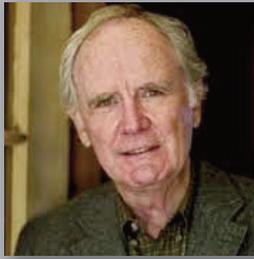


The Truth at the Heart of the Lie



Today's American Catholic (TAC) sponsored an evening with James Carroll on April 8, 2021. TAC is a journal of inquiry, reflection, and opinion on matters of faith, religion, and ethics in 21st-century America.

Our goal is to promote religious dialogue and to deepen the faith of our readers. TAC is produced by Catholics who value the role of religion, respect different ideologies, and share the conviction that belief informs civic responsibility.

Michael Centore serves as Editor and moderator.

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Michael: We are honored to have with us this evening the acclaimed author, historian, and journalist James Carroll. James is the author of twelve novels, most recently *The Cloister*, which the New York Times called “incandescent,” and eight works of nonfiction, most recently *Christ Actually: The Son of God for the Secular Age*, of which the Boston Globe said: “At once stunningly original and strangely familiar, a testament to the power of a critical, creative faith.”

Other books include the National Book Award–winning memoir *An American Requiem*; the New York Times bestseller *Constantine's Sword* which was turned into a feature-length documentary film; *House of War*, which won the first PEN-John Kenneth Galbraith Award; and *Jerusalem, Jerusalem*, which was named a 2011 Best Book by Publishers Weekly.

His books that have dealt explicitly with church reform include *Toward a New Catholic Church: The Promise of Reform in 2002* and *Practicing Catholic* in 2009. In 2012, Doubleday published *Vatican II: The Essential Documents*, translated by Norman Tanner, with introductions from James Carroll and Pope Benedict the Sixteenth.

James has been a Shorenstein Fellow at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University; a Fellow at the Center for the Study of Values in Public Life at the Harvard Divinity School; the Richman Visiting Professor at Brandeis University; and the holder of the McDonald Chair at Emory University, in addition to numerous other academic honors and appointments.

He is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and was a member of the Academy's Committee on International Security Studies. He lives in Boston with his wife, the writer Alexandra Marshall, and they have two grown children.

Tonight James will be speaking on his new book, *The Truth at the Heart of the Lie: How the Catholic Church Lost Its Soul*.

Recent scandals in the church have reignited debates over the issue of clericalism, the role of the laity, and the need to reexamine the hierarchical structures of church governance. In *The Truth at the Heart of the Lie*, James weaves together the story of his quest to understand his personal beliefs and his relationship to the Catholic Church with the history of the church itself.

He argues that the power structures embedded in clericalism pose a grave threat to the future of the church, and advocates for reform-minded Catholics to revive the culture from within by embracing anti-clerical, antimisogynist resistance that is grounded in the spirit of Christian love.

In light of the passing of theologian Hans Küng earlier this week, the subject of the book and of our discussion tonight seem especially appropriate. “My theology obviously isn't for the pope,” Küng once said. “[I will do theology] for my fellow human beings . . . for those people who may need my theology.”

A Conversation with James Carroll

He also said, “The pope has a right to a response from his own church in critical solidarity.” Like Küng, James Carroll’s work is committed to this dual strand of deep humanism and “critical solidarity”; as he himself has said, he prefers to speak as a “conscientious objector” from within the church, modeling a “kind of internal exile—a poignant life on the ecclesial inner margin, that liminal space from which an eye is ever cast toward the center as toward an unforsaken home, still beloved.”

James: In a year, the Council had been convened, Pope John had arrived on the scene powerfully demanding change and implementing, among so many other things, the two most important changes—one, the move away from Latin, which is the perfect symbol of unchangingness, the move to the vernacular so much more than about language, a move into an historical consciousness, understanding that the CC, too, lives in history, and that, no, Jesus didn’t speak Latin.

Jesus wasn’t even a Christian, much less a Catholic. I thought he was an Irish Catholic. Jesus was a Jew, pure and simple, and the god Jesus proclaimed was not the god of the New Testament against the Old Testament. Jesus proclaimed the God of Israel, pure and simple, the God of Isaac and Jacob and Rebecca.

Michael: That reminds me. There’s something you wrote in *Constantine’s Sword* that really struck me and it struck me when I read it the first time. Concerning the split between Judaism and Christianity in the second century you wrote, “The road not taken might have led to a religious collaboration between evolving Rabbinic Judaism and nascent Christianity with some kind of mutual notion of the one covenant, binding both currents to the broader stream of the one Israel.” I was struck by that image of the stream of the one Israel. Perhaps you could speak a bit on it.

James: Brilliant intervention, Michael, and thank you for it, because what you’re setting up is THE most important change that came at the Second Vatican Council, the vision of John and

of Hans Küng, which was that the ancient divide between the church and the synagogue, which lives on in Western culture as the divide between the good and the bad, between Christianity and Islam, even, and in our culture, between white supremacy and people of color. This positive-negative bipolarity rooted in the church against the synagogue, was an early mistake.



And many of you, like me, are advocates of change in the Church about women, about sexual morality, about ordination of married people, about pluralism, about democratic liberalism—we’re all familiar with the agenda. Nothing—nothing in that agenda comes close to the significance of what the Vatican Council did when it renounced the Christ-killer myth, which in Western culture is the basis of anti-Semitism, and when it renounced, relatedly, that the Church has replaced the synagogue as the favorite chosen people of God, that Israel continues as an authentic, ongoing, lively manifestation of God’s presence in the world.

