America
THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC REVIEW
DEC.22-29, 2014 $3.50

Christmas Without Borders

THE EDITORS

OF MANY THINGS

This year has been quite a journey for **America**, an unprecedented period of growth and change. I am very proud of the editors and staff who continue to bring you this smart Catholic take on faith and culture, not just each week in print, but every day online and every hour through social media. The datelines tell part of the tale: In just 12 months, **America**'s contributors have filed reports from Rome, London, Honduras, Seoul, Istanbul, Johannesburg, the Central African Republic, the Syrian-Turkish border and, with Kevin Clarke's report in this issue, we now add Vienna to the list of more than two dozen cities.

In 2014 **America** also hired a new engagement and community editor, a full-time Vatican correspondent and a U.S. Church correspondent. We launched "America This Week," a new weekly show on Sirius Satellite Radio, and we co-produced a new series of lectures and events with the American Bible Society and Saint Joseph's Seminary in New York. Last month we launched a new literary prize named for George W. Hunt, S.J., which has been generously funded by Fay Vincent, the former commissioner of Major League Baseball. We also joined with NBC News and other media outlets to co-produce coverage of the church in the United States and throughout the world. And last spring, **America** had its best year ever at the Catholic Press Association Awards.

We couldn't have done it, however, without the support of people like you. Nor would we want to. **America** is more than a journal of opinion. We are a community, a resource for spiritual renewal and social analysis, guided by the Jesuit ideal of finding God in all things. Everywhere I travel, I am reminded that **America** has the most loyal readers and supporters in publishing. Many of you have supported us for decades, through fair and foul, changing editors, changing times and a changing church. Christmas is the time for thanks, so on behalf of all of us at **America**: Thank you. You are warmly remembered in our Masses and prayers each and every week.

In past years, **America**'s readers have been particularly generous contributors to our annual Christmas appeal. Without the support we receive each holiday season, we would not be able to sustain our commitment to excellence. A contribution to our Christmas appeal will go directly toward our most immediate and pressing financial needs and will enable us to continue and broaden our efforts to lead the conversation about faith and culture in the United States. A strong financial base is also essential in order for **America** to be able to fulfill its vision for the future.

By now you should have received the direct appeal that was sent to our singularly generous group of associates and to our active and involved readership. Regardless of the size of your contribution, we greatly appreciate whatever level of participation you can manage. Please respond by sending your check to **America**'s offices at 106 West 56th St., New York, NY 10019, or use our donation page online at www.americamagazine.org. If you have already sent a donation, we thank you for your lovely Christmas present. We also thank you who have given **America** subscriptions as Christmas gifts. You would be surprised at the number of readers who became regular subscribers after receiving a gift subscription.

As I finish this column, night is falling and horns are honking as rush hour hits its peak in Manhattan. I am sure everyone heading home is quite happy that it is not snowing. Normal gridlock is bad enough without snow. But there may be another reason for their smiles: Christmas is coming. Hope and expectation are in the air. We have much to be thankful for and much to hope for. Merry Christmas!

MATT MALONE, S.J.

America | Media
A Jesuit Ministry

106 West 56th Street
New York, NY 10019-3803
Ph: 212-581-4640; Fax: 212-399-3596
Subscriptions: 1-800-627-9533
www.americamagazine.org
facebook.com/americamag
twitter.com/americamag

Cover: Pope Francis leads the Angelus from the window of his studio overlooking St. Peter's Square at the Vatican on Dec. 22, 2013. CNS photo/Paul Haring.

Contents

www.americamagazine.org VOL. 211 NO. 19, WHOLE NO. 5073 DECEMBER 22-29, 2014

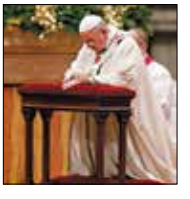
ARTICLES

COLUMNS & DEPARTMENTS

BOOKS & CULTURE

ON THE WEB

Take an Advent journey with **Pope Francis,** featuring quotes from Scripture and questions for reflection. Plus, reviews of **"The Imitation Game"** and other winter films. Full digital highlights on page 26 and at americamagazine.org/webfeatures.



One of Us

Our faith calls us to see Christ in others—not always an easy task. But seeing ourselves as made in Christ's image can also be a challenge. Some young Catholics may find help in a newly released Bible. The African-American Youth Bible depicts Jesus as an African-American man and offers commentary and artwork that are meant to put Scripture into relevant context for young black Catholics. The project, developed over four years, was spearheaded by Bishop John H. Ricard of the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, Fla., president of the National Black Catholic Congress, and St. Mary's Press, which published the Bible. "In the Bible, it speaks of slavery and it seeks to explain more fully what it means to the history of African-Americans in the United States," Bishop Ricard told Catholic News Service.

Today many young people struggle to understand the relevance of Scripture, and this Bible may help them to make meaningful connections between faith and real life. "The Eucharist calls us to see everyone as our brothers and sisters," Pope Francis reminded us during a general audience, "and to see in them the face of Christ." As the United States continues to grapple with its legacy of racial injustice and persistent inequality in our society, this new Bible may prove a valuable learning tool and jumping-off point for discussion of race and faith among all Catholics, regardless of background, ethnicity or age. During the Advent season, the project serves as an important reminder that, even as we wait for the birth of Christ, he is already present in each of us every day.

Bipartisan Child Care

On Nov. 19 President Obama signed the Child Care and Development Block Grant Act, a new law meant to improve the current $5.2 billion federal child care program, which was last updated in 1996. Over 1.5 million children under the age of 13 received help through this program last year. According to the U.S. House Education and the Workforce Committee, however, "weaknesses in the program have raised the need for reform," and because of patchwork licensing and oversight "children are not always as protected as they should be."

The law addresses these shortcomings, first by providing additional resources to better educate parents on what child care options are available. Changes will also be made to caregiving facilities and staff. Facilities will face yearly inspections, while staff will receive additional training in age-appropriate techniques for fostering the brain development of each child. Funds will be allocated to enhance the ability of states to train providers and develop safer and more effective child care services.

These measures are important first steps in revamping the U.S. child care system, though more action is needed to expand access to affordable, quality services for working families. The act also represents a rare legislative victory in a historically unproductive session of Congress. The bill was met with almost unanimous support in both the Senate and the House. In a time when government gridlock seems to be the norm, bipartisanship in service of the nation's children is welcome.

Israel's Referendum

After weeks of unrest and a rising sense of widespread insecurity and pessimism, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel broke up his government on Dec. 2 and called for early elections. His decision may prove yet another stroke of cunning by a political survivor—or a poor gamble that leads to the electoral overthrow of Netanyahu's administration. The Likud-led coalition currently in power may be remembered as the government that put an end to the two-state solution. In doing so, however, its members have been unable to offer an alternative vision of the future of the State of Israel except as custodian of its grim status quo or, worse, a separate and unequal society.

In November tension over a possible change of the status quo at the Temple Mount in Jerusalem led to deplorable acts of terror by Palestinians. In response the Netanyahu government returned to practices of collective punishment that have been condemned by the world and abandoned by previous Israeli governments as counterproductive. Instead of seeking a way to de-escalate the crisis, the prime minister ratcheted it up by introducing new legislation meant to cement the Jewish identity of Israel and further isolate Israel's increasingly restive Arab population. Those proposals were denounced by centrist members of his coalition, prompting the prime minister's call for elections in March.

It is hard to imagine that political conditions in the region could turn any gloomier than they are at the moment, but the possibility exists that after the elections Prime Minister Netanyahu could be returned to office in a government that will have no coalition members to restrain its worst impulses. That will mean more settlements and more power for Zionist radicals in all aspects of Israeli life.

At the very least, the results of the election should make clear whether any "partners for peace" remain in Israel, so that the United States can power ahead with negotiations toward a two-state solution or put an end to a peace process that has become a political mockery.

EDITORIAL

Crossing Borders

In some sense the Christmas story is one of borders. The Gospel of Luke tells us that the Holy Family's journey begins with a population divided, a census of "the whole world...each to his own town" (2:1-3). And, in the Gospel of Matthew, Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem, then flee to Egypt, then settle in Nazareth—crossing border after border so that the Son of God might one day break them down.

The birth of Christ upends our earthly sense of order. He is both a child and a savior; he is visited by shepherds and kings alike. He disperses the arrogant, throws down rulers from their thrones; he lifts up the lowly, fills the hungry with good things. Later, Christ's Passion blurs the neat borders we so often construct between life and death, between the human and the divine. He is one who gives drink to the thirsty, and who, himself, thirsts.

We know that our lives are meant to mirror Christ's. Yet we still struggle to live out God's call to reconsider the lines our world is so eager to draw. Conflicts over political and religious divides result in ongoing suffering and tragic deaths for Israelis and Palestinians. Violence continues between Ukrainians and Russian separatists long after cease-fires have been called. Individuals from West African nations affected by Ebola have been quarantined and separated from their communities, often in a worthy effort to halt the spread of the deadly disease. But stigmas and continued fear of contagions have resulted in the abandonment or isolation of many who have survived.

In the United States, the deaths of black men at the hands of white police officers have spurred nationwide anger and protests and drawn renewed attention to the many tensions and injustices that remain around issues of race in our country. Such episodes seed increased mistrust of authority, and Gallup polls show that our confidence in all branches of government is falling, with confidence in Congress at a record low.

Poverty, too, divides the American experience. In the United States alone, an estimated one in seven households are food insecure, even as Americans waste an estimated $165 billion of food each year. Families in the United States continue to seek stability, especially those with members who are undocumented. These families are described by President Obama as "part of American life" and by Archbishop Blase Cupich of Chicago as people "reaching out in hope"; yet discussions about the best way to assist such families has produced greater divisions between our political parties rather than greater empathy for the families that are struggling.

In the midst of uncertain times, it is all too easy to cry "each to his own town" and then settle into our own ways, to hole up in our own corners of the church or society. But Christ's birth calls us to more carefully consider our place in this world, where we have come from and where we are headed. What borders are we called to cross or erase in our lives? In what ways are we being asked to move beyond the boundaries we have set for ourselves? We must begin to rebuild our trust in one another. We must not allow differences around faith, race, nationality or income to keep us from truly seeing one another as neighbors, as children of God.

