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Pope Francis recites a prayer, "Forgive us for the war, Lord," composed by Italian Archbishop Domenico Battaglia of Naples, during his general audience in the Paul VI hall March 16 at the Vatican. (CNS/Paul Haring)



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Editor's note: *The following keynote address was delivered at a conference for and with a group of U.S. bishops March 25-26 in Chicago. "Pope Francis, Vatican II, and the Way Forward" was co-organized by Loyola University Chicago's Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage, Boston College's Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life, and Fordham University's Center on Religion and Culture. Also helping with the organization was NCR political columnist Michael Sean Winters.*

When Michael Murphy, director of Loyola's Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage, first invited me to join this conversation, he asked me to give a few remarks as part of a panel on how the culture wars have distorted Catholic bioethics. But then I was relocated to a keynote address on the topic "Reclaiming the Catholic Moral and Intellectual Tradition from the Culture Wars." If the first topic was big, the second is, colossal.

So I am going to take the original starting point that he gave me — the culture wars and bioethics — as a way into the larger question. For the culture wars have long been with us, but their particular manifestation during the COVID-19 pandemic has clarified key dimensions of this movement and confirmed, for me, a crucial way forward.

To help frame my remarks, I want to start with what I think might be the earliest case in Catholic bioethics. Here we see the distorting culture war dynamics already at play. It is a case familiar, I am sure, to everyone in this room:

> Jesus went into a synagogue, and there was a man there who had a withered hand. And they were watching him to see if he would cure him on the sabbath day, hoping for something to use against him. He said to the man with the withered hand, "Stand up out in the middle!" Then he said to them, "Is it against the law on the sabbath day to do good, or to do evil; to save life, or to kill?" But they said nothing. Then, grieved to find them so

> obstinate, he looked angrily around at them, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out and his hand was better. The Pharisees went out and at once began to plot with the Herodians against him, discussing how to destroy him (Mark 3:1-6).

Here we have, I would submit, the key players in the culture wars — the "religious traditionalists" (as I will call them, in order to use this passage as an interpretative framework for the analysis below, as well as to avoid using the word "Pharisee" pejoratively) in their unholy alliance with the Herodians; the man with the withered hand; and Jesus — who, standing at the center of the story points a way forward for us, beyond the contemporary manifestation of the culture wars, indicating how we might begin to move toward a truly post-conciliar Catholic moral and intellectual tradition, one shaped not by the imagination, tactics and sequelae of war but rather by peace, reconciliation and the flourishing of persons, communities and creation.

Related: Opposition to Pope Francis is rooted in a rejection of Vatican II

An unholy alliance

Before Jesus even walks into the synagogue, the stage has been set for a confrontation. We are only in Chapter 3 of Mark's Gospel, but the war is already simmering. In Chapter 2, Jesus has forgiven the paralytic's sins, eaten with tax collectors, refused to make his disciples fast and plucked corn on the Sabbath. So now the religious traditionalists have laid a trap — and the teeth of that trap is the law.

Mark's depiction of the religious traditionalists — especially as they ally with the Herodians — reads strikingly like Massimo Borghesi's incisive account of a new variant of Catholic Americanism, described in his recent book *Catholic Discordance: Neoconservatism vs. the Field Hospital Church of Pope Francis*. Borghesi argues that this form of Catholicism that has emerged since the council rests on "two pillars."

The first pillar he calls "a strident Catho-capitalism." Here the Catholic tradition has been refashioned as an apology for the economic theory of neoliberalism. For those erecting this pillar, who we might call the Herodians, Catholicism serves to support, justify and advance a specific economic ideology and its particular understanding of the state and culture. Such a position requires a selective, partial — and quite distorted — presentation of the Catholic tradition, which Borghesi dissects in detail.

The second pillar is the culture wars, fought, as Borghesi notes, by traditionalists who have long "take[n] morality as their battleground." The culture warriors claim to be defending "a specific set of values … that were rejected by the dominant culture" — unborn life, heterosexual marriage, the lives of the terminally ill. While it has shifted since the early 1970s, the terrain of the culture wars had largely been co-extensive with Catholic bioethics.

