The Catholic Citizen

CATHOLIC CITIZENS OF ILLINOIS — Summer 2026

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Dear Mr. Jefferson: A Letter from the Smallest American

by Gianna Maria Bailey

Dear Mr. Jefferson,

Two hundred and fifty years ago, you wrote, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal … " Did you know that someday people would debate whether someone like me—the smallest American—is included in this promise? I cannot yet speak for myself. I cannot protest, vote, or plead my case. But if all men are created equal, then surely equality should include the smallest, most vulnerable, and defenseless among us. And so, Mr. Jefferson, I write to you today with a question that weighs heavily on my tiny heart: If all men are created equal, then why do so many deny that someone like me should be included in the promise of this principle? Does "all men" include me?

In the name of personal decisions, convenience, and circumstance, I hear people say, "My body, my choice." I ask you: What happens to a society when one person's freedom is believed to outweigh another person's right to exist? I am not my mother's body. I am my own body. I have my own heartbeat, my own gifts, my own life, my own future. My DNA is my own, unlike any person who has ever lived or ever will live. I am not an appendage. I am not an organ. Do they know that my heart began beating just days after my life began … before my mother even knew I was there? Do they know that my brain was already sending its first signals as the foundation for every thought, idea, dream, and memory I would one day have? Do they know that my tiny fingers and toes appeared long before my mother would hold me in her arms? From the moment I came into existence, I was a distinct human life, endowed by my Creator with the same unalienable rights as any other person—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Like you—and every other American—I was created, and according to your declaration, "created equal." I am greatly comforted by this word that you chose: "created." You did not suggest that equality is something to be earned through age, strength, status, power, independence, or accomplishment. Rather, you boldly proclaimed that the promise of equality is inherent to every person from the very beginning—from creation.

Mr. Jefferson, you know well that throughout history, America has failed to remember this truth and that countless people have claimed ownership over other human beings to advance their own self-interest. Slaves were treated as property rather than people—their value determined by the desires and decisions of their masters rather than by their humanity. Yet the promise of your declaration was that no human being belongs to another—all people are "created equal" and that these

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The Quiet Potential of the Daily 'Examen'

by Andrea M. Picciotti-Bayer

… [T]his summer, I want to suggest one small, ancient and genuinely transformative practice that can change the shape of your interior life … It's called the examination of conscience. Catholic tradition calls it the *examen*. It takes three to five minutes before you go to sleep. And it has a way of quietly changing everything.

The Desert Fathers practiced it. St. Augustine practiced it. St. Ignatius of Loyola placed it at the center of his *Spiritual Exercises*. St. Josemaría Escrivá returned to it again and again as essential for anyone seeking God in ordinary life …

"I think of You upon my bed; I remember You through the watches of the night." (63:6).

… When something has been recommended across centuries and by this many saints … the reasonable response is probably just to try it …

… The examination of conscience is not a courtroom. It is not an anxious catalogue of failures followed by discouragement. It is not scrupulosity.

The First Letter of John gives us the right tone:

"If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and He knows everything." (1 Jn. 3:20).

God sees us whole. We come to the examen not to be prosecuted but to be seen and loved honestly … *[B]egin by acknowledging that God is present.* Thirty seconds. A simple *"Come, Holy Spirit, let me see my day as You see it."* This is what makes the *examen* prayer rather than mere

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"unalienable rights" do not come from size, strength, age, ability, or disability, or whether they were planned for or wanted. They come from being human. So, if I am a human being (and science says that I am), then I cannot be the property of someone else. I cannot be reduced to a choice made for convenience. My worth cannot be measured by whether I am wanted or not. Like every person who has ever lived, I possess my own dignity, my own identity, and my own right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I am not a possession. I am a person.

I wonder what would happen if people considered what I and thousands of others like me might someday contribute to this world. Perhaps I will educate children or fight for their rights in a court of law. Perhaps I will find a cure for cancer or invent a revolutionary product or technology. Perhaps I will become the president of the United States and leave a lasting mark on our nation, just as you did over two hundred years ago. No one knows the answer, but this uncertainty does not diminish my humanity. Every person who ever made history and changed the world began exactly as I am now—tiny, dependent, and full of promise.