Often it is fear—of the "other" or even of our own inadequacies—that keeps us from crossing those lines. And yet we must cross them. Over and over the Gospels remind us—in the words of the angel Gabriel to Mary, of the host of angels to the shepherds and of Jesus to the women who discover the empty tomb—"Do not be afraid." We must take these words to heart. Christ entered fully into our humanity; he crossed from death into new life on our behalf. He understood what it meant to feel alone, cold, afraid, "other." He understood the consequences of welcoming people who were considered outcasts. He understood that doing God's will sometimes means experiencing pain and sorrow. We must let go of our fears and allow ourselves to be as vulnerable as that infant child born into his own uncertain times, and in doing so to become signs of good news.

Christ's birth sends a message that cannot be contained by a single country or ideology and that must be lived, let out, set free. Through his birth, death and resurrection, and through our own lives—by seeking peace, by welcoming the stranger—we continually break down those obstacles that separate us from each other and from God. In each of us Christ is reborn. The Christmas season reminds us that we are invited to return to God's love, to that place from which we have come, so that together we might build a reign of God that has no borders, one that has always existed and that remains to be seen, one that even as we help create it is already here.

REPLY ALL

Not A Choice

"The Loneliest Choice" (12/1), by the Rev. Rhonda Mawhood Lee, disappointed me greatly. While pastoral reflection on suicide remains a crucial topic, the article seems to hark back to pre-Enlightenment days, when there was little understanding of grave mental illness. For example, if a documented kleptomaniac steals, he certainly commits a crime; but does he sin if his mental illness compelled him to do it? Has not the church always taught that for sin to happen the actor must freely choose to break the fundamental option to remain with God? The Rev. Lee quotes the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: "When someone takes his/her own life, however, 'grave psychological disturbances' or other mitigating factors 'can diminish the responsibility of the one committing suicide.'" Can grave mental illness not only diminish responsibility but even extinguish it altogether?

If we believe in a God who holds us accountable for things we cannot stop doing, do we really write about a merciful God?

(REV.) ROBERT VITAGLIONE
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Climate Control

Re "Renew This World," by Gary Gardner (12/1): Surely the environmental crisis is a reason for re-examining the church's stand on artificial birth control, on which participants of the Second Vatican Council were divided, as is well known. The prohibition of birth control extends and deepens poverty, threatens the earth's carrying capacity and puts stress on marriages. "Natural Family Planning" not only fails frequently but also strains marriages, while large numbers of Catholics, following their consciences, find themselves alienated from the church. I pray that this uncompleted task of Vatican II will be addressed with open and generous minds at next year's Synod on the Family.

MARY CATHERINE BATESON
Online Comment

Climate Commitment

The Catholic Climate Covenant is trying to help make a difference in many of the areas mentioned in Gary Gardner's excellent piece. I agree that it was astounding how the top minds from science and social science made a plea to the church to help shape minds and hearts and generate a new vision for our covenant on the earth. We must learn to be a part of God's gift of creation, not apart from it. Readers can take the St. Francis Pledge and commit to prayer, education, assessment, action and advocacy at catholicclimatecovenant.org.

DANIEL MISLEH
Online Comment

The writer is the executive director of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change.

Knowing Nuns

In "Living on the Edge" (12/1), a review of five books on the past, present and future of women religious, Carol K. Coburn states, "Whether the Vatican acknowledges it or not, women religious are leading the church into the future." This strikes me as wishful thinking. Few American Catholics have any contact with women religious.

Nuns taught me long ago in elementary school. Since then, though I went to Catholic high school and college and have belonged to a local parish wherever I've lived, I haven't even spoken with a nun. My grown children have never met a nun. Is this unusual, or is it the common experience of today's Catholics? I think the latter. I would like to know whether the situation is substantially different in other countries.

THOMAS FARRELLY
Online Comment

Stevens's Shift

"Democracy in Danger" (11/17), Daniel J. Morrissey's review of *Six Amendments*, by Justice John Paul Stevens, implies that other than on the death penalty, it was the court that moved from 1975 to 2011, not Justice Stevens. But this is clearly false. In the most iconic affirmative action case in court history, the 1978 Bakke decision regarding California medical school admissions, in which Justice Lewis F. Powell "split the baby" by introducing "diversity" to the legal lexicon, Justice Stevens actually wrote the opinion for the four-justice block that wanted a clean "quotas are unconstitutional, period" decision against the California Regents. And yet 25 years later, in the Grutter v. Bollinger decision involving the University of Michigan Law School, he had long since abandoned his original position. Justice Stevens is better understood as a legal contrarian, swimming the opposite way of the zeitgeist. This is not a good or bad thing per se, but it is the only accurate way to understand him.

PAUL CONLIN
Lake Zurich, Ill.

Taxing Charity

"A Sister in the Spotlight" (10/10), Hank Stuever's review of Sister Simone Campbell's book, *A Nun on the Bus*, leaves out a couple of important facts. Sister Campell is the executive director of two nonprofit organizations, NETWORK and the Network Education Program. If Sister Campbell wants to protect vital federal programs from budget cuts, then why doesn't she help pay for them by surrendering both of her organizations' tax-exempt status?

Contrary to popular belief, tax-exemption isn't just for houses of worship and charities. Many entities, like most colleges and universities (including those with generous endowments and lucrative sports programs), labor unions, activist organizations on the right and left, lobbying organizations and even periodicals like **America** also enjoy tax-exempt status. According to the National Center for Charitable

STATUS UPDATE

Readers respond to "The Loneliest Choice: Puzzling Through Suicide's Sorrowful Mystery," by the Rev. Rhonda Mawhood Lee (12/1).

There is a great need for education in this area. As a parish secretary, I am on the front line, receiving the call to help plan funerals for suicides. I am often the first one to speak to the family, the first one to greet them at the church, the first one to try in some small way to offer comfort and solace to the shipwrecked families and friends. Some families (still!) don't know that their loved ones may have a funeral Mass and Christian burial. It is comforting to be able to reassure them, first, that suicide is not a choice. No one would give up the most precious gift they have and hurt their loved ones so deeply if they were in their right mind. I also remind them that the divine mercy of Jesus, as the Rev. Mawhood Lee has suggested, extends far beyond the human imagination.

HEIDI THIBODEAU

The author's mother must have been incredibly depressed and in horrible pain. One of the things we can do as Christians to reduce suicide and the despair it causes is to stop the stigma associated with mental illness and its treatments. And we should be there to listen and pray with people suffering from mental illness. So many people with chronic depression and other problems are terrified of losing their jobs or loved ones, and therefore don't seek or continue treatment. We must be more understanding of each other and stop being so judgmental about it.

BONNIE WEISSMAN

Statistics, there are over 1.4 million nonprofits registered in the United States today, with total assets of nearly $5 trillion.

If we want the federal, state, county and local governments to spend their way to social justice and solve all sorts of problems from education to the environment without turning the United States into a bankrupt and socially chaotic country like Greece, then we will need to find new sources of revenue. In my view, there is something hypocritical and extremely self-righteous about entities, religious or non-religious, that are exempt from paying their "fair share of taxes" calling for increased government spending and, in effect, higher taxes for everyone else.

DIMITRI CAVALLI
Bronx, N.Y.

Israel In Context

We are a group of Santa Clara University faculty and staff who were dismayed to read the distortions of history in "Building an 'Ethnocracy'" (9/29), by Drew Christiansen, S.J., a review of Jo Roberts's book, *Contested Land: Contested Memory*.

Father Christiansen claims, "Israelis have no sympathy for Palestinian suffering," though his own article then goes on to quote several of the many Israelis who completely contradict his statement. What about all the Israeli groups that, visibly and loudly, oppose the current government policies? What about the articles and letters to the editor in the Israeli press that indicate support for the Arabs in the West Bank?

Father Christiansen's own sympathy seems distinctly lacking. After stating that the creation of Israel was "not the outcome of the Holocaust," he goes on to dismiss the actual historical roots of Zionism in Europe's longstanding, virulent anti-Semitism. Father Christiansen sums up the latter with a cavalier line: "Assimilation in European society had proved a failure for Jews." In the absence of historical knowledge, one might almost wonder whether the Jews just didn't try hard enough. Similarly, Father Christiansen focuses on the discrimination faced by Mizrahi Jews in Israel, certainly a dark chapter in Israeli history. But perhaps he should compare that to the experiences of minorities in the Arab countries where the Mizrahi Jews came from.

It is that lack of context and proportion that makes Father Christiansen's review so egregious. We object to the false, distorted image of Israel portrayed in this article and its underlying questioning of Israel's right to exist.

PETER MINOWITZ, STEVEN NAHMIAS, IRINA RAICU AND HERSH SHEFRIN
Santa Clara, Calif.

WRITTEN BY JAKE MARTIN, S.J., ART BY BOB ECKSTEIN

VIENNA

From Deterrence to Abolition; Vatican Revises Stance on Weapons

The Catholic Church seemed to throw its support behind what is, in Europe at least, an accelerating movement toward the abolition of nuclear weapons during the first day, Dec. 8, of the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons.

In a message to the conference participants from Pope Francis, read by Archbishop Silvio Tomasi, apostolic nuncio and permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations in Geneva, the pope said: "Nuclear deterrence and the threat of mutually assured destruction cannot be the basis for an ethics of fraternity and peaceful coexistence among peoples and states. The youth of today and tomorrow deserve far more.... Peace must be built on justice, socio-economic development, freedom, respect for fundamental human rights, the participation of all in public affairs and the building of trust between peoples."

Pope Francis added, "I am convinced that the desire for peace and fraternity planted deep in the human heart will bear fruit in concrete ways to ensure that nuclear weapons are banned once and for all."

Expanding on the pope's statement later at a press conference, Archbishop Tomasi said: "The consistent position of the Vatican has been against atomic weapons. From the very beginning, from John XXIII in 'Pacem in Terris' onward, there has been a consistent line opposing the use, the possession, the development of nuclear weapons. During the '80s, especially during the cold war, the use of deterrence was accepted as a condition for avoiding worst results, but not as a value in itself."

But after the end of the cold war and in a multipolar world, Archbishop Tomasi later suggested, deterrence was no longer justifiable, explaining that the risk of accident or the threat of terrorists acquiring fissile material has become too great. During the press conference, he said, "So we go back to the principal that the possession and use of atomic weapons is not at all acceptable."