More recently, however, the language has become more expansive. Take, for example, University of Notre Dame political scientist Patrick Deneen. In a piece written ostensibly about the war in Ukraine, Deneen claims the culture warriors are now fighting what he calls a "new biopolitical regime." This regime is run by those he calls the "disembodied 'laptop class,' " or "the Virtuals," a "woke" "radicalized messianic party, advancing its gnostic vision amid the ruins of the Christian civilization." They are "merely a new articulation of the revolutionary dream that was once vested in Communism," who disdain the working class, and who recently sought "to impose bio-political dominion over all of human life during the suddenly irrelevant 'crisis' of the pandemic." So what was once the landscape of bioethics has morphed into biopolitics and is now deeply interwoven with race, class, economics and geopolitics.

Borghesi argues that these two pillars stand in an internal contradiction. They are, on their face, a sort of unholy alliance — a pragmatic plot, we might say, between the religious traditionalists and the "Catho-capitalists." His assessment is plausible, for if one accepts neoliberalism — with its tenets of the radical freedom of the individual, the radical minimization of government, the relentless pursuit of economic efficiency, the elimination of mid-level or voluntary social organizations (including the church) and the endless "economization of everything" — then the Catho-capitalists should readily accept abortion as a commodified service especially for the full economization of women, the freedom of individuals to marry whomever they wish, the promotion of physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia to eliminate non-productive persons, and so forth. These practices are simply the logical outcomes of neoliberalism as not only an economic theory but a wider cultural ideology.

But they don't. The proponents of this odd American Catholic mélange strenuously reject these social and moral ramifications. They refuse to admit, Borghesi argues, that the new capitalist model that they unconditionally embrace is the "real engine" of these practices, creating and requiring the relativism and individualism they

vehemently oppose.

A man holds a sign among a group of people protesting the COVID-19 vaccine mandates at S

A man holds a sign among a group of people protesting the COVID-19 vaccine mandates at Summa Health Hospital Aug. 16, 2021, in Akron, Ohio. (CNS/Reuters/Stephen Zenner)

But are these two pillars really in contradiction? Before March 2020, I would have largely agreed with him on this point. But as the pandemic has brought to light so many previously "invisible" realities around the globe, it has also laid bare that these two seemingly contradictory pillars are rather two faces of the same neoliberal ideology. This became clear this past summer, when some among the small but amplified minority of Catholics who opposed the COVID-19 vaccines stunningly began using the mantra "my body, my choice."

But beyond that moment of dark comedy, the language used by anti-vax Catholics is deeply neoliberal. Here we hear the same anthropology — a radically disconnected decision-maker empowered to choose their own preferences based solely on their autonomy, now renamed "a right to conscience." Echoing the neoliberal dogma of privatization, we heard that "the vaccination question is a deeply personal issue." Following the neoliberal dogma of deregulation, these Catholics opposed any infringement on individual or corporate freedom, be it from local, state or federal government but also from any other organization — be it an employer, hospital, long-term care facility, school, diocese *or even a magisterial body*.

These arguments — espoused by a few Catholic bishops and a few too many Catholics — echo, cite or draw on materials prepared and disseminated by the National Catholic Bioethics Center. In the opinion of many, the NCBC materials misrepresent church teaching on these questions by cherry-picking sentences from authoritative documents and distorting their meaning.

But more troublingly, the National Catholic Bioethics Center has also had no qualms directly challenging the Holy Father. Their template for religious vaccine exemptions makes clear to state that "conscience is the aboriginal Vicar of Christ." Now, all faithful Catholics know that the Vicar of Christ is, at least according to Catholic Answers, "a title of the pope implying his supreme and universal primacy, both of honor and of jurisdiction, over the Church of Christ."

Thus, the National Catholic Bioethics Center's assertion of the priority of an individual's conscience over against Pope Francis could not be more explicit. Every Catholic is their own pope, their own magisterium. Similarly, the NCBC's Fr. Tad Padolczyk dismissed Pope Francis' guidance on the COVID-19 vaccines as merely his "personal judgments" or "personal opinion." Beyond these unsubtle challenges to Holy Father's authority, the NCBC released its own statement about the morality of the COVID-19 vaccines two to three weeks prior to the analyses by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. But although the NCBC position differed significantly from these Vatican statements, they took no steps to revise their original statement in light of magisterial teaching.