Mr. Jefferson, did you know that your profound words would one day be the rallying cry for abolitionists and suffragists? Did you know that they would inspire generations of Americans to stand up for the voiceless and the oppressed? Did you know that they would challenge each generation to broaden its understanding of human dignity and equality? I, too, am one of those inspired by your words, and so I ask once more: If all men are created equal, then does "all" include me?

With enduring hope,

The Smallest American



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The Catholic Citizen
Summer 2026

Published quarterly by
Catholic Citizens of Illinois
106 Calendar Ct. PMB #171
La Grange, IL 60525-2325
(708) 334-2627

Catholic Citizens of Illinois is an Illinois not-for-profit organization founded in 1997 by Thomas Roeser and Mary Anne Hackett. Our mission is to provide the Catholic laity with information and resources to enable them with charity and clarity to bring the Catholic faith and culture into the public square.

Catholic Citizens of Illinois is a non-partisan, nonprofit, 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization.



Sweetness and Light

by Madonna Muscarello

Ah, if men could and would listen to the lesson of the bees … how much better the world would be! Working like bees with order and peace, men would learn to enjoy and have others enjoy the fruit of their labors, the honey and the sweetness and the light in this life here below.—Pius XII, 1948

The bee is least among winged creatures, but it reaps the choicest of harvests. [Sir. 11:3]

Like a grand fanfare, the Easter Exsultet introduces the most beautiful liturgical celebration of the year—the Easter Vigil Mass. Not once, but twice in that grand proclamation of the saving work of God throughout salvation history but most especially in the Paschal mystery, we are reminded of the work of bees. We offer to God the Paschal candle, "the work of bees and of your servants' hands." Prior to the Second Vatican Council, it was not uncommon to see bee motifs on the Paschal candlestick itself. In the following stanza, we hear of the "melting wax, drawn out by mother bees" which feeds the light by which we give glory to God's honor. The wax produced by bees is the most pure and natural of all kinds of wax. It burns more brightly and cleanly than the alternative tallow used in less costly candles and is often redolent of honey. Catholic altar candles, which in their purity and color symbolize the human flesh of our Lord, have traditionally been made of unadulterated beeswax.

Images of bees or beehives enhance the ornamentation of Catholic churches, cathedrals, and liturgical vestments. The traditional papal tiara resembles a beehive. The Solomonic columns supporting the baldacchino in St. Peter's basilica bear the images of bees as well. (That they were added by Bernini during the pontificate of the Barberini Pope Urban VIII, whose coat of arms bore the image of three bees, says something—but not everything—about their derivation. As with all of creation, there are many layers to the meaning of things.) What about this humble insect merits its close association with the church and some of her loftiest beliefs and rituals?

Aside from the obvious relationship of beeswax candles to the gift of light, the honey bee also produces honey. There are dozens of references to honey in the Old Testament nearly always in terms referencing its sweetness, restorative and healing properties and delectability. Honey often figures as an instance of God's gracious providence over his chosen people. God promises the Israelites a land flowing with "milk and honey." The taste of the manna in the desert is likened to honey. The sublime words of God are said to be "sweeter than honey." As we move into the New Testament, we learn that John the Baptist lived on honey and locusts. The angel in the Book of Revelation hands John the Evangelist a scroll and directs him to eat it; it was as sweet as honey.

In addition to its importance in Sacred Scripture, the symbolism of bees is a rich and multivalent one in the Catholic tradition. The honey bee is prized for its habits of hard work, diligence, and cooperation. The beehive itself, an aggregation of the labors and specialization of tens of thousands of individual bees, is considered a singular organism. In the same way, Christ's Mystical Body, the Church—while comprising countless individual and incommunicable souls—is, nonetheless, one body.

Nature is not prone to waste. Honeybees are one of a scant number of creatures to create considerably more food than they need to sustain themselves. They are in this way a metaphor for Christian charity and neighborliness. Commenting on

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Every element of God's good Creation bears the impress of its Creator and Author, each according to its respective rank in the hierarchy of being.

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journaling because you are not doing the seeing yourself. You are asking for light. *Then, before you look for failures, you look for gifts.* What was good today? Name three things … That order matters. It reminds you, before you examine anything else, that you stand before someone who has already been generous with you today.

Next, *gently walk back through the day* … See it honestly, but without drama.

Then, a brief act of contrition, and one small concrete resolution for tomorrow … Something specific … The resolution is what keeps the *examen* from being merely a feeling and turns it into real formation.

