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* **Review: In ‘Super/Man,’ Christopher Reeve shows us how heroic vulnerability is.**

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* **Influential Cardinal Ouellet urges Vatican to unshackle charismatic groups in new book**

[**https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2024/09/26/cardinal-ouellet-book-**synod-248882?utm\_source=piano&utm\_medium=email&utm\_campaign=40704&pnespid=rrg6UHocbq4IwvzY\_zS2FpiGshSnCJgsLrCkxbdm8ABmfTmNP6J6bJljkxgCr8kLGkdi1WwI4w](https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2024/09/26/cardinal-ouellet-book-synod-248882?utm_source=piano&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=40704&pnespid=rrg6UHocbq4IwvzY_zS2FpiGshSnCJgsLrCkxbdm8ABmfTmNP6J6bJljkxgCr8kLGkdi1WwI4w)

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| **Father Radcliffe tells synod members: Don’t be driven by fear of the church changing—or staying the same**VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- Some members of the Synod of Bishops may need to let go of old ways of doing things and others may need to let go of a desire to make everything new; instead, all of them must allow the Holy Spirit to speak, said Dominican Father Timothy Radcliffe.Opening a retreat for members of the synod on synodality Sept. 30, the British theologian urged honesty, telling them that the “indestructible peace” given by the risen Christ “does not mean that we live in perfect harmony. We are gathered in this assembly because we do not. But no discord can destroy our peace in Christ for we are one in him.”The 368 synod members, along with the theologians and experts assisting them, gathered for a two-day retreat at the Vatican before Pope Francis was scheduled to formally open the monthlong, second session of the synod Oct. 2. After a similar gathering at the Vatican a year earlier, members were to focus this session on “How to be a missionary synodal Church.”Father Radcliffe told participants that with its focus on mission and on helping the millions of people around the world who are searching for meaning and truth, the synod “is not a place for negotiations about structural change, but for choosing life, for conversion and forgiveness.”“The Lord summons us out of the small places in which we have taken refuge and in which we have imprisoned others,” the Dominican said.Beginning with a reflection on Mary Magdalen, John and Peter seeking Jesus in the empty tomb, Father Radcliffe told participants that they, too, may feel like they are searching “in the dark.”“Since the last assembly,” he said, “so many people, including participants in this synod, have expressed their doubts as to whether anything is going to be achieved. Like Mary Magdalene, some say, ‘Why have they taken away our hope? We expected so much from the synod, but perhaps there will be just more words.’”In the Gospel account of Easter morning, he said, each of the three disciples “searches for the Lord in his or her own way; each has their own way of loving and each their own emptiness.”Yet, he said, “each of these seekers has their own role in the dawning of hope. There is no rivalry. Their mutual dependence embodies the heart of synodality.”In their searching, each also asks questions, he said. “Likewise, we come to this synod with many questions, for example about the role of women in the church. These are important questions. But they cannot be seen as just questions about whether something will be allowed or refused. That would be to remain the same sort of church. The questions that we face should be more like those in the Gospels,” which aim to help the disciples live and share what Jesus taught.To be of service to its faithful and to the world, Father Radcliffe said, the church must share its treasure, which is faith and is explained in doctrine and dogma.“The young are hungry for the rich meat of the church’s teaching,” he said. “They will not be satisfied if we just offer them Jesus who was ‘a nice guy’ and wants us to be kind to each other.”Benedictine Mother Maria Ignazia Angelini, a spiritual adviser to the synod members, urged them to keep their deliberations anchored in prayer and in awe before the Eucharist.“Let us make room for the amazed listening that repositions us, disposes us for this new beginning of our journey together,” she told them.As synod members experienced last year, Father Radcliffe said, truly listening can be uncomfortable and make people feel like they are being challenged.But, he said, they must remember that “our fierce love of the church can also, paradoxically, make us narrow-minded: the fear that it will be harmed by destructive reforms which undermine the traditions that we love. Or the fear that the church will not become the wide-open home for which we long.”“It is deeply sad that often the church is wounded by those who love the church, but differently,” he said.As they approach their discussions, Father Radcliffe said, synod members can be certain that “perfect love drives out fear. Let it drive out the fear of those whose visions of the church are different. The church is in the hands of the Lord and God has promised that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” |