Hans Küng was a prophet of that vision. Pope John was the one who implemented it...The Vatican Council. Nothing we’re asking for in changing the Church today comes close to the depth of that change.

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After all, that change repudiates text in the Gospels themselves which scapegoat that group called the Jews—we all heard it last week—for the murder of Jesus.

And that, my friends, is the beginning of my story. Hans Küng's memory is essential to it. I was there at the beginning. As I said, I embraced as a young man the church of the Council of Trent, repressive, reactionary, terrified of Protestants, afraid of pluralism, at war with liberal democracy as it unfolded in the Enlightenment, skeptical of science. The church that people of my generation, of whom some are present here, took for granted when we were young.

The best thing about our life stories is that we were invited to leave that negative, narrow vision behind. Hans Küng—and I know that many of you are friends of or value the lessons brought to us by Richard McBrien. Richard McBrien was the Hans Küng of America. I like to think of Hans Küng as the Richard McBrien of Europe. A son of Connecticut.

Michael: He's a real life for us, for sure.

James: Yes. So, that's where my own story begins. And the truth is, my story has been kind of one story ever since. The Second Vatican Council and its vision and promise has defined my life not just as a Catholic but as a human being. And it's given me faith in the democratic idea even as it's been under assault in so many ways, certainly in our own Catholic Church.

The Vatican Council, after all, was the beginning of a democratic revolution in Roman Catholicism. And the hierarchy understand that, and of course, they were the ones who were going to lose power, so they moved away from it.

But lo and behold, democracy itself is now under threat in ways we never imagined it could be, even in the precious United States of America.

Michael: It's interesting. I wonder if you see what's happening in the Church as part of a broader pattern of institutional collapse that we're seeing and distrust in institutions, or if it maybe predates some of what we're seeing today in more secular areas.

James: Well, it's a wonderfully pointed question, Michael. Let me just spend a minute or two, and I don't want to talk a long time because I want to hear from you folks, about what we've all been through over the last year, which goes to the question you raise, Michael. We're all living through this trauma. Thank God there's light ahead of us.

The Catholic Church is essential to the human response to each of these problems, which is why we're Catholics and why fighting for a reformed, humane, pluralistic church devoted to justice, equality for women, justice for poor people, and an ongoing commitment to rational belief is so urgent for the future of the human species.

I know that people on this session tonight have lost loved ones to the disease. It's inevitable that some of you have. We're all in grief. We're not just a grief-struck nation, we're a grief-struck species. Human beings all over the planet have been deeply wounded by this pandemic. Whether we've gotten physically ill or not, we've been terrified by it. We've been isolated by it. We've been deprived of basic needs of our common life by it. We've been unable to properly mourn and say farewell to those who have died. So, grief is our common experience.

A Conversation with James Carroll

I want to make four points about the last year. One is grief. One is Black Lives Matter, the Chauvin trial. And one is Me Too and the climatic arrival of the demand for equal rights for women. Those are three things that have bubbled to the surface. And the fourth is the deep and unprecedented threat to democratic liberalism around the world, including even in this country.

The Catholic Church is essential to the human response to each of these problems, which is why we're Catholics and why fighting for a reformed, humane, pluralistic church devoted to justice, equality for women, justice for poor people, and an ongoing commitment to rational belief is so urgent for the future of the human species.

First, a word about grief. I don't know about you, but I'm very proud of our Catholic President. I'm of the Kennedy era. I think of myself as one of Kennedy's children. I loved the memory of John Kennedy and his witness. I worked as a peon in the 1960 campaign.

Joe Biden, serious Catholic. Serious about conscience. Follows his conscience, doesn't kowtow to an autocratic and un-Christian hierarchy, which gets him in trouble with the more conservative bishops.

But I just want to say one thing about Joe Biden, one thing about his Catholicism. He put in on display without drawing attention to it when he was inaugurated. What was the most important thing about America in January of this year? It was that we had just lost 300,000 people dead to this disease. We've now lost more than 500,000.

And the thing that made that the most important thing about it was the way in which almost no one was able to say farewell to their loved one who died. So many of those people died alone, and then died unmourned of traditional rituals, the obsequies that enable us human beings to say farewell to our loved ones and to reckon with the meaning of mortality.

When someone dies, we bury them as a way of honoring their memory, but we also bury them with ritual as a way of dealing ourselves with the coming death we all know we're facing. We human beings die twice, once physically and once imaginatively when we see it coming. And for more than a year, Americans have been unable to do that. Around the world, human being have been unable to do that.

What did Joe Biden do? He behaved like a Catholic, I would argue. On the eve of the inauguration, remember the absolute first acknowledgment of the loss at the Lincoln Memorial, with all of those illuminated objects running along the reflection pond between the Memorial and the Washington Monument that were brought to light rhythmically to music as we heard Amazing Grace and Leonard Cohen's beautiful song, Hallelujah sung.

And President Biden, Joe Biden, Vice President Harris and her husband standing there—it was a wake. It was bringing the dead into the present moment saying, they're still with us. We honor them. And those of you who've lost them, we're with you tonight.

And then what? The next day at the inauguration, instead of the usual peroration, the usual call to arms, Joe Biden told us what the last year had meant. It was a eulogy. He preached a eulogy. That's the second moment of the Catholic ritual of funerals, the wake, the eulogy.

And then what? He didn't, as newly inaugurated presidents always do, go to a festive lunch, a celebration. Do you remember what he did? He went to Arlington Cemetery directly. He didn't make a fuss about it, folks. He went to Arlington Cemetery at the wreath of the Tomb of the Unknown with all of the living presidents except one. An act of American committal. That's the old liturgical word in the ceremony at the graveside, the committal. It was a completion of the requiem.