And finally, you entrust the day to Our Lady, and you close your eyes. Three to five minutes. That is all.

Summer is the right time to begin precisely because the disruption of routine creates a genuine opening …. The *examen* … requires only a few minutes of intentional quiet and an honest heart.

Start tonight … Do it again tomorrow night. And the night after that.

The Christian life is a daily rhythm of falling and beginning again. God is not wearied by that rhythm. He is ready to meet us in it with the same mercy He had the night before. The examination of conscience is the small hinge that makes beginning again possible …

This essay was published originally in the National Catholic Register.

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this perceived generosity in the humble honey bee, St. John Chrysostum praised the creature in these words: "The bee is more honored than other animals not because she labors, but because she labors for others."

In keeping with the primitive understanding of biology of our ancestors in antiquity, the bee was often seen as a symbol of virginity and even of the Blessed Mother. Observing that worker bees do not reproduce, Christians saw honey bees as models of sexual continence. (Scientists know now that, for a variety of reasons, the worker bees, all female, are infertile. But far be it from modern secular man to spurn the primordial human impulse to see a more than natural significance—indeed, a divine purpose—in all of creation.) The queen bee, the life force of the beehive, is carefully bred and selected by the beekeeper. In a way analogous to the "grace and privilege of the Immaculate Conception," the queen bee is singularly charged with fostering and perpetuating the life of the hive. As Our Lady was prepared from all of eternity in anticipation of her unique role in salvation history, exquisite care is taken by the hive to prepare the queen bee. It is fitting that World Bee Day (May 20) falls in Our Lady's month of May. It is even more fitting that World Honeybee Day (Aug. 15) falls on the Feast of our Lady's Assumption. There are resonances in nature felt even by the unbeliever.

Finally, a honey bee's ability to discriminate between good and bad flowers and to harvest nectar and pollen from the good and reject the deficient is a metaphor for the ability of the Christian Church, from its earliest days, to take what is valuable and holy from the wisdom and practices of pre-Christian civilizations and from all contemporary cultures and to reject what is incompatible with the Gospel.

Every element of God's good Creation bears the impress of its Creator and Author, each according to its respective rank in the hierarchy of being. Simply by being what God created it to be, each creature gives glory to God. In the summer thrumming of the honey bees' wings, we hear their distinctive contribution to the cosmic doxology. As Catholics, let us strive this summer and always to be as diligent, charitable, well-ordered, and cooperative as the humble honey bee.

A Catholic Understanding of Authentic Leisure:

The Modern World Has Lost the True Concept of Leisure

by Matthew Plese

The summer season is one that is typically associated with a slower pace of life, reduced workloads, school vacations, road trips, and meals alfresco. Children are home from school, many extracurricular activities are on hiatus, the pools are open, daylight lingers longer, and we all relish the opportunity to relax and enjoy ourselves for these three months. It is a season, in short, when we have more leisure time. *This seems an appropriate occasion to consider how we might best use our leisure time in a way that is consistent with our high calling as creatures made in the image and likeness of God and our destiny as guests at the heavenly banquet. The following essay summarizes ancient, medieval, and contemporary wisdom about the true meaning of leisure. Genuine leisure does not mean doing nothing, being lazy, or pursuing base hedonistic pleasures. It means doing that which edifies and elevates the human person by affording an opportunity to contemplate the highest things in a spirit of rest and receptivity. May this summer be a blessed and truly leisurely one for you and those you love.*

In his book, *Leisure: the Basis of Culture,* the German Catholic philosopher Josef Pieper makes the claim that the reconstruction of Western Culture demands a rebirth of the notion of leisure … What then does it mean to be at leisure, and what is the "act" that is most appropriate to leisure? Contemplation.

In the period of reconstruction after the end of the Second World War, the acclaimed goal was a restoration of Western Civilization. Pieper makes the startling assertion that truly to rebuild Western culture one must rebuild it on the foundation of leisure. This seems almost absurd in a world where the very concept of leisure has been destroyed by our utilitarian society. It would almost seem that we live to work rather than working to live. In part, our very notion of leisure has been replaced by the notion of a break from the working world.