As we all know, the National Catholic Bioethics Center grounded its position in the vaccines' putative connections to two historical abortions. This concern might have been persuasive, except for the fact that many of the figures opposing the vaccines likewise opposed from the beginning almost every public effort to stem the virus' spread. As early as May 2020, Catholic dioceses — many with the assistance of groups like the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty — were among those suing local municipalities about social distancing occupancy measures. Parents at Catholic schools — and even some schools themselves — protested mask mandates. Importantly, this all began well before the vaccines became available. In other words, well before any "conscience"-based concerns about abortion, the focus of the opposition was simply a purported government repression of individual freedom, camouflaged under the rhetoric of religious freedom.

Thus, Catholic opposition to the COVID-19 measures has helped to make clear that, at heart, rather than opposing a "biopolitical regime," the culture wars and Catho-capitalism are simply two manifestations of what we could call the "biopolitics of neoliberalism." Understanding this connection helps explain what has long been a deeply perplexing contradiction — or apparent contradiction — within the culture wars themselves: that while their lips speak the words "pro-life," their overall platform is often quite anti-life.



A child and an adult are seen during a demonstration against COVID-19 vaccines and restrictions July 24, 2021, in New York City. (CNS/Reuters/David Delgado)

The man with the withered hand

Between Jesus and the religious traditionalists, sitting on the margins, is the man with a withered hand. He is a concrete, embodied person — probably a poor person — who has long been in need of a healing intervention. But the authoritative champions of tradition have no interest in healing him. Rather, across the synagogue invisibly stretches the law — a wire for Jesus to trip over as he moves to heal the man.

Likewise, in the U.S. for the past 40 years, the culture warriors have positioned the "pro-life" witness as a tripwire separating the church from most policy efforts designed to assist those with withered hands. Purporting to defend "life" from conception to "natural death," the culture warriors focus on a narrow array of actions — almost exclusively legislative efforts — aimed at *prohibiting* a select set of issues.

Confounding many both within and beyond the church, they also often explicitly champion social policies that directly attack human life — such as the death penalty and war, as Borghesi documents. They often have little to say about the violence against men, women, children and families occurring daily at our southern border. And as far as I can tell, they are standing silently by in the face of the newest culture war tactic, which seeks to target individuals with the penal powers of the state — deputizing neighbors against each other; threatening to jail parents; criminalizing people's travel; and proposing the death penalty for women. (Some have noted this odd contradiction within neoliberalism itself — a tendency toward authoritarianism that is at odds with their rhetoric of freedom.)

At the same time, they have strenuously resisted and continue to fight against social policies designed to protect human health, well-being and life. Not only did many who had previously been vocally "pro-life" stand unmoved as the global COVID-19 death toll advanced toward what is now approximately 20 million "excess" deaths that have occurred since February 2020. Prior to this, they had often lobbied against seemingly any issue designed to promote human life and well-being: expanding access to health care via the Affordable Care Act; addressing climate change; combatting the real threats to life experienced daily by people of color; expanding social services to assist the elderly, people with disabilities, children and the poor; reducing military spending; or advancing economic initiatives solidly aligned with Catholic teaching, such as living wage or unionization.

This is the wire Cardinal Joseph Bernardin tripped over when he sought, in the mid-1980s, to reorient the Catholic pro-life witness by envisaging a different way forward — to bridge all these issues under the umbrella of the consistent ethic of life. The vehemence of the backlash against his vision — especially from those within the Catholic Church — signaled clearly that something else was driving those who were rallying under the banner of "pro-life."

With 30 years of hindsight, it is now easier to see that a key driving force has been neoliberal idolatry. For more important than healing, promoting, preserving and protecting the lives of real people, is the iron law of neoliberal economics: anti-government, anti-tax, anti-social spending, corporate "freedom." In the most charitable reading, the culture warriors are "pro-life" only as long as protecting human life and well-being doesn't require government spending or proactive public/social support. On a more wary reading, the rhetoric of "pro-life" has served to deflect attention from their deeper commitments to a nihilistic ideology that

ruthlessly privileges economic profit and individual choice over human lives — a commitment to "an economy," as Pope Francis has so rightly named it, "that kills."