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I don't mean to be religiously imperialistic about this, but this was a man coming right out of deep Catholic imaginative roots. And the healing that he hinted at and promised—I'm not interested in turning this into a partisan celebration; that isn't my point. I'm lifting up how we recognize the Catholic imagination in this presentation. The reason I want to do that is to emphasize how valuable, how precious it is.

So, that's what brings me here tonight. Now, it so happens that I'm publishing this book now, which is the result of the last three or four years of my life. It's the result of the last 78 years of my life. But it's well timed because I'm speaking to the problem of loss of faith. If the Catholic Church that's lost faith in itself, you know the human species is in trouble.

We're in danger of losing faith and the idea of commonwealth. What do we hold dear together? We're in danger of losing faith in the idea of democracy. The Catholic Church, a monarchy, an imperialist monarchy, in our lifetimes has been on the road toward a democratic reform.

I just want to conclude these opening remarks by lifting up Pope Francis, who has been such a signal of hope for us. When he became Pope, the vision of Hans Küng and Richard McBrien and Pope John XXIII, for that matter, seem to be coming through—in not only Catholics but all of the world it was recognized in Pope Francis an image of profound hope, his courage in opposing populism, his embrace of the fight against climate change, his defense of migrants, his insistence in the importance of equality for everyone, his criticism of capitalism, his insistence that the Church itself needed to change, his assault on clericalism in the Church. What hope we felt.

My book began in the summer of 2018, when that hope was dashed, when I realized that Pope Francis was going to be unable to break the lock of clericalism on our Church, when he finally refused his single most important obligation, which was to seriously alter the structure of clericalism, having been laid

bare as the source of the terrible abuse of children, the sexual dysfunction of Catholic clerics, not just that a minority of priests had abused children and others, including women, but almost all bishops had protected the priests, the predators, instead of the victims.

And why was that? Not because the bishops are indifferent to the suffering of the victims, but because the predators occupy positions with them on the pyramid of Church structure, Church hierarchy, clericalism—pope, bishops, priests, lay people at the bottom. That pyramid, originating in the Roman Empire and the medieval structures of monarchy, has to be protected at all costs, even at the cost of letting children go on to be vulnerable to predator priests. And Pope Francis has proven himself unable to dismantle it, or unwilling to dismantle it.

Three pillars of that structure are:

[1] the all-male priesthood, refusing the admission of women to the priesthood, which is a rank injustice, male supremacy, which morally is equivalent to white supremacy;

[2] the refusal to admit married people to the priesthood, which is rooted in a deep sexual neurosis, a rejection of the human body, and the scapegoating of women as sources of sexual temptation of men.

[3] And finally, the third pillar of clericalism, an idea of the damning god from whom you are protected by the ministrations of a priest.

If God is love and a ministry of the Church can be reimagined so that it's rooted in equality and service instead of supremacy and power, and the sexuality can be reimagined as the joyful celebration of human love and physical pleasure that clearly God means it to be, then the Catholic Church will move forward as a reformed force for life, for justice, and for service. And that's a struggle that's worth fighting for.

A Conversation with James Carroll

I don't want to be presumptuous. My hope is that we're in that struggle together. But now you get to let me know if that's so and let me know what you're thinking and what your experience is in this period.

Michael: Thank you, James. That's a lot to start with there. And again, I would just invite anyone who has questions or comments as we're speaking to type them into the chat and we'll get them to James.



You mentioned traditional rituals. One thing, in reading the new book, which is fantastic, I was struck by the coming back to some of the ancient rituals of the Church and where you feel we might be headed with rediscovering small church communities, rediscovering with some of the older rituals that maybe we've fallen out of touch with. I know we have some guests this evening that participate in small church communities and people looking to have these kind of smaller cells of research, almost like we read in the Book of Acts. And that seems to be a real prevalent trend in the Church, particularly, I think, among Catholics of all ages but younger Catholics, too.

They're looking for that more intimate sense of community, and at the same time, balancing global forces that are calling us towards more of a global sense of solidarity.

How do you see those two things being balanced and what would the sacramental imagination look like in a more decentralized church? Elsewhere in your writings you've talked about the healing circles of the first followers of Jesus. I love that phrase and I'm wondering if you see that as maybe an emergent trend.

James: Well, I'm no expert on these things, Michael. Actually, I suspect there are people in the conversation tonight who are more than I am. I would just like to say that in this pandemic period, we've all been in exile from normal experience of the Church. There are people on this call tonight who are probably not churchgoers regularly, but there may be some others who were. But no one has been a regular churchgoer this year.

Even those who've managed to get the reservation to be in the small minority of people who are allowed because of social distancing to be at church, it's not the same.

And it has to affect our imagination going forward, and it has to help us remember who we are. Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among you. And that's what defines the first impulse. There's this big, crazy debate about whether women were authorized by Jesus to be leaders in the early Church.

Hello?? We know that for the first hundred or two hundred years, certainly up to maybe when Constantine became a Christian and then the empire took over the Catholic Church, that the main form of Catholic life was gathering at the table in homes. Homes in the ancient world, pretty much the way they are in the present world, were presided over by women. I mean, excuse me—the tables at which people gathered to memorialize Jesus and celebrate his presence were presided over by women.

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The basilica is the center of the Catholic imagination for the eucharist. In Boston the most wonderfully vivid liberal democratic-minded church is St. Cecilia's in Back Bay, a basilica. St. Paul's in Harvard Square is a basilica. We've all seen the basilica.