A Vatican official explained that deterrence had been accepted only because of the crisis situation of the near past and only as a step toward complete nuclear disarmament, but as decades passed since John Paul II had reluctantly acknowledged deterrence, that condition has not been met, at least not fully, by global nuclear superpowers. As other officials at the Vienna conference have pointed out, U.S. and Russian negotiations have led to substantially reduced stockpiles of nuclear warheads in recent years.

A document released at the conference by several of the participating organizations, entitled "Nuclear Disarmament: Time for Abolition" called nuclear weapons a global problem, arguing, "Now more than ever the facts of technological and political interdependence cry out for an ethic of solidarity in which we work with one another for a less dangerous, morally responsible global future."

The Holy See statement calls for scrutiny of the belief that nuclear deterrence "is a stable basis for peace." A Vatican official went so far as to describe political fealty to the strategic policy of deterrence as "a kind of religion and faith" in its own right.

According to the statement, "Rather than providing security...reliance on a strategy of nuclear deterrence has created a less secure world." Instead, the Holy See argues, the current deterrence regime works "more as an incentive for countries to break out of the nonproliferation regime and develop nuclear arsenals of their own."

Just as bad, Vatican officials added, is the troubling misallocation of national resources that will persist under current nuclear weapons policies. The United States has recently announced plans to spend billions on the modernization of its nuclear force using resources, Vatican officials say, that would do far more for the common good if they were invested in resolving social inequities.

KEVIN CLARKE

FALSE SECURITY. Ballistic missiles at a Russian parade.

KEVIN CLARKE *attended the conference as* ***America****'s chief correspondent.*

THE VATICAN

Pope Remains 'Not Afraid'

Immediately after his election on March 13, 2013, Pope Francis told himself, "Jorge, do not change, continue being yourself because to change at your age would be ridiculous." He revealed this interesting personal detail in a wide-ranging exclusive multipart interview with Elisabetta Piquè published in the daily La Nación of Argentina beginning on Dec 7.

Asked why he thought some sectors in the church feel disoriented and assert that today the church is like a ship without a rudder, especially after the recent synod, Francis questioned whether people had really said this. He suggested that part of the problem is that people don't read what he has written: an encyclical together with Benedict XVI, homilies, declarations and "The Joy of the Gospel."

"There are always fears," Pope Francis said, "but [it is] because they don't read [the texts], or [they] read news in a daily paper, an article. They do not read what the synod decided, what it published."

Pope Francis pointed out that "nobody spoke about homosexual marriage in the synod, it did not occur to us. What we spoke about was how a family that has a homosexual son or daughter, how can they educate him/her, how can they raise her/him, how can this family be helped to move forward in this situation which is a little unprecedented. So in the synod they spoke about the family and homosexual persons in relation to their families because it is a reality that we encounter many times in the confessional."

So the synod has to see "how to help this father or this mother who accompanies this son or daughter. That's what was touched upon in the synod. For this reason someone spoke about positive elements in the first rough draft. But that draft was relative."

He said he is "not afraid" to follow this process of synodality, that is a journeying together, "because it is the journey that God asks of us. Furthermore, the pope is the guarantor; he is there to take care of this also. So it is necessary to carry on with this."

The Jesuit pope recalled that in his final speech to the synod he drew attention to the fact that "no point of the doctrine of the church on marriage has been touched." And in the case of the divorced and remarried, he said, "We raised the question: 'What can we do with them, what door can be opened?' It was a pastoral concern: So will they get Communion?"

But, Francis said, "It is not a solution if they go to Communion. This alone is not a solution; the solution is integration. They are not excommunicated, that is true. But they cannot be godparents at baptism, they cannot read the readings in the Mass, they cannot give Communion, they cannot teach catechism, they cannot do some seven things. I have the list here. Stop! If I take account of this, it seems they are excommunicated de-facto," he remarked.

So the question, he said, is "to open the doors a little bit more."

All the recent popes have met with resistance at some stage, and now after 20 months, the resistance to Francis that was at first silent and underground has become more evident. Pope Francis considers it "a good sign" that this resistance is ventilated openly, "that they do not speak behind the back when they do not agree. It is healthy to ventilate things, it is very healthy."

He thinks this resistance is linked to decisions he has taken, "decisions that have touched some economic interests, others more pastoral [ones]." But he is not worried. "It would be abnormal if there were no diverging points of view." As he moves ahead with clean-up and reform, he feels totally at peace, and remarked, "God is good to me, he has given me a healthy dose of unconsciousness. I keep doing what I must do."

GERARD O'CONNELL

GERARD O'CONNELL, ***America****'s Vatican correspondent, is the husband of Elisabetta Piqué, who conducted the interview for La Nación.*

REACHING OUT. Pope Francis in St. Peter's Sq.

In Search of Unity

In Istanbul on Nov. 30, Pope Francis stated unequivocally that "full communion" was his goal with the 300-million-member Orthodox churches. He added that the only condition for achieving that unity is "the shared profession of faith." Significantly, seeking to overcome suspicion and fears, he re-assured the Orthodox that such unity does not in any way mean "the submission of one to the other, or assimilation." The pope spoke at the end of the solemn Orthodox eucharistic celebration for the feast of St. Andrew in the 300-year-old church of Saint George in the Fanar, Istanbul. "The one thing that the Catholic Church desires, and that I seek as bishop of Rome, 'the church which presides in charity,' is communion with the Orthodox churches," he told the assembly in his homily. He assured Patriarch Bartholomew I and the Orthodox churches that "to reach the desired goal of full unity, the Catholic Church does not intend to impose any conditions except that of the shared profession of faith."

End to Slavery?

History was made in the Vatican on Dec. 2, when Pope Francis and other leaders of the world's main religions—Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism—signed a joint declaration to work together to eradicate modern slavery in its various forms by the year 2020. Pope Francis was the first to sign the pledge "to do all in our power, within our faith communities and beyond, to work together for the freedom of all those who are enslaved and trafficked so that the future may be restored." They declared that "modern slavery, in terms of human trafficking, forced labor and prostitution, organ trafficking, and any relationship that fails to respect the fundamental conviction that all people are equal and have the same freedom and dignity, is a crime against humanity." Some sources put the number of people trapped in slavery at 36 million, including children.

NEWS BRIEFS

Cardinal Zen

Citing a lack of funding, the World Food Program announced on Dec. 1 that it was **suspending food vouchers** for more than 1.7 million Syrian refugees, a move its president called "disastrous for many already suffering families." ✦ The final report of a Vatican-ordered **study of communities of women religious** in the United States is expected to be released by the Vatican on Dec. 16. ✦ Less than a week after he was installed in his new position, **Chicago's Archbishop Blase J. Cupich** on Nov. 25 had a private meeting with President Obama, during which they discussed the president's executive actions on immigration. ✦ Advocates for the more than 140 men still being held at **Guantanamo Bay, Cuba**, report that the release of several prisoners from the U.S. detention facility in November is seen as a sign that other transfers are in the works. ✦ Just a few weeks after Georgetown University's adjunct faculty and administration successfully concluded contract negotiations, adjunct faculty at another Catholic campus, **St. Michael's College in Vermont**, voted 2 to 1 to form a union on Dec. 1. ✦ Cardinal Joseph Zen and three leaders of the Occupy Central protest movement in Hong Kong **turned themselves in to police** on Dec. 3, asking to be arrested for illegally occupying public places, but were dismissed without charges.

Christian, Muslim Leaders Promote Peace

Catholic, Anglican, Sunni and Shiite leaders vowed to do all they can to combat "ugly and hideous" distortions of religion and to involve more women—often the first victims of violence—in official interreligious dialogues. Holding the third Christian-Muslim Summit in Rome on Dec. 2-4, the leaders said that while more and more women are involved in high-level dialogues, there is still much to be done, including recognizing that "women play a key role in peacebuilding." Christianity and Islam both teach that "humanity is one family," and religious leaders have an obligation to resist attempts to divide brothers and sisters with violence, said John Bryson Chane, the Episcopal bishop of Washington. Bishop Chane spoke on Dec. 4 at the final, public session of the summit, which concluded with a "call to action" that also included pledges: to travel together to areas affected by severe violence as a sign to their followers that Christianity and Islam are religions of peace; to focus more attention on equipping young people to live with respect for other faiths; and to promote collaboration among Catholic, Anglican and Muslim aid agencies.

From CNS, RNS and other sources.

DISPATCH | CHICAGO

After Ferguson, Learning to Listen

The shooting of Michael Brown by a police officer in Ferguson, Mo., exposed long-ignored, long-simmering tensions in the United States. Ferguson amounts to a kind of national Rorschach test on race. Polls show blacks and whites hold decidedly different views about the unarmed teenager's death.

The twin cities of Bloomington and Normal, where I live, are on the central Illinois prairie between Chicago and St. Louis. Both are anchored by great universities—Illinois Wesleyan in Bloomington and Illinois State in Normal. People here still leave their cars and back doors unlocked. A political science professor is Bloomington's mayor; a bicycle shop owner is mayor of Normal (the name itself evokes a "Wonder Years" type of serenity).

The community is overwhelmingly white. Bloomington hired its first-ever African-American police chief last year, but he is one of only two blacks on the police force. Normal has one black police officer. There are no African-American judges or state's attorneys.

At a series of discussions about diversity (pre-Ferguson) at the local Y.W.C.A., white participants described Bloomington-Normal as if they were conjuring up Mayberry. African-American professionals on the panel said they preferred to live in more racially diverse Peoria, even if it meant driving 45 minutes to their day jobs here. At least they could have a social life in Peoria. In Bloomington-Normal, blacks and whites mingle mainly on the Walmart checkout line.

Ricardo Cruz is a writer and associate chair of Illinois State's English department. He says he sometimes feels "stalked" by local police officers. "You know, you walk from the grocery store toward your home and you see them riding by looking at you in ways you know they're wondering if you're doing something you shouldn't be doing," Cruz says.

> A local business owner remembers hearing from his father, 'The police aren't your friends.'

It's an impression of the police that begins early in life. Wayne Patterson, a local business owner, remembers hearing from his father that "the police aren't your friends."