> In the most charitable reading, the culture warriors are "pro-life" only as long as protecting human life and well-being doesn't require government spending or proactive public/social support.
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In addition to distorting the Catholic pro-life witness, Catholic anthropology and the teachings of popes from Paul VI forward, one of the most significant ways that the culture warriors have damaged the church's witness is by deploying the tactics of war. To name a few:

- A first tactic is dehumanization. Opponents are labeled as "the aggressor" or "the laptop class" or some version of the enemy—they are targeted, maligned and demonized, often with mockery, insults and vitriolic ad hominem. As Pope Francis notes in *Fratelli Tutti*, we hear "verbal violence destructive of others … with a lack of restraint that could not exist in physical contact without tearing us all apart." Here the casualties are human persons and their dignity.
- A second tactic of war is deception. As we have seen, the culture warriors incessantly misrepresent the Catholic tradition. They likewise misrepresent opponents' positions either again, through partial accounts or, via disinformation, falsely and blithely projecting onto opponents their own actions. Here the casualty is truth.
- A third tactic of war is sophistry. This takes many forms. We hear a rejection or distortion of science. We see assertion rather than careful, thorough, logical argument. Contra Thomas Aquinas, who had no problem learning from the pagan Aristotle and the Muslim Ibn Sina, with whom he disagreed on many points, one iota of difference with another's position renders it anathema wholesale. Or we hear emotivism — positions based on feelings, such as claims that conscientious objectors need not give reasons for their positions, as long as they "feel sure." As Alasdair MacIntyre notes, once we move to emotivism, where moral positions are reduced to preferences and feelings, the only way to resolve differences of opinion is by propaganda or force. Here the casualty is reason.

- A fourth tactic of war is vice. Lost are prudence, temperance, charity, humility, mercy, hospitality. Gone is any evidence of the gifts or fruits of the Holy Spirit — love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. In the comportment of the culture warriors, one finds little that is discernably Christian. Here the casualty is virtue.
- And a fifth tactic of war is the intentional targeting of embodied human persons. Not to get too academic, but here I think Michel Foucault's maxim comes alive: Bodies are the site on which power is contested. It is on the bodies of real people that these issues continue to be fought — bodies like the man with the withered hand — "throwaway" bodies, as Pope Francis has so rightly named them. Here the casualties are mostly innocent bystanders.

This is what has become of the church's moral and intellectual tradition in the hands of the culture warriors and Catho-capitalists. "Certainly," as Pope Francis says in *Fratelli Tutti*, "all this calls for an alternative way of thinking." If the Catholic tradition has been distorted by a war grounded in an idolatry to an economy that kills, might the alternative be peace—a peace rooted in a very different economy? To explore this, let's return to the synagogue.

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The body of Christ

Jesus calls to the man with the withered hand and invites him to stand up in the middle of the assembly. He seeks to dialogue with the religious traditionalists on their own terms — inviting them to a public discussion of the law. They refuse to respond — because this wasn't about truth; this wasn't about living the law. It was simply about power, with the law — God's gift for the flourishing of God's people — serving as a weapon. Jesus is aggrieved and angry. Like the idols they worship, they have become like stones. He turns to the man and, again, invites him: "Stretch out your hand." And the man does — *he* responds. And in this encounter, the man is healed.

Here is the alternative — the encounter between the body of a marginalized person and the body of God incarnate. This encounter is the center of this story. It takes place at the center of the religious community. Two bodies come together. And indeed, here in this bodily encounter, power is contested — Jesus' radically different,

life-giving power squares off against the death-dealing power of idolatry. And his power is greater. The man is healed … and freed.

To provide a detailed, theological account of *how* this passage provides an alternate way forward for the post-conciliar church would take all the way to the end of our coffee break after this session and probably to the end of our next panel. I have begun to develop this account elsewhere. Today I simply want to direct our attention to a series of instances where Pope Francis has publicly performed a radically different alternative to that of the culture warriors, an alternative that reprises this Gospel passage.

