do about It* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 31: Photo courtesy of Office of Marketing Communications.

Story of Latina Spirituality

Isabel (third-generation Mexican-American), 33 years old

This is a story that my mother told me when I was nine years old. I walked into the kitchen and my mom just seems to have this look of hope in her face. She was going through a really tough time in the family. Mom had a lot of struggles and my dad was, well you know, he was struggling with alcohol, and Mom just had to be extra tough. You know, there were 11 of us in the family.

In any case, she told me that she had this dream. She was outside hanging clothes and all of a sudden it was like the sky had just opened up and the clouds had just kind of separated and there was this great light. She could see the Lord and with him were his apostles and it was the most beautiful sight she had ever seen.

I've interpreted the story as a sign that there is a light at the end of a tunnel because my mom was, well, she was just down and somehow this dream just reassured her that these tough times were going to pass. I could just see it in her face that she was ready to start a brand-new day. So when I have my struggles with, you know, career or marriage, or something like that, I just think of that story and I remember that the sun will shine tomorrow; that tomorrow will be another day.

Selection from *Stories We Live/Cuentos Que Vivimos: Hispanic Women's Spirituality*, (Paulist Press, 1998), 55. Reprinted by permission of Paulist Press, Inc. www.paulistpress.com

KATHERINE PIER

Strings of Faith

AS A TEENAGER I fell into an unhealthy relationship. I could feel this person taking away pieces of myself every time he walked into my home, every time he looked at me, every time he spoke to me. This relationship thrust me into a new reality that included sorrow and uncertainty. Even after it ended, every year seemed to bring new challenges and exposures to a world of death, heartbreak, suffering, and loss. This was not the world I had envisioned.

During my freshman year of college, I attempted to find an explanation for this new, harsher world. Surprisingly, the answer that made the most sense to me, and which resonated most closely with the desires of my restless heart, lay intertwined in a compilation of notes, crescendos and dynamic strings presented in “Adagio for Strings” by Samuel Barber.

Barber composed this song in 1936, in the midst of the Great Depression and just before the onset of World War II. This song perfectly seizes the melancholic uncertainty that comes from shedding a mask of blissful ignorance and from locking eyes with a hostile reality. The beginning of the song builds quite naturally in a stream of crescendos and cold chords that voice this unexpected mix of hope and despair, constantly teetering between the two, just as close to one as to the other.

To me, this articulated the dichotomy of love, in particular a love for God. It is very difficult to call a benign, unfaltering affection for God true love if it is not occasionally presented with the tribulations of suffering and the potential for betrayal. Barber’s dejected and yet breathtakingly sweet collection of strings perfectly posit

the idea that God does not want a love that is decorous and shallow. A love with God must include within itself the possibility to walk away; the looming threat of despair that lurks within us; that impending urge to believe that our sins are too monstrous to be forgiven.

Personally, this offered some reason as to why a merciful God would allow such atrocities to breed and fester amid the good of humanity. The warm tones from the cello and base juxtaposed by the despondent melodies taken up by the violas and violins foster a sense of mystery that asks: Why must adversity exist amidst compassion?

The beginning of this piece elicits strong parallels with the Book of Job. Job is a man who does exactly what is expected of him, yet God allows the devil to toy with Job, and give him all sorts of nasty infections, cysts, and bodily deformities. He even allows Job’s children to be killed. In a perpetual state of despair and suffering, Job wonders how it is that a compassionate God could allow for such seemingly unwarranted misery to be thrust upon him. His friends offer him religious platitudes and suggest that Job must have erred for God to allow him to endure such suffering. When God finally presents himself to Job, he chastises Job’s friends for offering such shallow consolations. God is appalled by this quick resignation and refusal to participate in a difficult questioning and conversation with God. God says that He is pleased that Job has actively sought out the wisdom and guidance of God and has, amidst his suffering, constantly pursued God’s grace.