"I think he understood that you couldn't look to the police for help as far as thinking they are somehow on your side or they're there to benefit you," Patterson remembers.

Both Cruz and Patterson instruct their own sons on how to act if they are questioned or pulled over by police. "I have said to my son, 'Understand that you are a black male. You can't always do what other people do,'" says Cruz. "I want him to be prepared, to be poised, hopefully to be able to do things so that he's not shot."

In Bloomington-Normal, African-Americans are more likely to be stopped while driving and have their cars searched, according to state traffic stop reports, even though white drivers are more likely to be found with illegal drugs or weapons. The crime rate among African-Americans in the twin cities has been falling consistently since 2007. Still, African-Americans who are arrested spend more time in jail than whites.

The question of law enforcement and race is a complex one. At its crux are two sometimes opposing objectives: fighting crime and safeguarding civil rights. Sean Vinson is an I.S.U. senior who is African-American. He was pulled over for having a license plate light out, then subjected to a pat down and a canine search of his car for drugs. None were found. "I don't fear the police," he says of the incident, but "it does make me feel I'm not as valuable a citizen as a white individual."

Fighting and solving crime will always be paramount, says Brendan Heffner, Bloomington's police chief. "When we have probable cause for searches, when we execute arrest warrants, we look at people's actions, what has occurred, not race."

Both police departments in Bloomington and Normal are beefing up recruiting practices to become more diverse. But arriving at a better balance will take time. In the meantime, can people of faith wait and be silent?

The Rev. Robert Rosebrough is pastor of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta parish just a few miles from where Brown was shot in Ferguson. He's begun an initiative called "Lean In," which he says means "lean in and listen." He wants blacks, whites and all colors in between to simply begin talking to one another, to hear each other's stories. Perhaps it is time for other majority-white communities to follow suit—to explore what life is like for those who are minorities. We could all do a lot more leaning in and listening.

JUDITH VALENTE

JUDITH VALENTE, ***America****'s Chicago correspondent, is a regular contributor to NPR and "Religion and Ethics Newsweekly." Twitter: @JudithValente.*

HELEN ALVARÉ

A More Perfect Union

Most Americans probably think that Catholics talk about the subject of the relationship between men and women to the point of exhaustion. But we don't. We have rather peered into every corner of their sex lives and by turns gossiped and wrung our hands over couples' failure to gel or their falling apart. As to the natural and divine significance of the fact that there are two sexes, drawn to one another in a one-flesh bond? As for this being the origin of all human life, all human society? Of this we say very little of consequence.

This should change for reasons both natural and divine. At the natural level it only becomes clearer week by week, as the tides of qualitative and quantitative evidence roll in, that the differences and similarities between men and woman matter. Biology sees it even at the cellular level. Eminent business consultancies advise clients to harness it. Psychological and sociological data regularly show both the unique and the overlapping talents of men and woman. Women on both sides of the political aisle affirm it. And outcomes for children and communities deprived of fathering manifest it.

There is also the sheer fact of a two-sexed humanity that gives birth to all human life. That's a "wow" all by itself and deserving of study, care and conservation.

Layer onto this the central role marriage plays in Christians' understanding of the economy of salvation. From the Old Testament to the closing scenes of the New, God's identity and relationship to humanity is explained with spousal analogies. The Scriptures point to marriage and family life as the school for learning the meaning of life as loving mutual service and sacrifice—Jesus' way of life.

Sex, marriage and parenting are pre-eminent themes of our age. Scholars, activists and film-makers cannot stop investigating them. Recent popes have paid them extraordinary attention. Pope John Paul II taught that misunderstanding the "complete and indissoluble human communion" in marriage "would make incomprehensible the very work of salvation." Pope Benedict XVI called marriage "the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa." And Francis, after devoting years to family themes, has said that "God's alliance with us is represented in the alliance between man and woman."

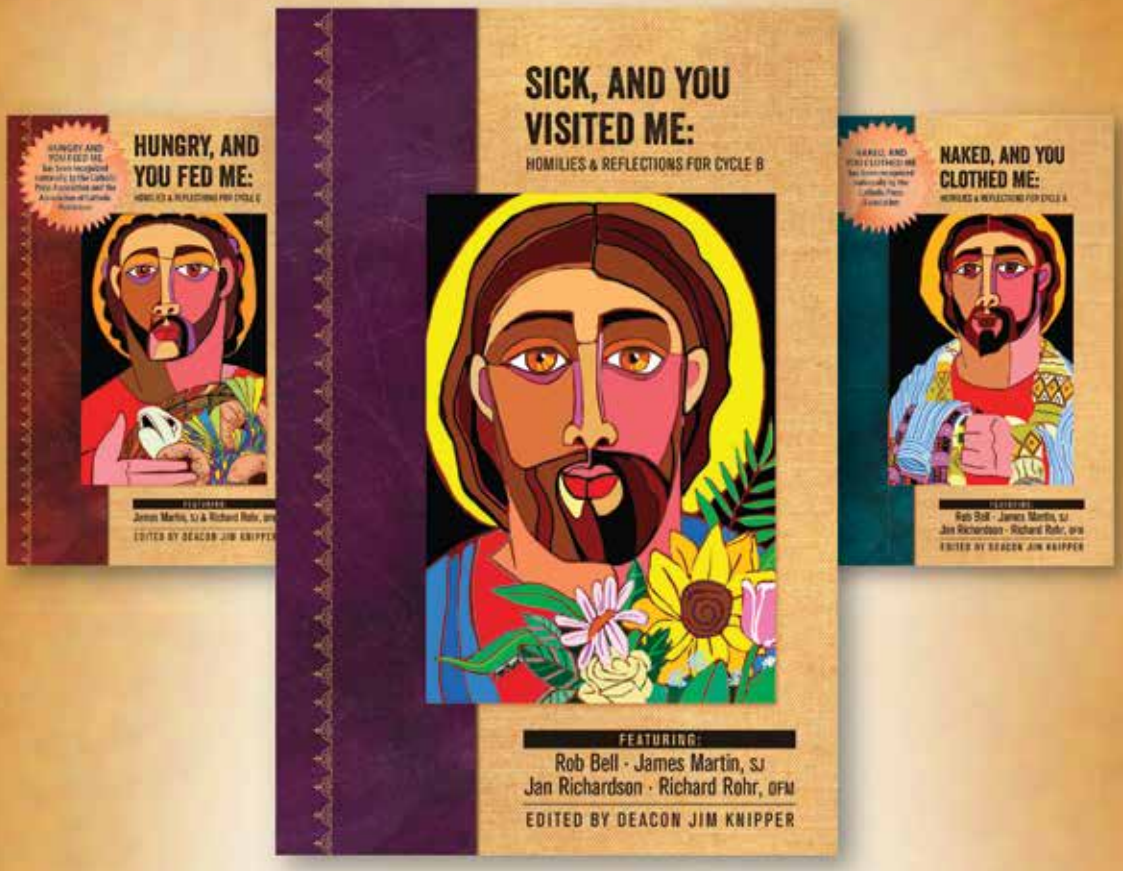
> Complementarity must begin with the radical equality of men and women.

Religions and cultures across the globe and throughout history have also affirmed the natural and divine significance of the relationship between the man and the woman. At the Humanum conference at the Vatican two weeks ago, Pope Francis and leaders from 14 religions and 23 nations mined a wide-ranging vocabulary to speak about the natural and divine meanings of a two-sexed humanity. Religions of East and West spoke of "cosmic polarities," of nature's dualities harmonizing to reflect the oneness of God, of Yin and Yang and of men and women changing and elevating one another.

Reaction against exploring the meaning of the male/female union can be harsh. The notion of "complementarity" is branded a plot against women's equality. Marveling at procreation is called a tool for putting women on a pedestal in order to sideline them. Throughout, there lurks a suspicion that any talk of the ties between men and women and of their procreative potential is narrowly directed to undermining respect for those seeking same-sex unions.

In order to move forward toward acknowledging that a two-sexed, procreative humanity matters a lot, it is necessary to deal with these reasonable fears. We have to correct interpretations of "complementarity" that fail to begin with the radical equality of men and women. We have to admit that some responses to women's fertility demeaned both women and children. We may even have to face the possibility that deep disorders of our human nature incline us to fear giving proper value to caring for others and to diminish people different from ourselves—whether these are of the opposite sex or people attracted to the same sex. But at the same time, we really have to find a way to move forward to nurture and promote the natural and divine wonder that is the male and the female together.

HELEN ALVARÉ *is a professor of law at George Mason University, where she teaches law and religion and family law. She is also a consultor to the Pontifical Council for the Laity.*



NEW RELEASE!

Some of the finest homilists come together under the moniker of "Homilists for the Homeless" in this compilation of homilies and reflections for the Sundays and Feast Days in Cycle B. The gift made by these contributors make it possible for proceeds of every book to go towards feeding and sheltering the homeless and those in need.

CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDE:

Rob Bell, James Martin, SJ, Jan Richardson, Richard Rohr, OFM, as well as:

Fr. Bill Bausch
Dr. Margaret Blackie
Joel Blunk
Fr. Greg Boyle, SJ
Sr. Simone Campbell
Dave Davis
Deacon Bill Ditewig
Michelle Francl-Donnay
Msgr. Michael Doyle
Fr. Jim Greenfield, OSFS
Fr. Paul Holmes
Fr. Dan Horan, OFM
Deacon Greg Kandra
Deacon Jim Knipper
Michael Leach
Fr. Rick Malloy, SJ
Carol Howard Merritt
Penny Nash
Msgr. Walt Nolan
Dr. Christine Valters Paintner
Mary Sperry
Martha Sterne
Fran Rossi Szpylczyn
Pat Wenrick

Artwork by: Br. Michael O'Neill McGrath, OFSF

To order your book, go to: http://clearfaithpublishing.com/homilies/
To follow us, go to: www.facebook.com/Homilists

Becoming Human

The Incarnation calls us to a new life.

BY LEO J. O'DONOVAN

How to choose from the bountiful treasury of images awaiting our contemplation (and sheer delight) in this darkening season before Christmas? Do you prefer Netherlandish precision and detail? Italian tenderness and warmth? The classical proportions and palette of Poussin? The transcendent simplicity, for all their mastery, of Rembrandt or Velázquez? Or perhaps something admittedly sentimental but so familiar that we love it all the more?