Return with me to March 28, 2013. Holy Thursday, a mere two weeks after the conclave. Pope Francis, as I'm sure you all remember, kneels before a dozen prisoners — some Muslims, some women — and washes their feet. Year after year he repeats this with a different group of marginalized people, performing the practice that stands in for the Last Supper in John's gospel — tenderly, individually and sacramentally washing, drying and kissing their feet.



Pope Francis washes the foot of a prison inmate during the Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper at Rome's Casal del Marmo prison for minors March 28, 2013. Pope Francis washed the feet of 12 young people of different nationalities and faiths, including at least two Muslims and two women, who are housed at the juvenile detention facility. (CNS/Reuters/L'Osservatore Romano)

Move ahead to July 2013. On his first pastoral visit as pope, Francis visits the tiny island of Lampedusa. Face-to-face, hand-to-hand, he stands surrounded by throngs of refugees — men, women and children who had survived the perilous sea crossing, who had lost not only home and life savings but friends and family members, both at home and to the unforgiving waters. He looks at them, touches them, listens to them, laughs with them, cries with them. And then together, they move to an open-air Mass where he commemorates the thousands of migrants who had died en route.

Fast-forward to August 2021. Where the culture warriors were wielding their interpretation of the law as an instrument of death, Pope Francis declared over and over in a video that went viral that to be vaccinated against COVID-19 — and importantly to bring the vaccines to all the peoples of the world, particularly the poorest — was an "an act of love."

I could cite many more examples, but let me trace the key features of these three. In the COVID-19 vaccine video, Pope Francis — amplifying Thomas Aquinas — makes clear that at the center of Catholic moral discernment and the Christian life lies a different economy — the virtue of *caritas*, charity, the practice of self-gift or self-emptying love for the good of others. This economy does not derive from some philosophical account of human nature, whether from Friedrich Hayek or even natural law. Rather, it is revealed in the economic Trinity, in God incarnate in Christ via the supreme act of self-gift — namely, kenosis. In this act, the Trinity's essence of love reached to the farthest periphery from God's divine self, namely us, taking on our nature and showing us via Jesus' life the fullest image of what it means to be a human person.

But God's kenotic self-gift did not stop there. As the Gospels proclaim, God in Christ did not simply assume human nature but pressed through to the farthest peripheries of human existence — per Matthew 25, to the bodies and lives of the hungry, the thirsty, the imprisoned, the sick, the poor, the weeping — all who experience the greatest pain, suffering and brokenness, and to death, on the cross.

And God's kenotic self-gift does not stop there. God in Christ presses further to each and every one of us, offering — gratuitously — to engraft us into God's very self, so that we can embody Christ's living presence in the world. The place of this transformative encounter is, of course, the sacraments. Through baptism, or so we say, we become members of Christ's kenotic, reconciling body. This identity, this reality, is reaffirmed renewed, and deepened each time God in Christ encounters us in the Eucharist. There, in the words of St. Augustine and Benedict XVI, "we become what we consume." In the Eucharist, we are again and again and again encountered by the Trinitarian God who is love, *caritas*, self-gift via Christ's endlessly self-emptying body. And we are thereby enabled to go forth into the world, bringing Christ's healing and reconciling love near to those on the peripheries.

But, even then, God's kenotic *caritas* isn't done with us yet. For as we move into the world from the Eucharist — individually as missionary disciples and corporately as the body of Christ, a missionary church — we not only bring Christ. We are encountered by Christ again — Christ who is present in the sick, the hungry, the thirsty, the lame, the bereft, the poor, the imprisoned, the bombed—and those on all the world's peripheries. As a place where we meet Christ, those on the peripheries become a *locus theologicus*, in fact, a sacramental locus.



Pope Francis is pictured in a video for an ad campaign promoting COVID-19 vaccines throughout the Americas. (CNS screenshot/Courtesy of Ad Council)

Of course, I'm not getting all this from the Holy Father's two-minute commentary in the video on the COVID-19 vaccines, but rather from the wider corpus of his writings and his witness. From *Aparecida* through *Lumen Fidei*, *Laudato Si'*, *Samaritanus Bonus*, to *Fratelli Tutti*, we hear a polarity — one that Borghesi does not mention in his very fine book *The Mind of Pope Francis*. It is a polarity that moves continuously back and forth between two sacramental locations — the Eucharist and the peripheries. In the work of Pope Francis, we find a dynamic of the Christian life that moves recursively from Christ to Christ and back again; we could say from sacrament to sacrament and back again. Or we could say, the heart of the Christian life is to be those agents where Christ encounters Christ in the recursive dynamic of Trinitarian love.