This kind of restlessness of heart really spoke to me, and reflected my own desire to understand God, not

To my aunt and uncle, Louise and Sidney Homer

Adagio for Strings*

Samuel Barber, Op.

Playing time: 7-8 min

The manuscript of Samuel Barber's "Adagio for Strings."

in spite of all of the suffering I see around me, but *within* that context. A rich relationship and dialogue with God does not involve settling with insufficient answers. Sometimes it requires anguish and leaves us feeling vulnerable, empty, and defeated.

But then I reach the zenith of the score: the epiphany during our agitated struggle to be closer to God. There is a light, romantic lull in the strings, that seems to be pulling us, not back and forth, but instead upwards: guiding us toward that small point of light at the top of the well. This is our calling from God, the extension of his offer to seek his grace actively in our daily lives.

The invitation to participate in a dialogue is befuddling at times, but a conversation that nonetheless yields a reward beyond all other treasures. This led me to the realization that despite all of the suffering and destruction in the world there is a force much greater that is redemptive. It is a holistic, unconditional, undeserving love; the type of love that would die for us, for our own sins. The type of love that would remain nailed to a cross, slowly suffocating to death and would still say, "Forgive them father, for they know not what they do." In this moment of excruciating pain and emotional isolation, Jesus was still capable of an unreserved, unimaginable love. A love that is ready to forgive as soon as we are ready to accept forgiveness. This type of love is far from rational; it is transformative. It is transcendent.

Suddenly, as the crescendo peaks at the summit of "Adagio," I am overwhelmed with a sense of beauty.

The top note of the summit, however, is not played at fortissimo; it almost seems a bit tentative, as if it is not quite ready to relinquish all restlessness. To me this was Barber's way of saying, this is not the end of your spiritual quest. There is still so much more to learn, to seek, to question. Then, the piece tapers off and repeats the similar cadence with which we were familiar at the beginning. I hear Barber positing that we have to say goodbye to the old, blissfully ignorant past, and doing so can open us up to times of doubt, of uncertainty, of frustration, of grief: times when we are so tired of being angry that we no longer have the energy to raise our fists to the sky, and instead let our arms go limp.

Existing in this dichotomy of suffering and love, now that we are no longer sheltered from a world of pain, we can be opened up to a more enriching and meaningful dialogue. For in the possibility for the greatest pain, there is also opportunity for the fiercest of love. We are facing something new and uncertain: something that has the potential for such graceful beauty and such demoralizing destruction. Answers that we find may shatter us and reduce us to a trembling pool of fear, but can also elevate us to a position where we may love more profoundly, pursue the truth more fervently, and perceive the beauty of Grace that is ever present amongst our human anguish. ■