A Catholic Understanding of Leisure Using the Philosophy of Josef Pieper

The Greek writer Aristotle clearly understood that the entire focus of man's existence was leisure. It is he who explains that man accepts being in a state of "not-at-leisure" in order to be "at-leisure." That is, the purpose for which man works is that he might be "at-leisure." This appears so contrary to our very notion of daily living and the rest-from-work that we are tempted to wonder whether or not this is merely something that an ancient writer stated but which has no relevance in modern times. Pieper says that this doubt points to misunderstanding the very notion of leisure.

If one is tempted to dismiss the saying of Aristotle that we are "not-at-leisure" in order to be "at-leisure." they might be shocked to find that the notion of the *vita contemplativa* in Christian doctrine correlates to the Aristotelian notion of leisure. Indeed our understanding of the human person as such has been altered to such a degree that to get a glimpse of what Aristotle meant by leisure and the values that antiquity and the Middle Ages placed on such a state, we must attempt to penetrate the notions of "work" and "worker" that have become so prevalent in our modern world.

The modern world has lost much of what is contained in the notion of leisure. Leisure, properly understood, is strictly opposed to what the ancients called acedia. The worker type, who finds his very meaning in the usefulness he serves to society, can

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only identify leisure with a sense of idleness and inactivity or "rest-from-work," which we commonly refer to as "relaxation." Acedia is precisely this lack of doing, but the notion goes deeper still. Acedia is fundamentally a despair of never accomplishing that which one is meant to be. It is a giving up in the effort to be who-one-is. This attitude may be found lurking behind even the most physically satisfying exertions.

In order to understand leisure, Pieper then seeks what is diametrically opposed to acedia. The modern man would have us believe that it is the industriousness of the worker contributing to the good of the society. But if acedia is fundamentally a denial of man's existence as man, then its opposite must be a fundamental affirmation of who man is. Pieper turns to St. Thomas Aquinas for the startling statement that acedia, so often understood as the man who fails to do any work, is not a resting per se, but is a very sin against the command of rest. Acedia then is a restlessness that is opposed to the very spirit of leisure. Acedia, after all, is one of the seven deadly sins. [Ed.—*Acedia is treated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church at ¶¶ 1866, 2094 and 2733.*]

After this contrast, Pieper attempts to provide an accurate concept of leisure to the reader. Leisure then, in the first place, is a stillness of spirit, an opening of the mind to receive. Secondly, it is opposed to the idea of work as effort, for it takes place in a sense of celebration, of approval of the world created by God. The highest expression of this celebration is the festival. And truly no festival is greater and of more importance than the Sunday celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Thirdly, leisure must be understood as opposed to the concept of break-from-work. A break is meant to afford man the ability to continue working. The break is fundamentally for the sake of work. Leisure, though truly refreshing, derives this freshness from the very fact that it is for its own sake. It is only accidental that man is better able to work after being at-leisure. Leisure is not about making the worker a better functionary, but about making him more human. In participating in leisure, something of the human is left behind and a spark of the divine is achieved.

For Pieper, the heart of leisure lies in an affirmation of the world … in festival. This affirmation is the praise of God, the Creator. The festival derives its entire meaning from the aspect of worship present in it. Thus, leisure too is based primarily in worship. There have undoubtedly been attempts to divorce celebration from its divine origins, but they are, as of the present, all empty of real meaning, except insofar as they steal from some authentic religious activity.

It is in the spirit of festivity that the great gulf between work and leisure is seen. Work is always about production and the advancement of society marked by compensation. Festivity on the other hand is marked by sacrifice, where one gives not just from surplus, but even where there is a lack. This is fundamentally opposed to the notion of useful endeavors.

The question of what one is to do is then posed, and Pieper replies more along the lines of what not to do than what to do. Leisure certainly then, with its greatest expression in worshipful celebration, arises naturally in a Catholic culture, but Pieper warns that trying to reestablish leisure as a method for restoring culture, is to defeat the very purpose of leisure. Leisure must truly be for its own sake. It can never be a means to an end, and thus it can never be done for the sake of restoring culture.

We as Catholics must ask ourselves—what are we doing to help reclaim leisure in the form of true rest and worship on Sundays and Holy Days in our society?

The foregoing is an excerpted version of an article originally published on the website of the Fatima Center.

A Universal Aristocracy

by Luke Hague

If America is to remain a democracy, her citizenry will need to become a universal aristocracy. Without this, the nation will inevitably decay into an oligarchy ruled by a few rich men and corporations, an authoritarian tyranny, or a socialist state. These are all a far cry from the America envisioned by the Founding Fathers, and the America hoped for by patriotic Catholics.

