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From the Editor

> Although the Catholic faith still lived in the hearts of men, in some cases intact and in others a bit obscured, however lacking they might have been in the spirit of the gospels, the charity of Christ had become so weakened in human society as to appear to be almost extinct.
>
> —Pius XI, *Rite Expiatis*[1]

One hundred years ago Pius XI published an encyclical, *Rite Expiatis*, commemorating the 700th anniversary of Saint Francis of Assisi's Transitus. Pius insisted Catholics "must reject that purely imaginary figure of the Saint conjured up by the defenders of modern error or by the followers of luxury and worldly comforts."[2] The pontiff reminded readers that the age of Francis was one in which those who loved peace were oppressed by those in power, one in which the rich "looked on poverty and the poor as something vile."[3] The Seraphic Doctor's love of poverty, Pius noted, was rooted in devotion to the Virgin Mary and obedience to the church but those "infected by the false spirit of secularism" overlooked these ecclesial markers.[4] This January Pope Leo XIV proclaimed a jubilee year to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the death of Francis of Assisi. In the letter he wrote to the Franciscan ministers general, Pope Leo referenced his hope that "the message of peace may find a profound echo in the Church and society today."[5] Leo references Francis's *Testament* to remind the ministers that peace is not a product of human effort alone but is a gift from God. In the twenty-first century, "Marked by so many interminable

[1] Pope Pius XI, *Rite Expiatis* (April 13, 1926), §7, https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_30041926_rite-expiatis.html.

[2] Pope Pius XI, *Rite Expiatis,* §1.

[3] Pope Pius XI, *Rite Expiatis,* §8.

[4] Pope Pius XI, *Rite Expiatis,* §29.

[5] Pope Leo XIV, "Letter of the Holy Father Leo XIV to the Ministers General of the Conference of the Franciscan Family on the Occasion of the Opening of the Eighth Centenary of the Death of St. Francis of Assisi," (January 10, 2026), https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/letters/2026/documents/20260107-lettera-morte-sf.html.

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wars, by internal and social divisions that create mistrust and fear, [Francis] continues to speak."[6]

Neither of these papal proclamations was created in a political vacuum. *Rite Expiatis* was promulgated during a time when the Holy See and Mussolini's government were working behind the scenes to reach a settlement on the "Roman question." The encyclical made special mention of Francis's nationality, asking, "Why then forbid Italians to glory in him who was an Italian?"[7] Mussolini picked up on the cue and declared Francis's feast day, October 4, a national holiday in Italy. Several months earlier in a piece published in the fascist paper *Il Popolo d'Italia*, Mussolini described Francis as a person in whom "the fervor of the apostles revives, suddenly and overwhelmingly, in his Italian soul, shunning rest and dissatisfied with the confines of his land."[8] Both Pius XI and Mussolini appropriated the figure of Francis in different ways in pursuit of social and political strategies that simultaneously overlapped and diverged. The appropriation of medieval Christians for modern political ends was not confined to Italy; French nationalists had appropriated the figure of Joan of Arc for political ends for two decades prior to her canonization in 1920.[9]

In 2026, Catholics in the United States are witnessing a similar struggle regarding civil government and the church, this time over the current war between the United States and Iran. On April 11, Pope Leo gave a homily at a vigil for peace during which he proclaimed, "Enough of the idolatry of self and money! Enough of the display of power! Enough of war!"[10] The next day Donald Trump attacked Pope Leo and asserted that the pontiff is "weak on crime," and is "catering to the Radical Left," and Trump wrote, "I don't want a pope who thinks it's OK for Iran to have a nuclear weapon."[11] Two days

[6] Pope Leo XIV, "Letter of the Holy Father Leo XIV to the Ministers General of the Conference of the Franciscan Family."

[7] Pope Pius XI, *Rite Expiatis,* §1.

[8] Benito Mussolini, "Messaggio alle rappresentanze italiane all'estero in occasione del settimo centenario della morte di San Francesco d'Assisi," (November 28, 2025), https://bibliotecafascista.blogspot.com/2013/01/messaggio-alle-rappresentanze-italiane.html.

[9] See James Montagu, "The Mussolinization of St Francis of Assisi," *Journal of Italian Cinema and Media Studies* 13 (July 2025): 237–52; Jennifer Kilgore, "Joan of Arc as Propaganda Motif from the Dreyfus Affair to the Second World War," *Revue LISA/LISA E-Journal* 6, no. 1(2008): 279–96, http://lisa.revues.org/519#authors.

[10] Pope Leo XIV, "Reflection of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV at the Prayer Vigil for Peace," (April 11, 2026), https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/homilies/2026/documents/20260411-rosario-pace.html.

[11] Donald J. Trump, "Pope Leo is WEAK on Crime," Truth Social, April 12, 2026, https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/116394704213456431.