The word *basilica* comes from the word *basil*, which was the vegetable out of which—it was out of basil leaves that the wreath of the empire was woven. Basil was the symbol of the emperor. When Constantine became a Christian, he opposed the design of his palace on the church as its main manifestation.

The pandemic has been a move away from the basilica. St. Peter's in Rome, vacant, empty. The Pope last week celebrating Holy Week liturgies with almost no one in the vast church that holds 12,000 people. That is a really powerful symbol of this moment.

A year ago, someone complained to Pope Francis by his own account that they were distressed that they couldn't go to confession to a priest because of social distancing rules in Italy. Pope Francis said—you remember this?—he described saying this in the homily he gave. He said, "You don't need a priest to go to God." People have been burned for saying that. The pandemic has reminded us that God is present to us everywhere and that the community where two or three are gathered is the essence of the Church.

So, I think that there is something unfolding. We begin by referring to people who are in alternative forms of Church life, some of whom are here tonight. Maybe one or two of them would like to say what their experience is.

Michael: That would be wonderful. Feel free to unmute yourself if anyone would like to chime in regarding small church community groups.

Female Voice: James, I've got a question for you. I think you've answered some of it just now, but in your book, I think you got me thinking this year like I've never thought before.

You said the first group of people that the early Christians turned against were the Jews, and I think we can all understand that. The second group of people were women. I'm reading that and saying, you've got to be kidding me.

Then I go to Holy Week and I hear the Passion read and I'm thinking, wait a minute—who betrayed Jesus? I think that was a man. Who denied Jesus? I believe Peter is the man. Who stood by the foot of the cross at which Jesus died? It was women. Who was at the tomb when they discovered Jesus was no longer there?

So, what happened in that early Church where it appears women were important in Jesus's life?

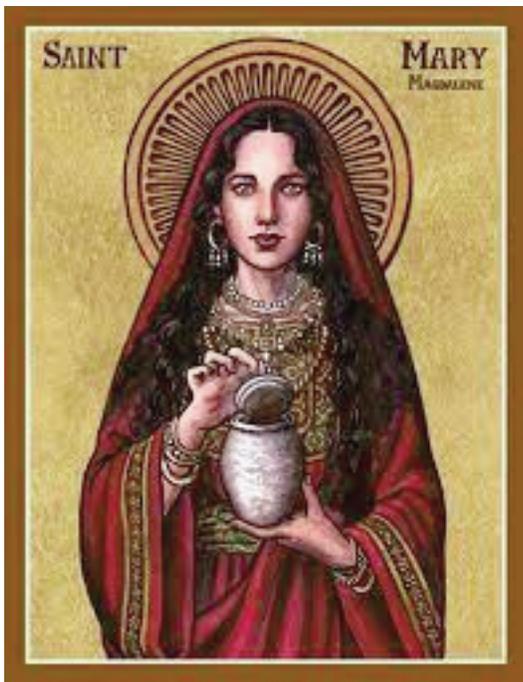
James: Well, it's a wonderful comment and question, Bev, and I don't want to belabor it. But, again, one of the points I made about this new imagination that began to grip us as Catholics at the Second Vatican Council was historical thinking. We actually realize that the Church was not always like we think it was, and the place of women was a classic instance of that.

Pope John Paul II seriously put forward as his radical rejection of women priests the idea that Jesus had not chosen a woman to be among the twelve, as if the apostles were priests, which they weren't. The only priests Jesus or the apostles knew in the year 30 AD or 31 AD were the Jewish priests, the Cohanim, who presided over sacrificing the temple. The Jewish priesthood didn't go on existing after the destruction of the temple in the year 70. The Roman war against the Jews beginning in 68 AD and lasting until 135 AD transformed Jewish experience. What is it to be Jew without the temple? That was the crisis.

The temple had located Jewish imagination for a thousand years and now it was gone. What is it to be a Jew without the temple? This was a crisis for the Jesus people, who were all Jews. The people who became the rabbis answered, from now on, to be a Jew is to be focused on practice, study of Torah, observance of Shabbat, the disciplines of kosher. That becomes rabbinic Judaism.

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The other Jews said, no, from now on, to be a Jew is to be a person of Jesus Christ, who is the new temple. And the Gospel texts reflect that—Jesus associates himself in the Gospels with the temple. And, of course, we Christians, reading ahistorically, read that as if Jesus said that, *I'll destroy this temple and in three days it will be raised again*. Jesus said that in our memory in the year 30. But that Gospel was written in the year 70 or 74 after the temple was destroyed. It was Jewish Jesus people making a way of thinking about what it is to be a Jew without the temple. And they put those words in Jesus's mouth.



Now we know that. And now we know that the women who were leaders in the Jesus movement, especially Mary Magdalene, who the Gospels themselves suggest was an intimate of Jesus's—we know that she was the first person to whom the risen Jesus appeared. She was, as you say, Bev, one of the women with Jesus when he died when the men had all fled. But more than that, she continued to be a leader in the Jesus movement.

Mary Magdalene was a problem then when, after that Roman war and the trauma of it, the men in the Jesus movement felt the pressures of patriarchy in the culture in which they lived and looked for ways to dominate over women, even though we have testimony from Paul's letter. And remember that Paul's letters date to between 54 and 66 when he died. And Paul distinctly reports women partners in his ministry. Clearly, women were powerful hosts of the Eucharist.

So, we can get lost in the weeds here pretty quickly, but let me just lift up again—once we understand the history, it's illuminating and liberating. Mary Magdalene became associated in the Catholic imagination as the unnamed, anonymous, repentant prostitute. We think Mary Magdalene was the repentant prostitute who washed the feet of Jesus with her hair and anointed him with her oil, one of the tools of a prostitute.