But what is this universal aristocracy that can save America? It is rather different from what is traditionally meant by "aristocracy"—that is to say, the rule of the privileged few. Often an aristocracy is envisioned as a hereditary ruling class disconnected from the working and living of the rest of the population. A universal aristocracy such as American needs is not the rule of a few, but of all, with all being privileged to enjoy the education of an aristocrat, taught about Western Civilization, Christ and his Church and all things good, true and beautiful.

In the words of the great political theorist Leo Strauss, " … It was once said that democracy is the regime that stands or falls by virtue: a democracy is a regime in which all or most adults are men of virtue, and since virtue seems to require wisdom, a regime in which all or most adults are virtuous and wise, or the society in which all or most adults have developed their reason to a high degree, or the rational society. Democracy in a word is meant to be an aristocracy which has broadened into a universal aristocracy."



It is through this liberating education that the citizenry of America will best be able to pursue the common good and be better disposed to prioritize virtue over material prosperity and license to pursue pleasure however one wishes. It will help ground Americans' views of what is worth pursuing, what are desirable and worthwhile objects of one's efforts, commitment, and devotion. Without this clear guidance, the youth of America will be easily and unknowingly deceived into desiring, pursing, and devoting their lives to less worthy impulses, endeavors, and ideologies. These deceptive enticements come in many forms including social media, money, and credentials. Rightly and prudently pursued, these can contribute to a good life but can often cause citizens to lose the focus of loving, knowing, and serving God, and loving their neighbor as themselves.

For these reasons and more, the education of American citizens will make all the difference. How they are taught will not only change what they know, and think, but influence how they come to learn new things and what they ultimately desire. This changing of desires, this broadening of the mind to learn of spiritual goods beyond the scope of the senses, this knowledge—even familiarity—with the greatest thoughts ever thought by the greatest minds in history, is at the heart of the liberal education of the aristocrat. For the universal aristocracy to take hold, this education will need to become available not only to the fortunate, but for all.

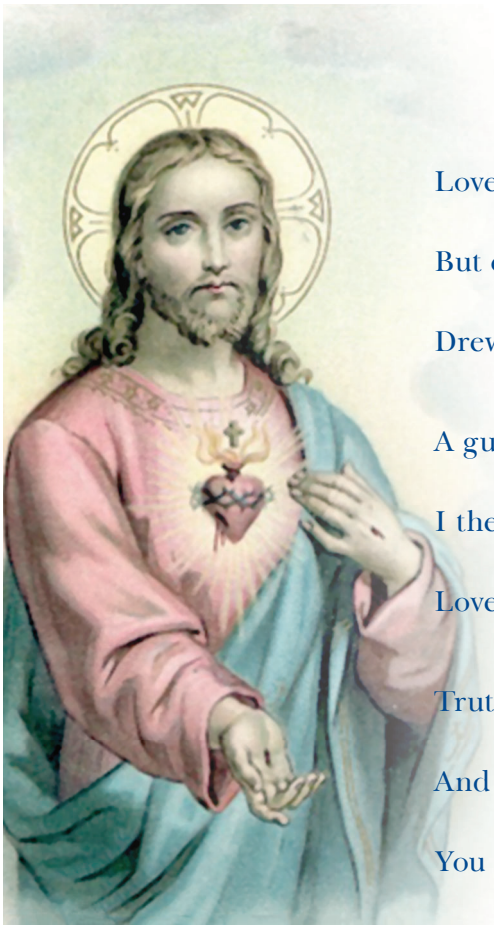
This commitment to a liberal education, an education to free the mind, must not be forced by the state because parents—and not the state—are a child's primary educators. Parents must take responsibility for ensuring that their children are given a liberating education, either by themselves, or by someone else

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A universal aristocracy such as American needs is not the rule of a few, but of all, with all being privileged to enjoy the *education* of an aristocrat, taught about Western Civilization, Christ and His Church and all things good, true and beautiful.

Poem

June, the month of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, seems a particular fitting time to feature a poem that speaks of our Lord solely in terms of the aspect of His Being revealed so exquisitely in that special devotion—His Love. In this poem by the 17th century Anglican priest and metaphysical poet George Herbert, the author, despite an acute sense of his own unworthiness and sin, is beckoned to dine and to be served by "Love"—our Lord Himself. It is one of the most moving poems included in the Roman Breviary.