| **Did Pope Francis say that all religions are equal? Here’s what the Catholic Church teaches.**Are all religions equal? Pope Francis created a stir with some off-the-cuff comments to an interreligious group of young people in Singapore, during his recent trip to Asia. “All religions are paths to God,” he said. “I will use an analogy, they are like different languages that express the divine.”As so often happens, a snippet from some impromptu remarks made it onto social media and many read it in a negative light, as though the pope were saying that all religions are equally true (which would seem absurd, since all religions, in some respects, contradict one another). But the pope’s point was that all religions are ways of communicating with God, not that they are all “the same.”Some commentators have interpreted the pope’s comments more charitably, and this is a good opportunity to offer some clarity on what the church does teach about other religions, and the Catholic faith’s relationship to them.One of the best-known statements on this issue was made by Pope Boniface VIII in his papal bull “Unam Sanctam,” in 1302: “Outside the church, there is no salvation.” This had long been understood by many Catholics (and many Protestants) as an assertion that those who are not baptized and in communion with the Catholic Church are going to hell.We are told, however, in “Lumen Gentium,” one of the principal documents of the Second Vatican Council, that non-Catholics “who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience—those too may achieve eternal salvation.” The door of salvation, the church affirms, is open to all (“Gaudium et Spes,” No.22).The church also affirms in “Ad Gentes” that the “seeds of the Word” are found in every great faith. These “seeds” are referred to multiple times in conciliar documents and encyclicals, and refer to those elements identified in other faiths and cultures that contain rays of the same truth we find in the Gospel.This is no recent innovation. The idea comes from one of the church’s first great theologians, St. Justin Martyr, who wrote that “the teachings of Christ are not alien to Plato.” Dante also portrayed heaven as containing good pagans. And popes like Alexander VIII and Clement XI would later condemn as heretical the proposition that Christ’s grace does not operate within those of other faiths (see Errors of the Jansenists and the encyclical “Unigenitus,” from 1713, statements wherein the popes condemned the heretical Jansenist movement within the church, whose theology, in some respects, more resembled Calvinism than Catholic doctrine).St. John Paul II, in his encyclical “Redemptoris Missio,”affirmed that the Holy Spirit is active in every human heart in the world (Nos. 6, 29), and that the many religions reflect a ray of the one truth (No. 56). This pope, who made great strides in interfaith dialogue, also wrote in his book Crossing the Threshold of Hope:[T]he Council [Vatican II] says that the Holy Spirit works effectively even outside the visible structure of the Church, making use of…the common soteriological [salvation-related] root present in all religions. Christ came into the world for all these peoples. He redeemed them all and has His own ways of reaching each of them in the present eschatological phase of salvation history.Does all this mean that the church, as we know it, is no longer important? That it is indifferent to whether or not someone is Catholic? That all religions are equally true? No.We can say at the same time that God operates always and everywhere graciously with all the human family, that the great faith traditions all serve as true pursuits of God and contain a ray of the same truth, and that we believe Christ established one, holy, Catholic and apostolic church, that he gave sacraments that communicate grace, and that the faith contains the fullness of grace and truth.The church believes that it is both true that everyone on earth is offered salvation in their own way and that salvation only comes through the body of Christ. It teaches that Christ desires “that all might be one” and that human beings are under unceasing obligation to seek the truth in good faith. But it also teaches that God punishes no one who, honestly seeking the true and the good, nonetheless remains outside the visible bounds of the church because of circumstance, culture, history or lack of knowledge.Together with the church, we can, without fear of compromising the truth of our faith, look boldly and with curiosity for “whatever is true and holy” in other faiths. We may, then, look at the poems of the Sufis, the classical odes of Chinese tradition or Indigenous traditions and find beautiful things to learn there which resonate with the same universal logos at the heart of our faith. We can see our Muslim or Confucian or Sikh brethren as fellow seekers of God, and find companionship in that, even while holding truly to the fullness of the church.This allows us to adopt the attitude of John Paul II, evangelizing in a manner that welcomes the good to be found in other faiths while holding at the same time to the conviction that the Catholic Church “is the universal sacrament of salvation” (“Redemptoris Missio,” No. 9). We can then operate not out of fear or a desire to crush other traditions, but out of a desire to share the fullness of the joy of the Gospel. It is this joy, in the end, which makes friendship with Christ attractive, and, as G.K. Chesterton said, the “key that opens all doors.”Nathan BeacomNathan Beacom writes from Des Moines, Iowa. His writing has previously appeared in Plough Quarterly, Comment Magazine and elsewhere.