But there is absolutely no reason to make that identification. Mary Magdalene, we know now from history, was a well-to-do kind of preeminent woman in the Jewish world around the Lake of Galilee. Magdala is the name of the town from which she came. There was a Gospel written in the second century called the Gospel of Mary, which was attributed to her, and it is a gospel that celebrates women's place in the world. And it was a gospel that the fathers of the Church in the second and third centuries chose not to include in the canon of the Bible.

What am I saying? I'm just taking this one point, this one pivotal point about the ordination of women. The Catholic hierarchy's logical claim that prevents them from ordaining women is not only ahistorical, it's deceitful, it's sinful, it's false, it's male supremacist. Women are being unjustly denigrated in the Catholic Church. That is a key revelation that this Me Too movement must force us to recognize.

Michael: Other people here have thoughts about this. What theologians do you think we should be reading?

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James: Well the great, groundbreaking theologian of the Vatican II era was Rosemary Radford Ruether, who was a prophet on the question of anti-Semitism but also on the question of male supremacy in the Church. In the same period, the great Mary Daley, who was denigrated and demonized by male theologians and hierarchs at Boston College, and in our time, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, a great Catholic theologian at the Harvard Divinity School. The great movement towards women's ordination, given there are people here, I suspect, who are part of it—FutureChurch, Women's Ordination Conference, women lifting up this issue.

Imagine if the Catholic Church said, no black people can be ordained because that's the way God wants it. How long would that stand? How long would that stand? A refusal to ordain women is rooted in a vast dysfunction that goes way beyond even that, it goes all the way back to the way we misread the story of Adam and Even, scapegoating Eve in the sin of Adam, saying all sin begins with women, the way to avoid sin is to avoid women and practice celibacy, going all the way back to the way that we understand the way in which God turned away from the human species because of something called the Fall.

There is nothing in Genesis about the Fall. There is nothing in Genesis about sex being the source of sin. That all comes from St. Augustine, who comes into the powerful place of the Catholic Church with Constantine when the Catholic Church

becomes an empire. I lay this out in the book, not to refer to my book. That's not my point.

This is well known to you. I'm not telling you anything you'd don't know. But we Catholics have been immobilized by this history and it's with me, too. And the sex abuse crisis and the collapse of democracy around the world, the moment is here for us Catholic democrats, Catholic feminists, Catholic people who believe in justice inside the Church as well as outside to lift it up. And as I know that that's what today's American Catholic is doing, and therefore, all of you.



Michael: I think we have a comment.

**F e m a l e
V o i c e :** Thank you so much. I am 78 years old, live in Phoenix, Arizona. We have been having home church once

a month since 2007 when we received our new bishop, Thomas Olmstead here, who took us way, way, way backwards and had many of us physically removed from the church property premises. Any liberal idea we were not allowed to speak and we were told not to come there anymore.

So, there are quite a few of us home churches. There are about 15 to 20 maximum in a group. We meet in rotating homes. And I just listened to Joan Chittister last week and I'm going to give you the same question I gave her.

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Because we've given up hope on the institutional Roman Catholic Church, we figured we're going to have to be church on our own. We are interfaith church here in Arizona. We've united with all our neighboring churches via—it used to be emails and activities, but now we all Zoom together. We do white privilege classes together.

Over these years, we've read all these books and done all these studies. So, my question is, do you sincerely have any hope that this Roman Catholic Church can turn itself around? And I'll tell you what Joan Chittister said. She said, "Give it 400 years."

James: That's a great comment. But let me first start by telling you how moved I am to hear your statement and how edified I am by your home church movement. I salute you. I salute you. You are exactly what I am hoping for. You are an image of hope.

But let me just say, I don't think we need to wait 400 years. Actually, I, myself—no, no, no, I'm 78. You said you were 78. Happy birthday. We're both the same age. And it's a great age, because I look back over my life and I understand so much more now than when I was young. And the important things are larger to me now.

When we say 'the institution of the Church,' of course, we usually mean those reactionary bishops. They're a pathetic group of men, the Catholic bishops, especially in the United States. Pathetic! And that's not who I am talking about at all when I talk about the institution of Church. When I'm talking about the institution of Church, I'm talking about a billion people around the planet. The Catholic Church is the largest NGO in the world. I know you know this. We need to bring this to the front.

There are only several thousand Catholic bishops. Most of them are pathetic, frightened, reactionary men who, if they could push a button and make everything go back to 1950, they would, because they have a fantasy about what 1950 was like.

But that's not only not the Church, it's not even the institution. The institution is hundreds, maybe thousands of clinics and medical centers, mostly in the Third World, being administered by Catholic men and women—mainly women, frankly.

Medical people caring for the poorest of the poor with no strings attached. Educators in the Third World teaching people who wouldn't have a chance at education otherwise. But also, in Europe and in America, the brilliant men and women who administer Catholic institutions of higher education, the Jesuits, the other teaching orders, those wonderful men and women who are running Catholic parochial schools in cities all over this country.

They're the Church. They operate indecent of these sad, small men who are the bishops. They recognize in Pope Francis, a leader of the hierarchy, that might speak to them. He's going to have come and gone, apparently, without doing it, without really instituting the reforms we were hoping for.

But that doesn't mean it's over. A billion people....think of it. Most of them very much like you and your colleagues. Most of them home church people, even if they don't have access to what you and I would call home churches. They're people who find their way to the Eucharist one way or another. I, myself, am not going to the Eucharist now because I refuse to associate with the clerical structure. I'm doing that as a way of valuing and honoring the Eucharistic centrality of the Catholic Church.