Love (III)

George Herbert

Love bade me welcome. Yet my soul drew back
Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
If I lacked any thing.

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
Love said, You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
Who made the eyes but I?

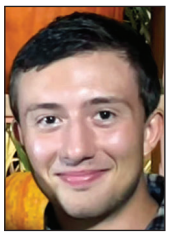
Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
So I did sit and eat.

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given the authority to do so, by them. The education that causes someone to desire God is not something that is simply learned in the classroom, it comes from Christian love and genuine relationships primarily found in the family. What child hearing the words of God but never feeling the love of Jesus by anyone would believe in Him? Without love, no education can truly be called liberating.

If this liberal education is pursued and Americans embrace the idea of becoming more virtuous, pursuing a universal aristocracy in which every citizen thinks of himself as best serving his country by growing in piety to God and serving his fellow man, we will truly be blessed. America will undoubtably become a holier, freer, and more Catholic nation. Our nation will become an America greater than even the founders hoped for—an America that finally understands that the pursuit of happiness is the pursuit of God.

May God have mercy on and bless the United States of America!



Luke Hague is a nursing student at Ave Maria University. He will be taking a bride in August of this year.

Renewing America's Soul: Faith and Civil Society

by Barbara Elliott

When did the conversation of conservatives in America shift predominantly to the realm of politics, to the exclusion of virtually everything else? What was once a rich philosophy of ideas imbedded in imaginative literature, philosophy, history, and theology has thinned out to a one-note samba played on a political tin drum. Both political parties have reduced their vision to the material realm where the only disagreement is over whether the government should be vast and bankrupt now or large and bankrupt soon. The assumption is that the government must provide all significant solutions. Is politics really the main engine that drives history?

Seeking Secular Salvation

Deep beneath this shift toward the political realm was a philosophical drift that began in an undercurrent early in the 13th century. Eric Voegelin, one of the most astute critics of modernity, argued that the modern age has been characterized by the emergence of politics as a secular means of salvation. He traces the unraveling of order back to Joachim of Flora, a medieval mystic who depicted man's history in three ascending ages, which would bring about the final age of perfection. According to Voegelin, Fiore "and his successors replaced faith in God with faith in man's ability to build heaven on earth. The new earthly faith depended upon the fallacious notion that history itself has a purpose: the achievement of human perfection. Salvation was to be sought in this world, through the pursuit of temporal achievements aimed at making material the transcendent world of God." Hobbes and Rousseau took the next steps, claiming that the political order could provide the means to rescue man from his fallen state and remake his image …

This is a perversion of the natural order. The government can never bring about the kingdom of heaven … Law can draw the dividing line between human beings and proscribe consequences for infractions that violate a person or [that person's] property. But the realm of politics is incapable of directly influencing the human heart to desire good or avoid evil. Government can provide boundaries for human action and can guarantee rights … but it cannot mandate the appetite to seek the highest good. These are tasks that must remain squarely in the private sector.

It is an odd paradox, but the success of America depends on these private virtues, and the theological truths that shape them, for its very existence. But it is outside the realm of the government to provide the character formation that is necessary for the survival of the republic. This is what people of faith in the private sector must do. That which is essential for the survival of our civic order must be provided in the private realm, in individuals and families, in churches and civic organizations, and through the armies of compassion, the people I call "street saints." … It is crucial that they succeed in planting the seeds of virtue.

… Without faith, virtue cannot be sustained. We walk in this precarious balancing act, suspended in the tension between church and state, with a push to eradicate all public traces of faith, while the nation depends on the vibrancy of faith for its survival. And meanwhile even the private sector capacity is marginalized by conservatives who have focused on the political to the exclusion of almost everything else.

… What then is the relationship between faith and the public square in America? Although the founders clearly proclaimed faith to be essential in fostering virtue, and virtue to be necessary for the functioning of the republic, the linkage has been severed today. For 350 years from the arrival of the earliest settlers, Americans acknowledged their

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dependence on God's grace for the human governing institutions to function. Only in the past 50 years has the dependency of the state on the fruits of faith been called into question.