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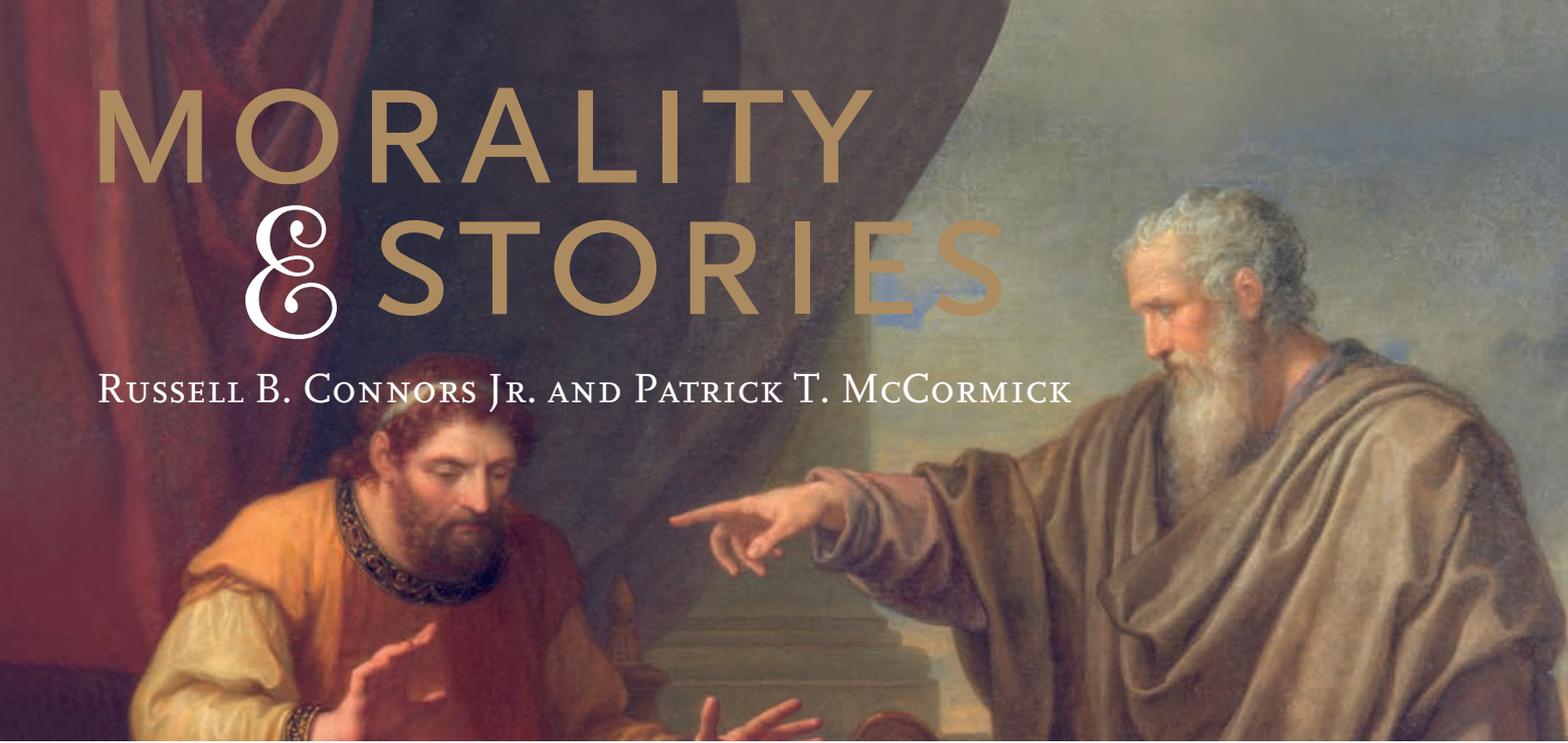
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Here's a secret.
Life's a dance.
And I want you to
learn how to dance.
Step Number One:
Find your desire, and
then Step Number
Two: **Fall in love with**
people, and then
Step Number Three:
Let life carry you.

— Jack Butler, S.J.,
Agape Latte, October 2010

MORALITY & STORIES

RUSSELL B. CONNORS JR. AND PATRICK T. MCCORMICK



STORIES ENGAGE US, excite us, entertain us. We feel ourselves drawn into them, sucked in by their undertow and pulled all so willingly into their imaginary worlds. They are, in a very real sense, *wonder*-ful, for they engage our wonder and imagination in a way that few other things do, and we have loved them since we were very small children.

And yet, perhaps because they are so enjoyable, so deliciously pleasurable, we often fail to understand just how important and powerful stories are. Indeed, it is just because stories are so entertaining that we can easily forget how much more than entertainment they really can be. Like the people of Troy who opened their city gates to let in the Greek's "gift" of a horse, we are often lulled by the playfulness and enchantment of stories, thinking that they are simply children's toys, little diversions from the serious world of adults.....