What you are doing with your home church is exactly right, so we don't have to wait 400 years. The Church is changing even in front of us. It doesn't mean that a liberal has to replace Pope Francis. What it means is that Catholics have to go on like you are doing and claim their marginal place as Catholic.

I'm really encouraging people to be in resistance to the clerical structure as Catholics. I love the Episcopal church. Theologically, I am an Episcopalian.

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My wife is an Episcopalian. I'm not an Episcopalian; I'm a Catholic. And I insist on it to be a part of the massive group of people who are changing the Church. And why is that? Because without that, without us, the best impulses of Catholicism will be unsupported, and those best impulses are precious. And without us, the worst impulses of Catholicism will be unresisted, and those impulses—misogyny, to take the most blatant—must be resisted.

So, I salute you as a home church leader and I encourage you to continue to claim your activity as the activity of the Catholic faith.

Female Voice: I wanted to share with you—I come from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia. And we have an intentional Catholic community where women are presiders. And we are a small group of about thirty to fifty people. We now do it on Zoom. Prior to COVID, we rented out a Protestant chapel. And we meet every Sunday on Zoom with women presiders who are part of the Women's Ordination Conference. They were ordained. So, we aren't waiting for the patriarchal hierarchy of the Catholic Church.

James: I salute you. I'm edified by you. You give me hope. And you're exactly what I'm talking about. There are groups in houses like yours all over the world.

Female Voice: Yes, and it has been very liberating.

James: I think the technology that has come to the fore in this pandemic is giving us a new way of organizing ourselves. Look at us. Here we are, talking to each other now. This wouldn't have been possible before.

I think that we're on the cusp of a new way of understanding the worldwide Catholic Church. It's happening everywhere. It's a big phenomenon in Europe. I encourage you all to Google Root and Branch. Root and Branch is a movement based in England, but it's all over Europe and it has some people from the United States, including, I think, from Philadelphia. And they have

Zoom gatherings, including liturgies, every few weeks. Google the *Root and Branch* (www.rootsandbranches.org) and you'll see.

And they're sponsoring in a synod, a worldwide synod of like-minded, reformed-mind—I don't want to reduce it to the absurd, but Catholics like us. They're having a synod next September, which will be both virtual and in person. It's happening all over the place. The Women's Ordination Conference has a headquarters in Rome. They're a powerful group.

This is happening. The Catholic Church is not going to be the only institution on the planet to be unchanged by the feminist insistence that time is up. Time is up for these people, too, for these sad, old, defensive men. Time is up.

Male Voice: I have a question. In the spirit of Nick McBrien, who always stressed that we should look at things not as either-or, but as kind of look in the middle sort of thing. So, what I'm hearing from you, I'm feeling as if we probably ought to just ignore the bishops. But I think Nick would say that's an either-or thing. We can't write them off completely.

The National Catholic Reform recently suggested that the bishops should be investigated by the Vatican. I think they should. But my question is, that wouldn't do much good. So, who's going to investigate the bishops, and should we ignore them or should we find a middle way?

James: I honor you and especially appreciate your invoking Richard McBrien. I, myself, don't ignore the bishops, especially Pope Francis. I think we should lift up the way in which Pope Francis has represented such hope to us, and honor him for demonstrating that a powerful, humane, reform-minded Catholic leader can make a big difference.

He could have made a huge difference in the Amazon region if he had accepted the recommendations of the Amazon bishops to ordain deacons who were already married and if he had accepted their recommendation to open the diaconate to women.

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He didn't. But if he had accepted that, it would have been an opening for the movement on clericalism.

We should celebrate what Pope Francis represents in a positive way, and all those bishops who are aligned with him. The Catholic bishops are like the United States Senate. No, really, they are. There's a sizable number of them who are reactionary, defensive fascists. Let's call them what they are. And then there is a sizable number of them who are liberal minded, open minded, looking for a future that is just and inclusive. The United States Senate is in a death struggle with itself. We're all at the mercy of it.

The Vatican and the Catholic hierarchy are going through something like that. Pope Francis has disappointed the reform impulse partly because he's been blocked by the reactionary elements in the Vatican and in the hierarchy, much in the way that Barack Obama was blocked by the reactionary elements in the United States Senate.

I'm being partisan here and I apologize for any Republicans, but my apology is only half meant. I do believe that the worldwide structure of this Church matters. So, you're absolutely right to begin by reminding us of that watchword of Richard McBrien's. It isn't either-or, it's both-and. So, we can be in resistance to the hierarchy. I think we need to be anti-clerical resisters inside the Church, anti-clerical. But I also think that we want to think politically and move step by step toward political power over this institution, because it matters.

There are more than a billion Roman Catholics to run the world. Compare that to the number of Jews in the world, which is fewer than 20 million. Thank of that. The Catholic Church is the only institution of its kind on the planet that crosses every boundary—rich, poor, ignorant, highly intellectual, high-tech savvy, primitive with no access to technology. We are—well, James Joyce said it: Catholic means here comes everybody. We are the human species. We're the only institution like that. That's what makes fighting for it worthwhile, and it makes fighting for it politically.

We could all just go away and form our own little sect, but that's not what we're talking about. When Lynne talked about her home church, she wasn't talking about people who have left the Catholic Church; she's talking about people who are in resistance to it. We are conscientious objectors to the Catholic Church; we are not deserters from it.