[The] metaphor of a "wall of separation between church and state" lay dormant [in a 1802 letter from President Thomas Jefferson], with no legal significance or binding power whatsoever. It suddenly appeared in an opinion of the Supreme Court in 1947. Justice Hugo Black wrote, "The First Amendment has erected 'a wall between church and state' …. That wall must be kept high and impregnable. We could not approve the slightest breach." … With this opinion, Jefferson's words in private correspondence assumed a power that the founding generation and Jefferson himself never intended … Ever since, this metaphor has defined church-state jurisprudence … Chief Justice Rehnquist has noted that the Court "bristles with hostility to all things religious in public life." … The metaphor of a wall is troublesome because it is inaccurate. A wall blocks in both directions. The First Amendment as formulated by the founders was meant to restrain Congress from intruding on the religious domain, not to evict religion from the public ethic …

We now see court orders and a secular feeding frenzy that aims to sanitize the public square from all traces of religion, particularly if it's Christian. There have been a few decisions bucking that trend … But these are the rare exceptions …

What We Need is a Change of Heart

The most important question is not what the government can do. The question is how we in the private sector can respond. Has everyone forgotten that the private sector clothed, fed, educated and provided medical care for Americans for nearly all of our history? … People of faith can do a great deal to revitalize a rapidly decaying culture from the inside out. The heavy lifting has to be done by individual people who act because of their faith and are at liberty to give an account of the source of their hope.

We hold in our own hands the threads of our tattered civil society. Reweaving the threads of relationship through face-to-face encounters in our own communities can be a joyous and fulfilling engagement. The antidote to so much of the modern malady is right there, contained in the fragile string of relationship. Abandoned children in the inner city, blasé Baby Boomers, isolated elderly, and disenchanted Gen-Xers are all yearning for a better way of living. And yet so few people are connecting the threads.

Until our culture demonstrates the virtue of *agape*, it will not move to help its forgotten. Until we do so as individuals, we will never know the joy that comes in serving others. The American culture has an opportunity now for renewal through its people of faith. We are being called to care for one another with love. We are being called to live out our virtue in service. The American soul has withered and awaits an infusion of the lifeblood of love. Whether or not we respond may determine the very survival of our civilization. "Just look at history," Peter Kreeft warns. "Each civilization has survived and thrived in proportion to its virtue. It has decayed when its virtue decayed. Israel, Greece, Rome and the modern West are examples."

America inherited such a rich patrimony, spanning more than twenty centuries intellectually and spiritually. We have had the benefit of understanding the mind and spirit, and we have had the gift of freedom to develop our capabilities. We once had a remarkable outpouring of generosity in charity and the warmth of human engagement through compassion on our streets. Trust and cooperation flourished in a way that we almost took for granted, but that surprised visitors and newcomers from other shores. We had a nation that was not only strong, but gentle and good. But the soul of America is in peril now.

The question is whether we will heed the call to renew America's soul.

This essay, excerpted above, appeared in its entirety in The Imaginative Conservative.

Upcoming Speakers

- **August**—No Forum Luncheon
- **Friday, Sept. 11 –Fr. Thomas Koys,** pastor of St. James Sag Bridge Mission Church, author and historian, will speak about the life and imminent beatification of Archbishop Fulton Sheen.
- **Tuesday, Sept. 29—*Annual Fundraising Dinner—Is Belief Believable? Reasoning About God with C. S. Lewis and Jordan Peterson*—Keynote speaker Professor Christopher Kaczor**

  Prof. Christopher Kaczor is president of the American Catholic Philosophical Association and professor of philosophy at Loyola Marymount University. He is a prolific author on a broad range of topics and has written books on St. Thomas Aquinas, false myths about the Catholic Church, marriage, bioethics, how to retain one's faith in college, and the psychology of human happiness.

  His bestselling book, *Jordan Peterson, God and Christianity*, explores the deeply and ineradicably human aspirations contributing to the Canadian psychologist's vast following and offers an authentic Catholic perspective on Peterson's writings.