But it's a mistake to take stories so lightly.... Indeed, in the Bible (2 Samuel 12:1-15) King David learns what an error it is to underestimate a story when the prophet Nathan regales him with an after-dinner tale about a rich man who murders a pauper's only lamb. Enraged by the injustice of this crime, David roundly condemns anyone who would do such a thing, only to be reminded that his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah has made him just such a person. The king has been trapped in a story, drawn in by its perfume and deeply stung by its message.

Like many stories, Nathan's little tale of a lamb turns out to be something of a wolf in sheep's clothing, and reminds us that, in spite of their coy wrappings, stories have a tremendous moral power. For good or ill, they can challenge, influence, and even transform us.... [T]hey express and form

(and *re-form*) how we see ourselves and the world around us, both as persons and as communities. Our stories are not just our literature and entertainment; they are our theology, philosophy, and politics. In the stories we choose to attend to, believe in, and repeat to others, we are expressing and shaping ourselves as persons and communities. Therefore, on the personal and communal levels our stories express and shape our moral character....

It may be tempting to think that the real moral importance of stories is to be found in the point that the storyteller is trying to make, for indeed every story seems to have some sort of moral or lesson to teach its readers or listeners.... [Y]et, if the central importance of stories was that they taught us what to do in a particular setting, then such tales would simply be a more entertaining way of teaching us something that we could just as well have learned from a law or a lecture, and the real meaning of every story could easily be distilled into a neat little lesson, a bumper sticker or sound bite we could memorize and follow. But that, as we know, just isn't so....

[J]ust try reducing a really good story to a sound bite! If you have ever been deeply touched or moved by a story of extraordinary power, you certainly know the folly of trying to "sum up" this experience in "a lesson." *Romeo and Juliet* is about the trials of teenage love? *The Red Badge of Courage* teaches us to stand up for our country? Think of how often you have seen a movie that completely failed to capture the rich texture and passion of a novel, or how flat the plot summaries in *Cliff Notes* are when compared to the actual books.... Real stories, great stories, have a power that goes beyond any single lesson. They are far more than an entertaining preamble to a moral.

Story of Latina Spirituality

Sylvia (Mexican-American), 15 years old

My mother always tells me that in me I carry the blood of very proud and strong women and that I have a responsibility to develop these qualities in myself. I have the security of throwing on restraint when I need it. My mother says that my great-grandmother Santos's spirit is always around for guidance and comfort. She tells me that all the pride and strength will shine through me for other people to see and use as an example.

She says we all make mistakes in life because these are lessons that develop our character. She says that if we were born knowing everything we might as well be dead. She says that there is no shame in making mistakes but it is foolish not to learn from them. She also says that there is nothing in the world that could stop her from loving us. We could commit the most horrible acts and she would still love us. She wouldn't like what we did but her love will last even after she is dead.

Selection from *Stories We Live/Cuentos Que Vivimos: Hispanic Women's Spirituality* (Paulist Press, 1998), 23. Reprinted by permission of Paulist Press, Inc. www.paulistpress.com

The real moral power of stories flows from the fact that they engage us as persons, and the best of them engage us so fully, so effectively, draw us so profoundly outside of ourselves and get so deep inside our imagination that it is simply not possible for us to be the same persons after such an encounter. They shape our character. Indeed, the result of a good story is not that we now “know something” we didn't know before. It is that we now “see” things as we have never before seen them. Good stories, by altering the inner landscape of our imagination, leave us in a different place....

[T]he best of our stories are forever carving out a richer, meatier grasp of what it means to be human, unpacking in all its depth both the depravity of which we are capable and the full humanity to which we are called. Great stories show us parts of our humanity, or indeed hidden potential within us that we might not have considered otherwise.... The full moral import of our actions, in other words, can only be grasped when they have been placed within a human story....

On the level of character, stories help to teach us by developing our sympathetic imagination. That is, the

best stories increase the capacity of our hearts, and they do this by giving us a chance to walk around inside someone else's skin.... Good stories pull us outside of ourselves and put us inside the hearts and minds of people we overlook, people we know nothing about, sometimes even people we think we know so very well. In this way these tales increase the range and depth of our sympathies, helping us to recognize the humanity of our neighbors and to uncover the full implications of our own humanity. Our world and our hearts are made larger by such stories.