Let me pause with you before "The Adoration of the Kings," painted some 400 years ago by the Flemish artist Jan Gossaert and now in the National Gallery in London. At first there is nothing surprising here, except of course for the ravishing perfection of the piece. But the longer we look (as is always the case), the more we are lost in the scene. The beautiful Virgin Mother, dressed in robes of precious lapis lazuli blue, holds her poised child, who, in a rhapsodic interpretation of the story in Matthew's Gospel, is receiving the gift of a golden cup from the eldest king—biblically a *magus,* or wise man, and traditionally named Gaspar. His younger colleague, Balthazar, stands to the left, with Melchior to the right, each likewise holding elaborate gifts. (The names are carefully inscribed on their clothing or the gifts.) The entire scene unfolds—no one seems entirely still—in ruins that may represent either antiquity, the Temple of Judaism or both.

Looking longer, we notice telling further detail. The handsomely gowned attendants of the royal visitors; Joseph, half-hidden in the ruins between Balthazar and Mary, with a bright red robe and a cane; the shepherds of Luke's Gospel behind the picket fence at the back of the ruins, but also, minutely, in the far distance, first hearing the news of the child's birth from an angel; and flights of angels, nine in number to represent the heavenly hierarchies beloved of medieval speculation—the whole world of God's creation is suggested, centered on the child. And presiding discreetly over all is a small dove, at the very top of the picture, under what seems at first the star of the Magi but may well also refer to God the Father, who sends the Son among us.

The painting, named after one part of the "Christmas story," as we know it today, proves in fact to be a visual theology of the mystery of the Incarnation, God's revealing to us the Christ in whom divinity and humanity are one and through whom the entire creation is meant to be redeemed. Even the baptism of Jesus, intimated at least by the appearance of the dove of the Holy Spirit who descended upon Jesus in the waters of the Jordan, is included. For the early church, the baptism was in fact a more central part of the mystery than we recognize now.

In Western Christianity we currently celebrate Christmas on Dec. 25, Epiphany two Sundays afterward and then, on the following Sunday, the Baptism of Jesus. But in the early church the inner coherence of these different aspects of the Incarnation was celebrated with a greater sense of their temporal unity.

Until the late fourth century, the church in the East celebrated "Epiphany" on Jan. 6, "the manifestation of God in Jesus" both in his birth (including the visit of the Magi) and his baptism. (Reference was also made to his manifestation at the wedding in Cana.) By the end of the century, however, imitating Western practice, the East began to celebrate Christmas as the nativity, the birth of Jesus, on Dec. 25 (including the visit of the Magi), leaving the baptism and the wedding at Cana to be celebrated on Jan. 6. When the West borrowed from the East in turn and began to celebrate a feast of the Epiphany on January 6, it took only the visit of the Magi for that day.

I recall this (all too abbreviated) history of a complex liturgical development, because it reminds us that incarnation, God's becoming human with and for us, was from the beginning conceived as an extended temporal event, less a moment (birth) than a story (the beginning of a life). And clearly the life, the humanity, of Jesus cannot be complete at birth. There were years yet of unseen labor, presumably learning carpentry from Joseph. After the baptism by John, the opening of his public life and ministry, there was his testing in the wilderness, both crucial experiences for the course of his life. He had yet to experience the effect of his preaching, his healing of the sick, his companionship with outcasts, his mastery of the natural world, not to mention the growing antagonism of leaders both religious and civil.

More and more clearly it appeared who this unique man was and who he presented himself to be. The climax of his life, the cresting of its saving course, comes with a week of utmost challenge and ultimate rejection, only then to be vindicated by the God who was (and is) his Father. "As with all of us," writes Elizabeth Johnson, C.S.J., "the mystery of his person

OPPOSITE: "THE ADORATION OF THE KINGS," BY JAN GOSSAERT MABUSE PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/AISA EVERETT

LEO J. O'DONOVAN, S.J., *is president emeritus of Georgetown University.*

was never totally expressed...until the time of his death, when he transcends this world and is raised from the dead. Then his ultimate identity burst upon him in all clarity." *Then* he is the fully human and fully divine person he was meant to be, the startling, suffering Savior once born in utter helplessness and now raised as "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."

But is his humanity complete even then? He is "One and Unique," writes Hans Urs von Balthasar, "and yet one…who is to be understood only in the context of mankind's entire history and in the context of the whole created cosmos." He was not born for himself and the glory that was naturally his but "for us and for our salvation." And we are one with humanity

past and, we now realize, one with a vast humanity for centuries to come. They too are called to be his, the body of Christ, which will be complete only when time is complete. It is not simply a matter of adding to the communion of saints. It is a matter of "completing Christ," achieving the whole Christ (St. Augustine's "Totus Christus").

The early Christian writers we call the Fathers of the Church, meditating on the Prologue of St. John's Gospel and the first chapter of the Letter to the Colossians, knew this, and we are invited to appropriate it again and in a still deeper sense by theologians who speak of "deep incarnation," writers who point out that in becoming flesh the Word of God becomes united not only with the human species but with all living creatures and with "the cosmic dust of which they are composed," as Sister Johnson says. "The incarnation is a cosmic event." Reflecting many years ago on humanity in the cosmos and the hope our faith gives us for it, Karl Rahner, S.J., wrote:

> Is not *each* person completely that person's self, entirely brought to that fulfillment which the person should have and which God has eternally planned for the person, only when *all* persons are made perfect in the Kingdom of God? Must not all individuals wait for their ultimate fulfillment upon the complete fulfillment of all things?

We think we are human because we behave as humans (though how often so deplorably). But we know, when we are honest with ourselves, that we are but struggling wayfarers whose true selves will appear only when brought finally before the blinding light of God—when we are fully one with the risen Christ.

Could Jesus have become human without sharing, though faultlessly, that journey? Is not the deepest blessing of Christmas not that he was born as the infant child of Mary but rather that he was born to become fully human, and with the promise that we too might be so?

Still, this wide full vision, this hope for the redemption through Christ of all God's creation, should not deprive us of the moment that is the fulcrum of the whole, the birth of the divine infant in Bethlehem. Nor should one overlook the bread of life that sustains us in our remembering and our journey. In Gossaert's painting, the child who has been given golden coins by Gaspar returns one to his visitor, a clear and potent symbol of the eucharistic host taken from what the visitor does not yet know to be a ciborium.

When we celebrate again this Christmas the birth of Jesus, the appearance of God and humanity united in one small infant, we celebrate as well our birth for heaven—and the call to everlasting life of all the universe and the children of God in it for ages to come.

Solid Foundations

Grounding social justice in our common humanity

BY MEGHAN J. CLARK

In March 2010, I traveled to Bagaces, Costa Rica, for a weeklong service project with a dozen college students and a colleague. Volunteer programs, service learning and weeklong service trips are now commonplace on American college campuses. These programs offer students powerful opportunities to engage the wider community through experiential learning. Our experience was organized through the Christian Foundation for Children and Aging (which has since been renamed Unbound), and we were tasked with building a house for a young immigrant family who were homeless and expecting their second child.

Each morning we left our motel around 8 a.m., walked down the street to a local café for breakfast, then headed down a mixture of paved and dirt roads to our building site. Working with some local craftsmen and the husband, we built a concrete house without machines or power tools. The intense physical labor was combined with short breaks to play catch with neighborhood children.

When the house was completed, it would be connected to the electric wires, but these would only be hooked up on our last day when professionals came to install the roof. While most of the people we encountered had their basic needs met, life was a struggle for many and there was little room for error. The town of Bagaces, in the province of Guanacaste, had widespread relative poverty, with few wealthy people and few facing extreme deprivation. Like many undergraduates, my students were focused on accomplishing their task. They did not want to take breaks and had to be forced to stop for lunch and dinner. This focus on helping and on the particular task is common in volunteer or other human rights work. However, the vision of Catholic social thought calls for a different type of engagement. Success requires more than merely completing the task; it also asks us to build solidarity through practicing human rights.

Each day at lunch, all of the women on the block helped cook and prepare the food C.F.C.A. provided for lunch. We were invited into their homes and extra tables were set up in the backyard. They welcomed us into their community with their hospitality. We were providing needed labor, but the community invited us to participate in what was their project, not ours. As a community, they had chosen the family and housing site. We were building community with them, not building a house for them. This participation was crucial—it was not enough to bring resources and accomplish our task.

Despite the language barrier, we were one community united in the project. Yet, this was the element with which many of my students genuinely struggled. Uncomfortable with taking time or resources from the poor, they often manifested a laser focus on the concrete building task and experienced discomfort at eating the papayas the village women bought for us off the fruit truck. Solidarity, however, requires genuine mutuality and reciprocity in the relationship. I can come in and help you, but if the relationship is not one of mutual participation, then it will not be one of solidarity.

Complete focus on the limited project of building a house provides insulation from the vulnerability, the ques-

BUILDING COMMUNITY. The author, left, works on a house.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

MEGHAN J. CLARK *is an assistant professor of moral theology at St. John's University, Queens, N.Y. This article is excerpted from her book,* The Vision of Catholic Social Thought: The Virtue of Solidarity and the Praxis of Human Rights *(Fortress Press).*

tions and the challenge posed by the reality of relative poverty. For Catholic social thought, the elements that often make us, as Americans, anxious are absolutely crucial. Those lunches hosted by the women were a major element of what made solidarity possible. Engaging the vulnerability and poverty through solidarity in Bagaces forced us to be vulnerable and to ask difficult questions about poverty in our own communities. Solidarity with those in Bagaces was made possible only through the vulnerability experienced when we realized our humanity is bound up with theirs. That experience generated an opening that draws us into relationship with those in relative poverty back home. Engagement through those lunches pushed us beyond the moral problematic of seeing only what is lacking or of making sharp judgments about the people in poverty we encountered and people facing poverty in our own communities.