**Avoiding election anxiety: Some Jesuit advice on how to find hope**How many people have said to you about the upcoming presidential elections, or politics in general, “I can’t stand it!” or “I’m so depressed!” or “I’m close to despair!” That goes for both Republicans and Democrats, for various reasons. Indeed, the past few years in U.S. politics have been the most contentious, vituperative and violent that I can recall. (My bona fides: my earliest political memory is President Lyndon Johnson telling a television audience that he would not seek re-election in 1968.)The storming of the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, was perhaps the most visible and public outgrowth of these dark and violent tendencies. Many people worry that if there is a similar challenging of the election results and calls for “resistance,” the country will descend into chaos or even civil war. And if you are on social media at all, you will see that political “dialogue” has mainly been reduced to bitter recriminations and name-calling. At times despair seems like the most logical response.But it would be, according to St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit Order, the least helpful response. So let me offer some Jesuit advice about how to combat despair.In his classic manual on prayer, the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius invites us not only to enter prayerfully into the life of Jesus by imagining ourselves in various Gospel stories, but also to “discern the spirits.” That can sound bizarre to those who are unfamiliar with Christian spirituality, but it simply means that there are various forces, impulses or voices (I don’t mean hearing voices but rather voices within) that move us away from God and others that move us toward God. Moreover, St. Ignatius reminds us that the voice that is moving us toward God is coming from God. That is, God not only wants us to make good and life-giving decisions, but God will help us do that.To take a simple example, imagine getting into a heated argument with someone at work or in your family or with a stranger in a public place. In the heat of the argument, you might say to yourself, “Oh, I want to punch this person in the face!” But another part of you thinks, “I need to calm down and try to make peace with this person.” One impulse is clearly coming from God and one is not. How do we know? Well, one easy way is to look at Jesus’ words and deeds in the Gospels. What do you think the person who said, “Blessed are the peacemakers” would want you to do? This is part of what it means to “discern the spirits.”When it comes to despair, Ignatius is clear. It’s never coming from what he calls the “good spirit.” In fact, in the Spiritual Exercises he describes how the good spirit acts in the lives of good people (those trying to lead a good life). “It is characteristic of the good spirit,” he says, “to stir up courage and strength, consola­tions, tears, inspirations, and tranquility. He makes things easier and eliminates all obstacles, so that the person may move forward in doing good.” In other words, God’s voice gives you hope.By contrast, what St. Ignatius calls the “evil spirit” or “enemy of human nature” acts in the opposite way for good people. “It is characteristic of the evil spirit to cause gnawing anxiety, to sadden and to set up obstacles. In this way he unsettles these persons by false reasons aimed at preventing their progress.” In other words, the evil spirit leads you to despair.Before we go any further, let me say that this does not deny that life can be extremely difficult, that our political discourse might turn violent and that the election season may cause fear or even terror. What Ignatius (and many other spiritual writers) are saying is that despair is never coming from God. Why? Essentially because it denies God’s ability to act—and ours too.In his book New Seeds of Contemplation, Thomas Merton said that despair was actually a form of pride—that is, so “stiff necked” that it says, in essence, “I know that God can’t do anything with this situation.” Or “I know better than God.”So how do you avoid despair during the election season, or any season? First by reminding yourself that this extreme form of hopelessness is not coming from God. Being able to identify those voices as moving you away from God is an essential step. Second, by not listening to the voices (from within or without) who say, “Nothing can be done.” Just say to yourself: “I don’t need to pay attention to that.” Third, by acting against it, that is, working against precisely what you fear—name-calling, divisive speech, violence—in whatever way you can.Finally, in such situations, I find it helpful to think of the disciples on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, after the crucifixion but before the resurrection. Cowering behind closed doors, they were surely in despair, doubting that God could bring anything good after the shattering events on Calvary. And again, I’m not suggesting that there will suddenly be an Easter-like outbreak of unity, concord and love after Nov. 5, but it’s also important to see that the disciples in their despair were, in the end, wrong.In short, despair is never coming from God. Hope always is. Choose hope.James Martin, S.J.The Rev. James Martin, S.J., is a Jesuit priest, author, editor at large at America and founder of Outreach. |