Michael: Excellent. There are a couple of people in chat. We have a comment: "Pope Francis has his hands tied less there be the threat of schism in the Church, who would perhaps love to walk in the streets and mingle with the people of Travastaveri. But what can he do? Internal strife in the Church would put the focus on the structures of the organization rather than the work that must be done to open up to the world. The structure must become invisible while it still works." It's an interesting image of the invisible structure. It kind of speaks to what Luke and James were saying about the 'both-and.' The structure is still there, but it doesn't dominate. James, would you like to speak to that?

James: That's an important observation and very wise. And I'm sure—I missed the name of the person who said that. Well, schism is the threat. But I would just say that it shouldn't be an immobilizing threat. The Second Vatican Council—the same thing was said to Pope John XXIII, and Hans Küng, for that matter. And there was schism as a result of the Second Vatican Council and we still see it. We still see people who refuse to accept even something as basic as the mass in the vernacular, or who refuse to accept the Church's new teaching about the Jews and the Jewish people.

Because at bottom, what happened when the Catholic Church said that the bond God has made with Israel is unbroken, what that meant was, you didn't have to be a Catholic or a Christian to go to God, which is a radical departure from traditional Catholic theology. And people warned that would lead to schism. Well, it has. But that's okay.

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People are not required, are not forced, to bend their conscience to the will of anybody, including a liberal, reformed Catholic Church. We can respect that. And the Catholic Church does find ways of accommodating people even people who reject its central teaching. I reject some central teachings of the Church and yet I still feel at home in the Church.

So, I think that's part of our tradition. In the Protestant tradition, schism is a much more dangerous threat because there is a long history of groups breaking off from one another. In our tradition, we have found ingenious to accommodate dissent. One of the most clear was the religious orders. Religious orders of the Catholic Church enshrine different emphases and different understandings of what it means to be Catholic. Franciscans emphasize piety, speaking generally; Jesuits emphasize the intellectual life, speaking generally. That's an accommodation of a very profound set of differences.

I don't, myself, think schism is something we should be so worried about, even though people who oppose reform and change are always threatening it.

Michael: There's another comment in the chat that seemed very appropriate for the week of Easter that we're gathered here before: "It seems to me that the message of the Resurrection is a message of rebirth and making all things new. All are expressions of hope. To what extent do you see the spirit currently waning or ascendent in the current Catholic culture that you know?"

We've touched on this, but this is from Norman. James, do you have any further comments on the ascendance of hope in the Church, or what maybe could give us hope.

James: I just would salute you for that crucial calling us back to our basic faith. And I, for myself speaking, see this event this evening as itself a manifestation and resurrection of hope. It's not an accident, to me, that we're in the period of the Resurrection now.

We've been convened, in a way, by a broad community centered on today's American Catholic. Aren't we all insisting on our identities as people of today, people who are American, and people who are Catholic? And each of those elements requires an act of hope.

I'm a hopeful Catholic in exactly the same way that I'm a hopeful American. I see my nation as beleaguered and in a way broken as I see my Church. I wouldn't think of cutting my ties with America, despite the grotesque manifestations of racism, sexism, and the temptation to fascism that we've seen over the last few years. No, no, no, I'm a citizen of this country and I'm going to fight for its best impulses. The same way with my life in the Catholic Church.

What enables that is the hope that you just lifted up. But hope isn't something that comes out of nowhere. Hope is a choice. We choose to be hopeful. We're confronted with very dark and serious challenges. What do we do with them? Do we just quit on it? Do we just fall into a kind of cynical skepticism? Not feeling it's that important? I'm not going to get upset about it? Let it go. Let someone else deal with it? No, we choose to re-engage, remind people that once there was a new possibility, the Second Vatican Council, or, in American terms, once there was a new possibility, the election of an African American president.

Human beings are defined by our capacity for self surpassing. There's nothing automatic about it, but it can happen. And the difference between us and other creatures in the evolutionary scale is that positive evolution for us as a species is a matter of freedom. We're responsible for it.

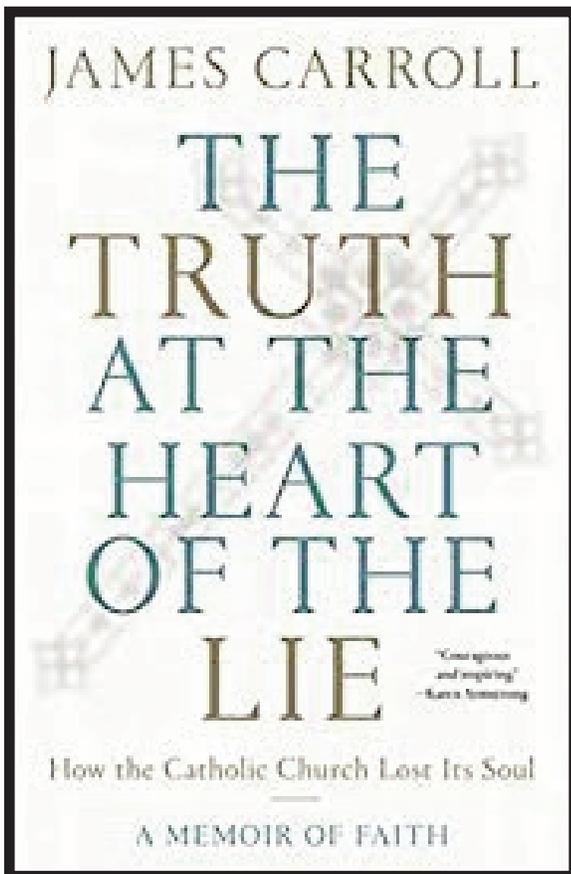
And what are the stakes? I don't want to be overly grave here, my friends, but I'm the son of an Air Force officer who was a member of the nuclear priesthood, and I'm life-long obsessed with the threat of nuclear weapons. I believe the stakes are nothing less than the survival of the human species. And the human species, if it's going to survive weapons of mass destruction, new forms of technology, and the threat of climate degrada-

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dition, if the human species is going to survive all that, it's going to be because of human choices.