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later Vice President (and recent Catholic convert) J. D. Vance—in remarks about God, the morality of war, and just war theory—told an audience at an event sponsored by Turning Point USA that "It's very important for the Pope to be careful when he talks about matters of theology."[12] Theologians are used to controversies within their own ranks; now in this current age of political and ecclesiological polarization theology has become a flashpoint for disagreement between the US president and the pope. Although we are not witnessing a return to the political struggles of Francis of Assisi's time, when the emperor Frederick II clashed with Pope Innocent III, the contemporary upheavals in long-standing global alliances and ongoing wars will not leave the church untouched. In this jubilee year, those Christians who follow the early Franciscan greeting "May the Lord give you peace" will preach an evangelical message to a world in which the powerful are disposed to dismiss peace as an unrealistic ideal, just as they did eight hundred years ago.[13]

This year's Franciscan jubilee reminds us how the Christian past inexorably flows into our present, and this current editor's note intends to do the same. At the recent annual meeting of the College Theology Society, our longtime *Horizons* editor Elena Procario-Foley was honored as the recipient of the 2026 President's Award. Dr. Procario-Foley is richly deserving of this recognition. For a decade she has guided *Horizons* into a new era in which our partnership with Cambridge University Press has given the journal enhanced international recognition. Under her leadership our editorial board has developed into a group representing a diverse array of institutions and theological specializations. In addition to overseeing *Horizons* content, Dr. Procario-Foley and our managing editor, Mary Pappalardo, ensure that the operations and logistics of publishing the journal, which have grown in complexity in recent years, run as smoothly as possible. As I succeed Dr. Procario-Foley as the editor of *Horizons*, I am fortunate that she has been such a wise and talented mentor during my tenure as an associate editor. During the production of every issue for these last ten years, her counsel has been invaluable and rooted in the journal's aspiration to continue the Catholic tradition of "faith seeking understanding." Our editorial team's own understanding develops through the gift of the manuscripts we receive and the labor of the numerous reviewers who evaluate submissions. From a personal perspective, working with *Horizons*

[12] J. D. Vance, interview by Andrew Kolvet, Atlanta, GA, April 14, 2026, posted April 15, 2026, by PBS News, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-vance-says-pope-leo-should-be-careful-when-talking-about-religion.

[13] Francis of Assisi, *Testament* [23], in *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, trans. Regis J. Armstrong and Ignatius C. Brady, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 155.

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has deepened my own faith, a faith shaped by my conviction that those of us fortunate to be scholars in theology and religious studies labor in grace as we dialogue with our pluralist and religiously diverse culture.

As the College Theology Society has paid tribute to the work of Dr. Procario-Foley, my first task as editor is to honor the memories of two former editors of *Horizons* who both passed away recently.

In 1973, the CTS board authorized the publication of a journal that would be published twice a year. Bernard (Bernie) Prusak answered the call for editors and became editor-in-chief of *Horizons*, along with his Villanova colleague, Rodger van Allen. Prusak had been teaching in the Department of Theology at Villanova since 1969 and remained a fixture in that post for fifty-two years until his retirement. He remained on the journal's masthead as editor until 1980. Under the joint editorship of Prusak and van Allen, *Horizons* quickly became highly regarded in the field of theology. The initial editorial board included Anne Carr, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, and Gerard Sloyan, while the contents of the first issue featured an article by Raymond Brown on Christology and Prusak's own review of Richard McBrien's book *The Remaking of the Church*, which Prusak characterized as "a very unusual book" that served "as a handbook for effectiveness in a pluralist church."[14]

Dr. Prusak received a doctorate in canon law from Lateran University and studied liturgy at the Pontifical Liturgical Institute of St. Anselm. His service to Villanova included coordinating the university's summer Theology Institute and serving as a department chair for eight years. In recognition of his teaching, he was the recipient of Villanova's Lindbeck Foundation Award in 1982. Dr. Prusak received the CTS's best article award for his 2014 article, "Explaining Eucharistic 'Real Presence': Moving Beyond a Medieval Conundrum."[15] In this article, he presented a historical overview of Catholic eucharistic doctrine, arguing that shifts in the philosophical understanding of realism challenge understandings of the Eucharist in a contemporary era in which embodiment has a different meaning than it did centuries ago. Deftly incorporating the writings of theologians ranging from Augustine and Aquinas to Schillebeeckx, Ratzinger, and Chauvet, Dr. Prusak produced an article that represents theological retrieval at its finest. In his 2004 book *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology through the Centuries*, he also engaged in a wide-ranging historical retrieval of both the doctrines and the experiences of

[14] Bernard P. Prusak, review of *The Remaking of the Church: An Agenda for Reform*, by Richard P. McBrien, *Horizons: The Journal of the College Theology Society* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1974): 113–14.

[15] See Prusak, "Explaining Eucharistic 'Real Presence': Moving Beyond a Medieval Conundrum," *Theological Studies* 75, no. 2 (June 2014): 231–59.

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the church that Christians have lived throughout twenty centuries. Prusak's lapidary words in the introduction remain as relevant today as they were two decades ago:

> To have hope for the future is to recognize the need for the world to be "otherwise." It is to recognize the need for action to recreate the values and structures whereby humans have shaped a world filled with injustice, poverty, hunger, hatred, violence, and suffering. If humanity is to survive into the distant future, it must face up to the overwhelming problems of a technological world wherein humanity is more and more threatened by its own autonomy. In an era in which humans have the power to destroy all life on this planet, it is imperative that we acknowledge the brokenness and ambiguity of our human freedom. Now more than ever, it is crucial that humans learn how *not* to use power, or rather, learn to exercise power the way God does, motivated by self-giving love and empowering the creativity of "others."[16]

The Catholic Press Association gave *The Church Unfinished* its first-place award for a book in theology.