Now how does one preach this to the world without constantly orating a theological treatise that most people couldn't understand? You perform it. And that, I would suggest, is what Pope Francis did at Lampedusa; that is what he does every year on Holy Thursday. Here he physically, tangibly, brings Christ to Christ — enveloping Christ's presence on the peripheries within Christ's sacramental presence in the Eucharist. Here, as in the synagogue, two bodies come together — the body of a person who is broken, withered, hurt, invisibly relegated to the margins, and Christ's eucharistic body. Again and again, Pope Francis brings these two together — creates an encounter between these two bodies — unleashing God's extraordinary healing power, both for these individual people as well as for those who see it — which is, of course, evangelization.

And here, he crystallizes in these gestures, the essence of the church. For where we find the body of Christ, we find the church. It is in this recursive movement between the body of Christ in the Eucharist and Christ in the bodies of the poor and marginalized, that the church exists. This, I would suggest, is the dynamic captured in the vision of the Second Vatican Council. Opening with *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the council proclaims that the font of the church is the sacraments — the endless wellspring of God's real presence in the world. Out of the sacraments, the church moves — via all the members in the *communio* of the people of God — into the world through *Gaudium es Spes*, the final document of the council. Here the church meets the world in all its "joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of the [people] of this age, *especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted* … [we rarely hear that latter part of the sentence, right?] … [these] are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."

What Pope Francis helps us see, via the Argentinian reception of the council in the *teología del pueblo*, is that this vector is not unidirectional. The Spirit that goes forth into the world via the church as missionary disciple, returns to the church through its encounter with those on the peripheries, thus recursively remaking, renewing — even converting — the church.

Thus, the council gives us a vision of the church rooted in a particular economy — an economy of gift and need that is at the heart of the sacraments. This economy and its Christological anthropology points toward a radically different ecclesiology than that espoused by First Things culture warrior Rusty Reno who preached to his Napa Institute audience last summer that "We're in a season in which we need to rebuild *the walls* of the church."

This economy and its Christological anthropology points toward a radically different moral theology than that espoused by the culture warriors, not a biopolitics of neoliberalism but instead toward what we might call a "sacramental biopolitics" — a vision of Christian discipleship — both individual and corporate — informed first and foremost by the sacraments and the peripheries and the identity of the God who encounters us there.

A sacramental (bio)politics

Like Jesus in the synagogue, Pope Francis has unmasked the nihilistic idol at the center of this deadly variant of Catholic Americanism. And we know how the Gospel passage ends. Jesus tripped the wire, and "the Pharisees went out and at once began to plot with the Herodians against him, discussing how to destroy him." Jesus was crucified. War requires dead bodies.

Though you might not know it, this war is apparently coming for us. You don't even need to move, it seems, to trip the wire. As George Weigel put it just this past November, paraphrasing — of all people — Leon Trotsky: "to my progressive Catholic friends I say: you may not be interested in the culture war, but the culture war is interested in you — and everyone else." So it appears that it's only a matter of time before it comes for us all.

But Jesus was raised and, we proclaim, is present in his body, the church. Thus Pope Francis, the Vicar of Christ, declares: "Never again war!" As he has insisted almost every day since Feb. 24: "God is only the God of peace, he is not the God of war, and those who support violence profane his name."

> As we envisage our way forward, our moral and intellectual traditions must no longer be shaped by a grasp for secular power gained by distorting Catholicism in service of particular political parties and ideologies.
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In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis has called for a better kind of politics — a politics rooted in charity, in love, a politics that prioritizes and seeks peace and human flourishing. He outlines what that might look like for the usual political actors. But if our words are to have any meaning, that better kind of politics must start with the church. There can be no room for anyone who identifies as a "warrior," who profanes Christian witness by using the tactics of war.