Seeing People, Not Poverty

Commitment to human rights and solidarity is always grounded in the personal. Responding to human rights violations begins with the recognition of the other as an equal human being. As we respond, in the interplay of these experiences locally and globally, we begin to build solidarity. How do I engage a different context? How do I begin not with poverty but with personhood? As the philosopher Charles Taylor notes, "Our age makes higher demands of solidarity and benevolence on people today than ever before. Never before have people been asked to stretch so far and so consistently, so systematically, so as a matter of course, to the stranger outside the gates." Building solidarity and practicing human rights requires seeing the people in front of me first. Only then can I move to the injustice of poverty. Solidarity and substantive human rights are realized through human encounter and not through the abstract. It is a challenge, however, to see persons, not poverty, as the necessary starting point.

During our trip, as we were walking home one night, a group of children from a different neighborhood swarmed us looking for stuff—footballs, Frisbees, stickers and so on. The situation was upsetting and problematic from every angle. Motivated by generosity, the students wanted to give the children what they asked for, and yet behind the generosity was a preoccupation with the perception of poverty. In the neighborhood in which we were working, it was different because there was a broader and deeper community relationship involved that created a context for generosity outside of simply the perception of poverty. This was not the case with random children from a different neighborhood following us down the street.

"Can I have that?" a small child asks one of our students as we are walking home, pointing first to her camera, then to her bracelet. It was clear that the mother had sent the children out "to the Americans." And we all struggled with why, in my only assertion as a faculty member, I quickly moved us away from the group. Creating a relationship in which "Americans" come down and hand out stuff, without solidarity, sets up structures of dependency. Broader questions of neocolonialism, racial justice and social sin on a global scale all complicate the interactions we had with the children we met in Bagaces.

But this is not any different from questions of solidarity within our national and local contexts. As we walked away from the family of children following us, I was taken back to my own time as an undergraduate volunteering at St. Ann's afterschool program in the South Bronx. Made famous by Jonathan Kozol's book *Amazing Grace*, St. Ann's provides homework help, food and a safe place to play. As I was helping an 8-year-old African-American girl with her math homework, I still remember her looking up at me and saying, "I know you all come down here to help us." "You all," did not mean college students; it meant white college students. This is why solidarity as a social virtue, participation and the structure of our relationships are so important. The relationship between a college student and the child she is tutoring, or between a teacher and members of a weekly religious education class, is not one of equals in power or role, but can be founded on the equality of persons. Thus, if the participants are vulnerable and fully human in the encounter, it can be one that builds solidarity.

My humanity is bound up in yours—this idea is fundamental for the vision of Catholic social thought. I cannot build a relationship of equal human dignity unless I begin from that starting point. If your pain cannot change me and

my pain cannot change you, then the relationship cannot be one of solidarity, even if basic needs are being met. For solidarity it is not enough to recognize and fight injustice; vulnerability and participation grounded in the one human family must also be present. I must see your dignity bound up with mine. Without that vulnerability and participation, motivation for basic human rights becomes more and more difficult. This sad reality is powerfully demonstrated by the international response to the Rwandan genocide and hauntingly depicted the movie "Hotel Rwanda." Upon news that coverage of the genocide will run on international news, the hotel manager, Paul Rusesabagina, thanks the reporter:

> Paul: I am glad that you have shot this footage and that the world will see it. It is the only way we have a chance that people might intervene.
>
> Jack: Yeah and if no one intervenes, is it still a good thing to show?
>
> Paul: How can they not intervene when they witness such atrocities?
>
> Jack: I think if people see this footage they'll say, "Oh my God that's horrible," and then go on eating their dinners.

Unfortunately, the reporter was right. Seeing and knowing about an ongoing genocide was not sufficient to prompt immediate action. Even today it is not sufficient to motivate sustained focus to determine a proper course of action, as long-term humanitarian crises like Darfur have shown. The horror of injustice by itself has not proven sufficient motivation. Common humanity must be the starting point understood through radical interdependence. Catholic social thought offers an understanding of human persons in community in which human dignity is always both personal and universal. My dignity is bound up in yours, and mine is attacked where yours is attacked—this challenges hard distinctions between us and them.

The popular Christian music artist Sara Groves, inspired by a mission trip to Rwanda, wrote the powerful song "I Saw What I Saw." We played this song during reflection in Costa Rica. Her poignant expression, about the deeply human encounter that cut to the core of how she understood the world, captures what it means for our humanity to be bound up together. She movingly portrays the vulnerability and solidarity in which "your pain has changed me," and she recognizes that once one recognizes the humanity in the other, one has seen something that cannot be unseen. In this radical encounter where one sees the victims of injustice as brothers and sisters, solidarity is possible and substantive exercise of human rights attainable. The virtue of solidarity and the praxis of human rights require your pain to change me. Participation in the humanity of one another is necessary. A

Signs of That Peace

Peacemaking is everybody's business

BY GERALD W. SCHLABACH

ROOTED IN FAITH. Israel's President Shimon Peres, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (partially hidden), Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople in the Vatican Gardens on June 8.

CNS PHOTO/CRISTIAN GENNARI, POOL

For decades now, popes and episcopal conferences have been insisting that to work for peace is the vocation of all Christians. Too often, however, peacemaking seems the domain of special vocations or technical specialists. This is certainly not the church's hope. As Pope John Paul II proclaimed in his World Day of Peace message at the opening of Jubilee Year 2000: "The church vividly remembers her Lord and intends to confirm her vocation and mission to be in Christ a 'sacrament' or *sign and instrument of peace in the world and for the world*. For the church, to carry out her evangelizing mission means to work for peace.... For the Catholic faithful, the commitment to build peace and justice is not secondary but essential" (No. 20).

Yet peace often seems an activity only for those who are "into that sort of thing." Many associate peacemaking mainly with protesting war and injustice. If they know a little more, they may think policymaking. If they know even more, they may think of on-the-ground practitioners in the developing field of peace-building. But even if all these associations are positive, peacemaking can still seem like other people's business. Protest requires a certain disposition. Policymaking requires expertise. Peace-building practitioners need training in techniques like conflict resolution.

Pope Francis would change this by widening our focus in a way that places every vocation, technique or tactic in the wider context of God's overarching strategy in history.

For Francis, after all, peace-building means building a people of peace—*people-building*. In his exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel," he speaks repeatedly of all work for peace and the common good as building or becoming a people. This follows his portrayal of evangelization as the work of the entire church, which is "first and foremost a people advancing on

GERALD W. SCHLABACH *is a professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota and lead author and editor of* Just Policing, Not War *(Liturgical Press). He is currently at work on a book tentatively titled* A Pilgrim People: Becoming a Catholic Peace Church.

its pilgrim way towards God," thus opening out as "a people for everyone" and "a people of many faces."

We may ask which people he means. That would be the wrong question.

People Within a People Within Peoples

Picture a set of nested Russian dolls. Once we recognize the work of peace-building as people-building, we start to notice that God's own peacemaking strategy always places creative people as change agents within communities, within peoples.

That World Day of Peace 2000 message from John Paul II, for example, worked at multiple layers at once. As a sacrament of peace, the church is to be both a sign—being—and instrument—doing—of a saving reality beyond itself. But even as the nesting pattern moves outward into the world, it also calls inward to an "essential" role for each of the Catholic faithful.

The pattern is really the oldest and most basic in salvation history. In Genesis, even as God called Abraham promising the blessing of descendants who would become a great people, God's strategic purpose for them was that they be a blessing to all other families or peoples of the earth. The elegant paradox of an Abrahamic community is that it can be true to its vocation as a people only if it is ready to risk that very identity by blessing and living for other peoples.

Francis draws instinctively on this Abrahamic pattern. The church must live its life on the streets, he insisted as he began his papacy, preferring the risk of getting wounded out there to the prospect of stagnating health from living behind closed doors. In "The Joy of the Gospel" he demonstrates the theological heft that sustains his pastoral practice. Turning midway to a natural-law

Building a People of Peace

The liturgical reform movement has been forming us as people of justice and peace for decades. Social justice offices in parishes and dioceses have forged numerous projects to develop and practice global solidarity. Pro-life organizations walk with struggling families and women to protect the unborn.

What we can do better in response to Pope Francis' vision of people-building is to enact the liturgy and tell the story of God forming a people of peace down through the centuries in ways that draw all our projects, vocations and lives together. Here are some suggestions.

LITURGY AND PREACHING

- The prayers of the people at Mass should always balance local concerns with global solidarity for the church around the world. If we pray for "our troops," we must also pray for conscientious objectors and above all—as Jesus taught—for enemies.
- Attend to the liturgical message of flags: The U.S. flag should never stand alone in our liturgical spaces. Either move it out of the sanctuary or add flags from many countries of origin of parishioners and ethnic groups in one's diocese.
- Longer-term, bishops and liturgical commissions should consider revising eucharistic prayers in order to underscore how the nonviolent character of Christ's passion is normative for all disciples, as the Rev. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy (centerforchristiannonviolence.org) has advocated.

CATECHESIS AND CATHOLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

- Homilies should offer more than therapeutic spiritual counsel. They should draw out the invitation that the church year and indeed every Eucharist already embodies—to join in the drama of salvation history by which God has been forming a people blessed to be a blessing for all the peoples of the earth through service to the common good of all humanity.
- In parish settings and Catholic educational institutions, young people should learn the dynamics of active nonviolence and the criteria of the just war tradition, so that any Catholic support or participation in warfare is truly an exceptional last resort.
- Longer-term, the work of theologians should solidify and popularize the proper Christian historicism that the Second Vatican Council reaffirmed, thus inviting all the Catholic faithful to recognize their lives and vocations as participating in God's saving work here and now, even as it promises eternal fulfillment beyond this life.

COMMUNITY FORMATION AND SOCIAL ACTION

- Pick up on a suggestion that Archbishop Hélder Câmara of Brazil once made as part of his ringing call, "Abrahamic minorities unite!"—namely, form small affinity groups among professionals for reflection, mutual counsel and joint action to direct their vocations toward true social transformation favoring the poor at home and around the world.
- Support organizations like the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and Maryknoll Lay Missioners so that offering two or three years of dedicated service might one day become as normative for Catholic young people as it is for Mormons.
- Continue developing "sister church" relationships among parishes not only across continents but also among parishes with different racial, ethnic and class identities in our own dioceses.
- Bring home the pioneering work that the Catholic Peacebuilding Network has been doing to learn and teach conflict transformation capacity in war-torn areas of the world by offering similar parish- and diocesan-level training in the skills needed to transform our own relationships amid American and Catholic "culture wars" into models of creative civility. ***—G.W.S.***

mode of reflection, he lays out four principles. Together they aim to transform the social conflict and cultural diversity that are an inevitable part of human life into "a genuine path to peace within each nation and in the entire world."