  Ideas have consequences, and our ideas about God and his relationship with man are the foundation of our faith and life as Catholics as well as the source of our peace and joy. Distorted and false ideas of God result in the kind of violence, alienation, and despair we see far too often in civic life today. Our annual dinner speaker, **Dr. Christopher Kaczor**, will discuss the ways in which his own life has been shaped by God's providence. Two very different—but highly influential—thinkers, C.S. Lewis and Jordan Peterson, have spoken about God as central to the human experience, and that is true not only for Lewis and Peterson but also for Dr. Kaczor and for each one of us. Dr. Kaczor's talk will go a long way to help us articulate the way the Catholic Church and her doctrine is an "expert in humanity" and to bring her saving message into the public square.
- **Friday, Nov. 13—*Misunderstandings about the Crusades*—Historian Prof. Thomas Madden** of St. Louis University will present on misunderstandings about the Crusades. In light of the current operations in Iran and the ongoing peril in Europe and our own nation of radical Islam, this should be a particularly interesting and timely talk.
- **Friday, Dec. 11—*The Incarnational Beauty of Hearth & Field*—Matthew Giambrone,** publisher of *Hearth & Field* magazine, will talk about the Catholic inspiration for this beautiful new journal featuring thoughtfully written essays, stunning artistic images, and gentle homey recommendations for living a fully human life and savoring the daily graces that God grants in our families, workplaces, and communities.
- **Friday, Feb. 12, 2027—Bethany Janeiro,** certified instructor for the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, will speak about the way Sophia Cavalletti, founder of the highly successful Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, adapted Maria Montesorri's pedagogical approach to specifically catechetical ends. Young children are particularly sensitive to supernatural realities. This method of transmitting the faith immerses students from pre-school age on in the beauty, truth, and goodness of the faith as they encounter Christ their shepherd in an incarnational and immediate way.

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President's Report

by Madonna Muscarello

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Summer 2026 Update

The film critic Michael Medved has written a book and more recently produced a film highlighting what appear clearly to have been miraculous interventions related to the founding of our country. These include a number of instances in which George Washington escaped from probable death on the battlefield, both as an officer in the British Army during the French and Indian War and as commander of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War.

More recently, we can look to the wildly inexplicable decision of Adolph Hitler to engage in an unwinnable war on two fronts (what Winston Churchill called "one of the outstanding blunders of history"), a foolhardy strategy that sealed his nation's fate and expedited the end of the Second World War in Europe. Miracles attributed to the consecration of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary forestalled what might have been a nuclear Armageddon between the United States and the Soviet Union.

As Catholics we do not place our ultimate faith in men or in nations. Nonetheless, American Catholics are blessed to live in a nation committed to freedom of religion and speech and founded upon a system of electoral consent and limited government. Where the civil law conflicts with the divine law, we are, of course, obliged to resist in every way possible. Nonetheless, the virtue of patriotism is a species of the overarching virtue of piety, and we at CCI are happy to celebrate the historic 250th anniversary of this nation with our fellow Americans.

The articles in this issue of this summer newsletter have been chosen to harmonize with the activities and rhythm of the season, and we hope you find them edifying. We hope as well that you will join us for our upcoming Forum luncheons and annual dinner scheduled for Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2026. Ideas have consequences, and our ideas about God and his relationship with man are the foundation of our faith and life as Catholics as well as the source of our peace and joy. Distorted and false ideas of God result in the kind of violence, alienation and despair we see far too often in civic life today. Our annual dinner speaker, **Dr. Christopher Kaczor**, will discuss the ways in which two very different—but highly influential—thinkers, C.S. Lewis and Jordan Peterson, have spoken about God. Both men wrote at times of great political and social tumult—C.S. Lewis in the context of the Second World War and thereafter and Jordan Peterson in our own day. C.S. Lewis was a Christian; Jordan Peterson, to all appearances, is not yet. Dr. Kaczor's talk will go a long way to help us articulate the way the Catholic Church with her doctrine is an "expert in humanity" and to bring her saving message into the public square.

As always, we invite you to join us in our mission with your prayers and financial support. We are grateful for you for your loyalty over the course of nearly three decades and look forward to seeing you regularly in the coming months.

Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Pray for Us!



If you are inclined and able to support our efforts, we will be very grateful. You may send a personal check or donate through the general donation portal on our website Catholiccitizens.org by using this QR code. May God reward you for your kindness.

Speakers *continued from page 12*

Our Forum luncheons are held at the Carlisle Banquet Hall, 435 E. Butterfield Rd, Lombard, Ill. Parking is free. Check-in begins at 11:15. The luncheon and program begin promptly at noon. Professional attire is required. Reservations may be made at the CCI website or by calling 708-334-2627. Timely reservations are very much appreciated.