As we envisage our way forward, our moral and intellectual traditions must no longer be shaped by a grasp for secular power gained by distorting Catholicism in service of particular political parties and ideologies, nor by, as Pope Francis has noted, "a disjointed multitude of [philosophical] doctrines to be imposed insistently."

Rather, the council points us toward a framework that finds its structure, content and norms in the sacraments (per *Sacrosanctum Conciliium*) paired with Catholic social thought (per *Gaudium et Spes*) and shaped by an understanding of each of us as a member of the *communio* of the body of Christ (per Vatican II documents 2-15). Let me sketch three implications of such a framework.

Tweet from Pope Francis (Twitter/@Pontifex)

First, such a sacramental-ecclesial framework would suggest that, via our Christological identity given in *baptism*, Catholic moral reflection concerns first (not solely, but first) our own action and character as those reconfigured in Christ as missionary disciples — as both individuals and the corporate body of Christ — rather than with policing the actions of others via lobbying for prohibitive, penalizing legislation carried out by secular authorities.

Instead, it pushes us to ask: how might each and every parish wash the feet of homeless people — or refugees or ex-cons or AIDS patients or opioid users — not only as a symbolic gesture on Holy Thursday but via concrete, corporate, economic

practices that bring them to the center of our churches, just as Jesus brought the man with the withered hand to the center of the synagogue? How might bishops, one might ask, create and foster such a vibrant vision of the *corporate agency* of our parishes in our local communities as a first step in healing our moral fabric?

Second, such a sacramental-ecclesial framework would suggest that, as those reconfigured as embodiments of the Prince of Peace and gifted with the sacrament of *reconciliation*, our moral and intellectual traditions would be grounded at all times in the practices and tactics of peacemaking and reconciliation — commitments, for example, to the infinite dignity of each and every human person — even our enemies — in our actions and words; commitments to truth, honesty and transparency; to reason, knowledge and dialogue; to the practice of virtue, mercy and the fruits of the Holy Spirit; and to the care and flourishing of all people, especially those who might be accidentally caught in the crossfire.

It might also entirely reorient moral theology, helping us reimagine traditional issues, such as conflicts at the end of life. It might help us see that a case like that of Terri Schiavo — which I am sure you all remember — is less about treatment decisions than about how tragedy fractures families and their need for reconciliation. It would critique the culture warriors who held vigil and stormed the media in her case, fomenting enmity and hatred rather than embodying the healing and reconciling presence of Christ to her family. How might such a sacramental-ecclesial perspective provide a new, truly post-conciliar framework for the discipline of moral theology?

Finally, such a sacramental-ecclesial framework would suggest that, as a church grounded in the *Eucharist*, the Catholic tradition operates out of a different economic vision, an economy of gift. As Benedict XVI notes in *Deus Caritas Est*, "a Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented." Thus, a Catholic vision that emerges from the theological economy of the Eucharist and moves to the world, pushes us as Catholic intellectuals to draw on a wider array of theoretical resources to make clear the economic and structural dimensions of every issue and to begin to reimagine correlative practices and structures.

At the beginning of *Fratelli Tutti,* Pope Francis speaks of St. Francis and notes: "Wherever he went, he sowed seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters." Let me

close with a final gesture of Pope Francis performing this powerful vision of church — which happened today [March 25] — in which we all participated. Today, on this, the Solemnity of the Annunciation, the Holy Father invited all the bishops of the world, along with their priests, to join him in praying for peace and in consecrating and entrusting Russia and Ukraine to the Immaculate Heart of Mary during the liturgical Celebration of Penance in Rome. Here, again, he brought Christ's sacramental presence — captured in the gathered global prayer of the church — together with Christ embodied in those at the margins, in this case, in the people caught up in this horrific conflict. For as he prayed earlier in March:

> Lord Jesus, born in the shadows of bombs falling on Kyiv, have mercy on us!
>
> Lord Jesus, who died in a mother's arms in a bunker in Kharkiv, have mercy on us!
>
> Lord Jesus, a 20-year-old sent to the front lines, have mercy on us!

Christ — he proclaims — is a casualty of this, as of every war. For our complicity in this, we join him in praying: "Forgive us for war, O Lord." And so forgiven, might we go forward to reimagine and embody the Catholic tradition in all its Christological light.