Francis' Four Principles

In writing his first apostolic exhortation, Pope Francis reiterates many core lessons of Catholic social teaching. But to summarize his vision, Francis ultimately turns to a fresh and suggestive image—that of a polyhedron.

Both a sphere and a polyhedron can serve as metaphors for human equality, but the first is individualistic and the second is communal. While a sphere seems to offer perfect equidistance from the center, the egalitarian justice of a sphere is deceptive, for its cost is the globalized smoothing out of all cultural differences. A polyhedron, in contrast, offers the image of a richer justice of equality through participation in local cultures that have not lost their distinctiveness.

PEACE MEET. A Catholic Peacebuilding Network event in Burundi

Accordingly, the work of peace-building must be the very task of becoming a people of peace whose social posture in the world serves the respective cultures and common good of all other peoples. Each of Francis' four principles builds toward this vision.

1. *"Time is greater than space."* However urgent we sense the world's needs to be, our first and most basic task as Christians is not to seize power but to generate processes of people-building, not to hold territory through frantic and domineering self-assertion but to be patient with history.

To instead give priority to time puts spaces and material goods into their proper perspective. It allows us to engage in actions that "generate new processes in society and engage other persons and groups," allowing them the time they need to grow and bear fruit in history. All this "without anxiety, but with clear convictions and tenacity."

The Christian horizon of action, after all, is not geographical, but eschatological. The most important location we live within is not a space we may pretend to possess, but a time given us as a gift. This is the time between the *already* of God's beckoning future and the *not yet* of our limited human condition. To be sure, life in this in-between time presents a "constant tension." But recognizing time as greater than space gives us "a first principle for progress in building a people." We can live in that tension between fullness and limitation and "work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results."

As a first principle of people-building, the priority of time over space should also blunt the besetting temptation to put nationalist loyalties above solidarity with other peoples around the globe—to say nothing of the global Christian people living in diaspora amid many nations. Robert George of Princeton University has warned that in the face of secular animosity toward Catholic teachings: "The days of acceptable Christianity are over. The days of comfortable Catholicism are past."

One need not share all of Professor George's alarm or his agenda in every detail to share his presupposition: The demands of Christian faith and Catholic identity are not coterminous with the moral climate and borders of the United States or any other nation-state. As William Cavanaugh and Michael Baxter wrote in these pages ("More Deeply Into the World," 4/21), all Catholics should embrace the *mestizaje* that immigrant Latino Catholics model as they contribute to their land of residence while maintaining an identity that crosses its borders.

2. *"Unity prevails over conflict."* In introducing his four principles, Pope Francis reiterates the teaching of the Second Vatican Council that peace is not merely the absence of violence or warfare. As the pope moves to his second principle, the implication is this: Conflict can in fact be a positive "link in the chain of a new process" of people-building, but only if it is "faced" rather than "ignored or concealed." Facing conflict frankly, with a willingness to work for resolution "head on," in fact makes it "possible to build communion amid disagreement."

Such honest confrontation opens a "third way" between callous evasion of conflictual realities and resentful entrapment within conflicts. But to engage in conflict nonviolently requires a living hope that underneath our conflicts lies a more profound unity that allows us to build friendship in society and act in solidarity.

Surely such practices and hope must take shape within the church's own communion if it is to be a "sign and instrument of peace in and for the world." Writing in these pages, my colleague Massimo Faggioli called for rebooting Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's Catholic Common Ground Initiative in order to facilitate dialogue and consensus-building across all levels of the U.S. church ("A View From Abroad," 2/24). Widely practiced, the value of such a project would come not just from

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CATHOLIC PEACE NETWORK

Saint Mary's University of Minnesota
announces
the presentation of the

Signum Fidei Award

Álvaro Lionel Ramazzini

Bishop of Huehuetenango, Guatemala

The *Signum Fidei Award* commemorates "Servant of God" Brother James Miller, FSC, an alumnus of Saint Mary's University of Minnesota who was shot and killed in 1982 for his defense of the indigenous youngsters he served in Guatemala. He is fondly remembered for his heroic contribution to humanity as a Christian educator, apostle to the poor and underprivileged, and advocate for justice and solidarity.

With Saint Mary's *Signum Fidei Award*, the university recognizes an individual, group, or organization for extraordinary service to the vulnerable and marginalized members of society. It also recognizes and honors work that promotes human solidarity.

The award's name, *Signum Fidei* or *sign of faith*, is taken from the great seal of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools; and it is to this international educational network that Saint Mary's University of Minnesota belongs.

For more information, please contact:
OFFICE FOR MISSION
SAINT MARY'S UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
700 TERRACE HEIGHTS #52
WINONA, MN 55987-1399 USA

SMUMN.EDU/MISSIONOFFICE

inviting Catholics to transcend their own culture wars. The very effort would mean that Catholics across thousands of parishes would receive training in the same skills of conflict transformation that the Catholic Peacebuilding Network has been developing around the world.

3. *"Realities are more important than ideas."* Coming from Latin America, Pope Francis obviously knows the cultural self-recognition that Cervantes captured in the figure of Don Quixote. In his flights of idealism, Quixote needed the realistic Sancho Panza as a companion. Long before Jorge Bergoglio became Pope Francis, he undoubtedly knew many Latin American intellectuals advocating political ideologies who needed a dose of realism.

Pope Francis' third peace-building principle thus speaks to both pastoral practice and politics. In the context of peace-building, that carries additional lessons. Whether coming from reformers or fundamentalists, he insists, ideas that are "detached from realities" and "dwell in the realm of words alone, of images and rhetoric" are "dangerous."

Surely this is why peace-building for him must first of all be about people-building. One of Mahatma Gandhi's most famous aphorisms, we might recall, was to "be the change you wish to see in the world." Likewise, Francis insists, Christian peace-building must be incarnate.

What we offer to the world, therefore, cannot be mere policy proposals. It must be embodied in the life of the people called church. Learning to talk constructively in our parishes about effective responses to poverty, what will really discourage abortions, how to welcome immigrants, when to resist unjust wars and, for that matter, how to negotiate our disputes over liturgical matters—all contribute to world peace as surely as Vatican diplomacy.

4. *"The whole is greater than the part."* Pope Francis now turns to the "innate tension" that "exists between globalization and localization." We should neither allow the glitter of global culture to seduce us nor encase local cultures unchangeably in museums of folklore. Our challenge is to broaden our horizons even while putting deep roots down into our native places. Again, this suggests that to work for strong families, vibrant but hospitable neighborhoods and racial justice in our cities and regions is as crucial to peace- and people-building as policymaking in national capitals or mediation in war zones.

Here, then, is where Pope Francis presents his many-faced "polyhedron" as a model of global reconciled unity. The Gospel certainly embraces all people universally. But it does so through creative inculturation that sustains the cultural genius of every people and leaves no lost sheep behind. "Pastoral and political activity alike seek to gather in this polyhedron the best of each" (No. 236).

A Church for All People

As the first pope from the Global South, Pope Francis has personally experienced the globalizing forces that buffet the peoples of the world. Amid the cultural corrosions and economic exploitations that modern life accelerates, Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio learned that we should not take people-hood itself for granted. But if it is the vocation of the church as a whole to be a people-for-all-peoples, the church can build itself up as a people only through the diverse vocations of all the faithful.

Entities like the Catholic Peacebuilding Network—together with the academic peace studies departments, peace-building agencies and episcopal social justice offices it brings together around the globe—represent growing expertise. The ecumenical Just Peacemaking Initiative, led by the late Glen Stassen, has documented proven peace-building strategies. Knowing what to do for peace is less and less of a problem. What we lack are people practiced in the skills and virtues of peace-building.

Doing requires doers, after all. Peacebuilding requires peace-builders. Peacebuilders require formation through participation in a people of peace. The Methodist theologian Stanley Hauerwas is famous for insisting that the church does not have a social ethic; the church is a social ethic. Likewise: the Catholic Church cannot be content to have Catholic social teaching; it must constitute Catholic social teaching in its very life together, church-wide and parish-deep, as a people of peace.

Rome in Review

What an extraordinary year this has been for the Catholic Church under the leadership of Pope Francis, who continues to inspire and reach the hearts of people far beyond its boundaries!

In this last Vatican Dispatch of the year, I will briefly review what the Argentine pope has done to change the church in 2014 and how he has reached out to the peripheries and opened new frontiers.

During 2014 Francis opened new processes and sought to introduce changes in the church in several ways. He began with the process for the selection of bishops. On Feb. 27 he visited the Congregation of Bishops and spelled out the criteria to be used in the selection of bishops, in addition to those he gave the nuncios in June 2013. He is monitoring this process carefully, and sources say he personally intervened in the appointment of bishops to a number of major sees, including Madrid and Chicago.

In February he held his first consistory to create new cardinals and, breaking with tradition, he sought to correct the imbalance that favored Europe (especially Italy) and the United States in the College of Cardinals and to give more representation to other parts of the world, especially the peripheries.

Throughout the year, assisted by his council of cardinal advisers, he made considerable progress toward reform of the Roman Curia. He created a Secretariat for the Economy and appointed Cardinal George Pell to head the new structure; he gave him extensive powers to ensure all Vatican offices will operate with an agreed program and budget starting on Jan. 1.

By December 2014, his cardinal advisers were drafting the plan for curial reform. One part envisages the creation of two new congregations, for the laity and for charity/justice, and incorporating several existing councils. Another part involves restructuring the Secretariat of State and bringing all Vatican tribunals and the Council for Interpretation of Legislative Texts under one umbrella. A papal commission headed by Lord Patten is working on a project to incorporate the Vatican's media operations into one new Communications Secretariat. The reform plan should be completed by mid-2015.

Pope Francis has opened new frontiers.

Like other popes before him, Francis is appointing men of his own choosing to key positions in the Roman Curia. In 2014 he appointed Cardinal Robert Sarah of Guinea as prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship, Archbishop Paul Gallagher of Britain as secretary for relations with states and Archbishop Dominique Mamberti of Morocco to head the Vatican's top tribunal (the Segnatura Apostolica).