And to tilt the scale toward positive human choices, I'm convinced that the human species desperately is in need of a reformed, justice-minded, pluralistic, rational Catholic Church.

Michael: We might have time for a couple more questions here.



Female Voice: I am not a techie. All I am is a name out there and I don't know how to do any of this.

Well, I listened to all this and I'm vacillating between hope and despair at the very same time. I'm wondering, I guess, in my 83 years of working and a good fifty, some of them, in the Church professionally, and in all that time feeling as if I'm a voice cry-

ing out in the wilderness. And the wilderness is getting larger and my voice is getting smaller at the very same time.

I don't want to leave the Roman Catholic Church because my whole life I've been in the Roman Catholic Church. And at the same time, I don't want to keep going to a church where on the way home my husband and I are in fierce argument, not with each other, but over the inadequacy and the lack of community and the pretense, the superficiality, that's going on.

What the pandemic has done wonderfully for us is allowed us to get online with wonderful people elsewhere, but that's still not the same. It's grand and it's great. I can't really say it's enjoyable; that's too superficial. It's deeply joyful for us. But this is not where we live. We live here in North Carolina in a parish where superficiality reigns. And it's really a go to church and get communion and go home.

I also am a religious columnist for a local paper and that's more the Church for me and more my pulpit than my own church. I don't want to get too long-winded on this, but I guess that whole idea of being... the one primary sin that's being promoted is the sin of abortion, and I want to scream and say, we women, not just the women, but frankly, anyone who has any kind of deepened faith over the course of time, are being aborted on a daily basis and no one cares.

James: I don't want to be presumptuous, but I want to say I care. I care very much for what you just said, and I suspect that almost everyone on this call cares. And I just want to thank you for your very important, honest description of an experience that many of us associate with.

If you would let me, I would just like to observe two things. One, you called yourself a voice crying in the wilderness. Don't underestimate the power of your voice. You have a column. You also just spoke so movingly and truthfully just now and I suspect you're doing that in more ways than you know. You're speaking that way with your husband.

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So, the impulse you're protecting in yourself, the truth, is precious. And it exists, Fran, no matter what anyone else makes of it. You are a center of the truth right there. Your reference to abortion is true. Abortion is a grave problem that the Roman Catholic hierarchy is using abortion as a way of reinforcing their failing and broken authority. Their concern isn't with the lives of the unborn. That's a lie. If they were concerned about the unborn, they would be advocating contraception and birth control. The single-most important way to reduce abortions is by advancing contraception. There's the paradoxical corruption in the heart of Catholic teaching. You know that; I know that. We may not agree about what I just said, but that's certainly your right.

And we don't have to become pro-abortion to be deeply critical of the way the hierarchy is using abortion dishonestly. They've been doing that ever since *Roe v. Wade*. *Roe v. Wade* threw them what they thought of as a life preserver. It's deeply corrupt.

But let me just say one other thing. You referred to the other people. That's not an inhumane response, either. Many people recognize the Eucharist and the receipt of communion as a kind of basic touchstone meaning for them, perhaps without being able to explain it. And if all they want when they go to church is to receive communion and to, where possible, blank out the nonsense they're hearing from the pulpit, that can be a very humane thing.

I've been referring in this evening's discussion to the billion Catholics around the planet. I suspect most of them are like that. Most of them find their way to the Eucharist, recognizing it as the center. Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am present. A way of touching the presence of Jesus Christ.

It isn't the church you and I are hoping to live in, Fran, who want articulate, theologically reflective, historically responsible, intelligent structures of belief. But maybe the most basic thing of all is the taste of the bread, and if you're in that kind of

community, a sip of wine. It's a way to remember that Jesus walked the earth as the son of God, as a symbol of hope, as a prophet of justice, equality, and love, telling us the basic thing, which is the transcendent holy one, who we have no other way of encountering, is present to us in human compassion [alone?].

You're doing something precious, and lifting your voice tonight is a good example of what I think you're doing in all kinds of ways.

Michael: Thank you so much, James. I think that's about our time for this evening to end. We have a lot more questions in the chat I wish we could get to, but I know it's getting a little late for everyone. But we just wanted to thank you so much for sharing your time and wisdom from your new book and your other books, and for engaging with us and giving us some things to pray on and hope for, and some practical actions. There was a great mix in the conversation of praxis and contemplative efforts and prayer, but also real things we can do to kind of keep things moving forward and keep things hopeful. So, thank you.

James: Michael, I'm so grateful to you and all of you, friends, and I mean 'friends' seriously. We're conscientious objectors, we're not dissenters. We're anti-clerical. We're people who are hopeful because we understand that hope is the choice, and we made that choice to be hopeful about our struggling nation, our struggling Church, which are very much alike. And we want to support Pope Francis in all the important things that deserve support, and we want to keep alive the vision of Pope John XXIII, Hans Küng, Richard McBrien, all the people who have enabled each one of us one way or another over the years to stay within this Church, and by lifting up their memory, whoever they are. And each of us has a private litany of those people we should be thankful for.

After this night, I include all of you in that litany for myself. I'm very grateful to you. What a privilege it's been. Michael, keep up the great work at Today's American Catholic, and Bev, thanks for hounding me to get me here tonight.