Photo courtesy of the Prusak family

After Drs. Prusak and van Allen stepped down, Walter Conn from Villanova assumed the role of *Horizons* editor in 1980, a role in which he would serve

[16] Prusak, *The Church Unfinished: Ecclesiology through the Centuries* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 7.

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for the next seventeen years. A native of Rhode Island, Walter earned a degree from Providence College, undertook seminary education with the Jesuits, and eventually earned his doctorate through a joint graduate program at Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary. Dr. Conn came to the Theology Department at Villanova in 1977, where he taught for thirty-five years, winning the university's Outstanding Research Award. In his first editor's note, he wrote, "Editorial responsibility for the future seems clear: to continue building creatively on the foundation that has been set so securely. There is no fixed blueprint—only the best."[17] Dr. Conn had particular interests in spiritual development and religious conversion, an outgrowth of the masters degree that he earned in counseling.

His published books included *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender, The Desiring Self: Rooting Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction in Self-Transcendence*, and the monograph *Conscience and Conversion in Newman: A Developmental Study of Self in John Henry Newman*. Having worked in social services, Dr. Conn was acutely sensitive to the contested understandings of selfhood, the primary theme in his scholarly corpus. *The Desiring Self* provided a survey of contrasting therapeutic goals of self-denial, self-mastery, and self-love. Having dedicated the book to Bernard Lonergan, Conn asserted, "I am convinced that an accurate understanding of the desiring self in its journey through development and conversion is necessary for every practitioner of the Christian life."[18]

He had a keen sense of the tension between the human person's desire for independence and the simultaneous need to be in relationships. Dr. Conn saw this tension at work in his spiritual biography of the early Newman. From a theological perspective, Newman's early life may seem like a chaotic maelstrom as this restless intellectual navigated a path between evangelicalism, theological liberalism, and Anglo-Catholicism—a path that would eventually result in Newman's reception into the Roman Catholic Church. Yet Conn tells the story differently. While keenly recognizing the doctrinal factors pushing Newman to and fro in his adolescence and early adulthood, he placed particular emphasis on the role of affective conversion. Using the psychological framework featured in his earlier books, Conn argued that the role of conscience in Newman's journey to Catholicism was multifaceted and is best understood as the result of both biographical and intellectual influences.

[17] Walter E. Conn, *Horizons* 8, no. 1 (spring 1981): front matter.

[18] Conn, *The Desiring Self: Rooting Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction in Self-Transcendence* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 6.

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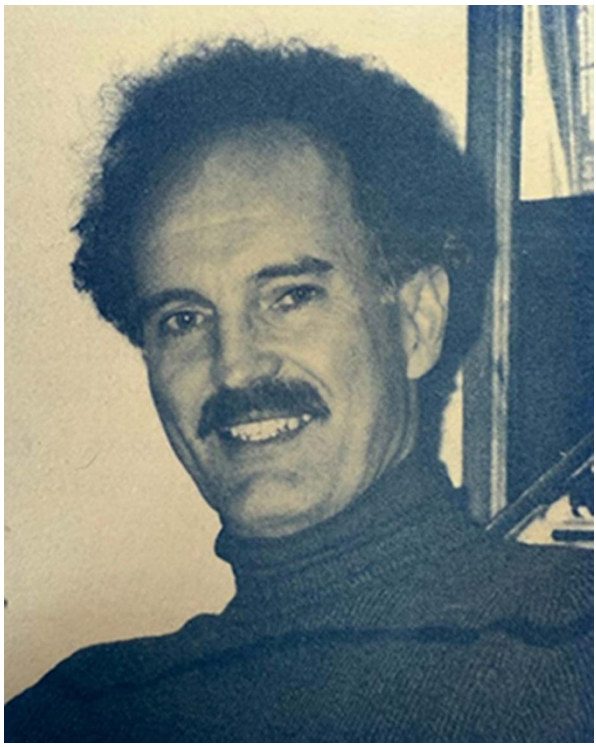


Photo courtesy of Joann Conn

Bernie Prusak and Walter Conn left a legacy to *Horizons*, which during their years as editors was described in the journal's frontmatter as "A journal exploring developments in Catholic theology, the total Christian tradition, human religious experience, and the concerns of creative teaching from the college and university environment." As I conclude my first editorial note for the journal, I am grateful for the work and counsel of *Horizons*' associate editors, Timothy Brunk and Cristina Lledo Gomez, and for that of our managing editor, Mary Pappalardo. My thanks are also due to our book review editors Jessica Coblentz, Craig Ford, and John Sheveland, who make the journal's book review section a highly regarded part of this scholarly enterprise. Their efforts make this journal possible as we strive to present our readers with a periodical whose diverse contributions build bridges between the past and the present, and between the academy and the church.

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