Of course, this change of heart must lead to new attitudes and intentions, for stories with real moral power don't just leave us feeling different, producing some cathartic bath of tears or warm afterglow. Instead, great stories, by shifting the interior landscape of our character, by altering our reference points, affect the stances we take in the world, the things and persons we value, the commitments we make and our basic intentions about who we want to be and how we hope to act....

At the same time, good stories shape our character by stripping us

of our self-deceptions and uncovering our biases.... Clearly Nathan's little lamb story does this for David, holding up a mirror to the “good” King's adulterous and murderous behavior, and unmasking the lie of his innocence and moral superiority. And indeed, every great story echoes Nathan's accusation, reminding all of us that “That man is you!” For stories don't shape our moral character by pointing out other people's flaws, but by uncovering our self-deceptions. And if we think a story was intended to teach someone else a painful lesson, we have probably wasted our time listening—or, more honestly, not listening—to it. ■

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Selections from *Character, Choices, and Community: The Three Faces of Christian Ethics*, (Paulist Press, 1998), 74-75, 76-77, 79, 80, 82-83, 84. Reprinted by permission of Paulist Press, Inc. www.paulistpress.com

PHOTO CREDIT: Page 34: “David and Nathan,” c. 1797. Kauffmann, Angelika 1741–1807. Copyright akg-images.

GOD WORKS

WILLIAM P. LEAHY, S.J.

William P. Leahy, S.J., president of Boston College, shared with students his faith story so that they could be attentive to their own faith story. Here's an excerpt from the Agape Latte talk:

IT HAS BEEN very helpful for me to reflect on my deepest and most consistent desires. I think in the case of a lot of people that I have known who have made decisions either to be priests, to get married, or to choose a major, it has been very helpful for them to reflect on their deepest and most consistent desires. I am a firm believer that those deep and consistent desires are an invitation from God to consider a way of action.

In the Roman Catholic Church, there are two types of priests. There are diocesan priests who primarily work in parishes and there are religious order priests, like the Jesuits, Benedictines, and Franciscans. In my case, for most of my life I had only known diocesan priests. Yet there was this drawing and this interest in being a Jesuit. I ultimately made my decision to be a Jesuit because I felt drawn to that.

God does not coerce. God does not force us. He invites and he acts out of

our desires. He draws us to Himself. St. Benedict urged his monks, the Benedictine community, to “listen with the eyes of the heart.” That is a great thing for all human beings to do. Listen with the eyes of the heart. To do that means you have to have some quiet time and you have to be able to begin identifying what is going on inside of you.

In my mind, one of the marks of a mature person is someone who can identify, accept, and articulate feelings. That is why desires are so key. The founder of the Jesuit Order, St. Ignatius, was always urging Jesuits to listen to their desires, to act out of these deep, consistent desires, because in those, God is inviting us—not forcing, but calling.

So many things go on in a life of faith. Some of us are born into a community of faith—Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, whatever. The challenge is how do we

nourish it? What nourishes your faith? What happens in your life that gives strength to you, that helps you grow to be a better human being? What calls you to assist other people?

In my case, I learned a lot from my peers. I have learned a lot in classes. I have learned a lot in conversation. All those are hugely important in helping us develop our faith lives.

When I entered the Jesuit order, I had no idea that I would ever end up in Boston. In fact, at age 19 I didn't even know Boston College existed! I certainly had no thought that I would someday be here. But, God works. ■

WILLIAM P. LEAHY, S.J., is the 25th president of Boston College.

PHOTO CREDITS: Page 36: William P. Leahy, S.J., president of Boston College, speaking at Agape Latte. Page 37: ©iStock.com/Logan Bannatyne, England.

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of the heart.



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