Pope Francis made five foreign trips in 2014: to the Holy Land (Jordan, Palestine, Israel), Korea, Albania, the European Parliament and Council of Europe in Strasbourg, and to Turkey. Four are Muslim-majority states, and in visiting them he sought to strengthen Christian-Muslim relations, advocated greater creativity in interreligious dialogue and encouraged working together for peace in the Middle East.

During his Holy Land visit, he sought to revitalize the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and convened a prayer for peace in the Vatican with the Palestinian and Israeli presidents. In the divided Korean peninsula, he encouraged a new effort for peace. And in his meetings with Patriarch Bartholomew, he made every effort to overcome the Catholic-Orthodox divide.

During 2014 Francis also led a major international effort to combat human trafficking, prostitution and slave labor. This reached a high point on Dec. 2, when the leaders of the Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican churches joined faith leaders from Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism to sign a common declaration to work for the eradication of modern slavery by 2020.

There is little doubt, however, that the event that has most affected the Catholic Church and continues to influence it across the globe has been the two-stage Synod on the Family that Pope Francis convened. The synod, under his leadership, is enjoying a freedom hitherto not experienced and is shaking up the church in a way that has not happened since the Second Vatican Council. We are likely to see more of the "Francis effect" in this and other fields in 2015. **GERARD O'CONNELL**

GERARD O'CONNELL *is* ***America****'s Rome correspondent.* ***America****'s Vatican coverage is sponsored in part by the Jesuit communities of the United States. Twitter: @gerryorome.*

DIGITAL HIGHLIGHTS

America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC REVIEW

Join the conversation.

ADVENT

Take an Advent journey with Pope Francis featuring quotes from the daily readings and questions for reflection.

THE LIVING WORD

The full text of Bishop N. T. Wright's talk on "Paul and the Powerful Word: Gospel, Community, Mission"

FILM

John P. McCarthy reviews "The Imitation Game," and John Anderson discusses Christmas films on "America This Week."

WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT:

"We must learn to be a part of, not apart from, God's gift of creation." — Daniel Misleh on *Renew This World*

FROM OUR BLOGS

The Beam in Our Own Eye: Pope Francis Speaks to Europe, and to the Church, Francis X. Clooney

Disabled Seniors Could Be a Powerful Voting Bloc
Robert David Sullivan

Blessed are the Pure of Heart: The Ellacuría Tapes
Michael J. Rogers, S.J.

WHAT YOU ARE READING

The Loneliest Choice
Rev. Rhonda Mawhood Lee

The Tyranny of Talk, The Editors

The Preferential Option for Life
Mark P. Shea

Working for Peace in Ferguson As Violence Erupts Anew, Judith Valente

Faith and Science: 15 Questions for Dr. Stephen Barr, Sean Salai, S.J.

America THIS WEEK SiriusXM SATELLITE RADIO
Wednesdays at 1 p.m. on The Catholic Channel 129

Follow us @americamag | Links to these stories can be found at www.americamagazine.org/webfeatures.

Faith Amid Flowers

Finding grace and new growth at Christmas

BY B. G. KELLEY

I am the son of a florist, so I was reared to accept that there are no tin flowers. And even the least of them are like rainbows or sunsets: worthwhile natural deities. I worked side-by-side with my dad for 25 of the 50 years he spent in his tiny flower shop in a tiny Philadelphia neighborhood called Paradise. When my pop was in his shop taking care of his customers, he was truly in paradise. He taught me that flowers speak to the verities of the heart and soul: honor, truth, love, prayer. For my entire life I have embraced the power of flowers, and they have helped guide me through both good and challenging times.

One Christmastide I was delivering poinsettias in my pop's Ford panel truck when I noticed this girl waiting at a bus stop on Roosevelt Boulevard in the Northeast neighborhood of Philadelphia.

We had met as students on the campus of Temple University, had even gone out several times. She was a rare beauty, statuesque with long dark hair falling over her shoulders, and deep, dark brown eyes that lit up like polished pinewood. But we were polar opposites. She spent most of her time in the library studying French literature; I spent most of my time in the gym playing basketball. I was the starting point guard for Temple. We were as different as the Louvre and Madison Square Garden. I moved on.

I stopped the Ford panel, rolled down the passenger-side window and shouted, "Need a lift?"

After recognizing me, she said, "Sure," and hopped in.

"Are you still playing basketball?" she asked, before noticing the cache of poinsettias in the back of the truck. "I love poinsettias," she said. "Do you have any extras? I'll buy one."

"Yes, I'm still playing basketball," I replied. "And no there aren't any extra poinsettias."

After dropping her off at her house, I returned to my pop's shop, picked out a rich, rose-pink poinsettia and hung a "sold" sign on it. On the card, I wrote a poem. The next day when I was again delivering poinsettias in the Northeast area, I stopped at her house. I knocked on the door, and she opened it. Awkwardly, I said, "These are for you. Maybe we can get together."

"Maybe we can," she said. "Call me."

I did, and several days after Christmas we got together. She suggested we go for a walk. We stopped at a playground near her house. "Let's shoot some hoops," she said. (The way to my heart wasn't through food but basketball.) And so we played a one-on-one game of basketball.

I won. I married her.

And for the 43 years we have been married, I have given her a poinsettia and a poem every Christmas.

Spirituality in Flowers

In difficult times, when I need a source of strength to fill whatever holes within me need filling, I can call on those attributes of flowers: renewal, inspiration, peace—and spirituality. "Strike the rock, and the water will flow from it for the people to drink." It is the same with flowers for me.

Four days before Christmas, in 1984, my pop the florist summoned me to the hospital where he was a patient. Looking me square in the eyes from his hospital bed, with that distinctly Irish Kennedyesque mug, a shell of a man from the once strapping football player he had been—muscular and sinewy, fast as a cheetah—he said, "Billy, make sure there are a lot of flowers at the

ART: TIM LUECKE

B. G. KELLEY *is the author of* The World I Feel, *a book of poetry, and was a writer for the television film "Final Shot: The Hank Gathers Story" (1992). He is a regular contributor to The Philadelphia Inquirer.*

viewing." He died the next day.

Why wouldn't he want plenty of flowers present at his passing? He was certain that flowers played a spiritual role in death, bringing a symbolic presence and meaning. Flowers bloom beyond tears, fears and no next years, symbolizing that death is not separation but transformation, not termination but transcendence. My pop forever preached that flowers help us to view death with the promise that life does not flicker out for good.

That is because he saw so often the comfort that his flowers brought to families and friends of loved ones who had died. Even science has now begun to take notice of the effects of flowers. A recent Rutgers University study revealed that in anxious, uncertain times, like death, flowers are a blissful and spiritual necessity. But then again, my pop didn't need some scientific study to tell him that. He experienced it for 50 years in that tiny flower shop in Paradise.

So many times I heard people say to him, "Thank you, the flowers meant so much to us. They were a source of strength, peace and, most of all, faith."

My father was buried on Christmas Eve. On the day of his viewing I made sure that the request he asked of me that night in the hospital was honored. There was a bounty of flowers circling his casket like a necklace. I arranged them. I am blessed with a usable past.

A huge spray of bulbous, white chrysanthemums spread the length of the casket; baskets of white gladioli, shooting out like spires, stood at the head and foot of the casket; a rosary made of red roses lay clutched in his hands, and 25 to 30 other baskets and sprays, one after another, framed the funeral parlor.

After everyone had gone, alone in the silence of the funeral parlor, I looked at my pop and all the flowers encircling him. They reminded me of that triumphant connection: Flowers were the other side of the silence, drawing life out of death.

Has Natural Law Died?

The recent Synod on the Family had its surface controversies: the admission of the divorced and remarried to the sacraments and the pastoral care of homosexuals. It also had its background theoretical controversies. The Vatican's Humanum conference in November probed one of them: the complementarity of the sexes. Another controversy concerns the value of natural-law ethics. An ancient mainstay of Catholic moral argument, natural law suddenly appears consigned to ecclesiastical limbo.

The documentary history of the extraordinary synod tells the tale of natural law's eclipse. The 2013 Vatican questionnaire preceding the synod asked, "What place does the idea of the natural law have in the cultural areas of society: in institutions, education, academic circles and among the people at large?"

Early in 2014, the German bishops, like many other national episcopates, replied negatively: "Very few people are familiar with the term 'natural law.' It has virtually no role to play at the institutional and educational level or in everyday culture." Preparing the synod debate, the working document (*instrumentum laboris*) issued by the Vatican in spring 2014 evinces a similar skepticism: "The concept of natural law today turns out to be, in different cultural contexts, highly problematic, if not completely incomprehensible." When it survives at all, the appeal to "nature" is distorted into an appeal to personal preference (my nature), to cultural prejudice (what the majority thinks) or to biology (what animals do). Given this impoverished concept of natural law, the working document can only "request that more emphasis be placed on the role of the word of God as a privileged instrument in the conception of married life and the family, and recommend greater reference to the Bible, its language and its narratives." This amounts to a tacit replacement of natural-law ethics by a moral argumentation based uniquely on biblical narrative. In the synod's closing report (*relatio post disceptationem*), the reference to natural law has disappeared.

> Natural-law ethics is abandoned at the church's peril.

The problems concerning natural law detected by the synod are real enough. The very term has become confusing. In a recent ethics examination, one student defined natural law as the law of gravity. Another identified it as evolution's random selection. A popular textbook claims that natural-law ethics condemns anything artificial. According to the author, natural law considers Diet Pepsi immoral. (The status of un-diet Pepsi remains unclear.) Clearly, such distorted concepts are far from an accurate grasp of natural law, which resides in human nature and manifests itself in moral inclinations to protect the basic goods of human nature, essential to the quest for authentic happiness.

Despite its confused semantics, natural-law ethics is abandoned at the church's peril. The proposed substitutes are problematic. Recasting natural-law arguments in terms of human rights cannot capture natural law's teleological argument as to why an action is right or wrong in terms of its end. In an age of subjectivism, rights themselves easily become subsets of self-indulgence.

The effort to substitute biblical narrative for natural-law principles suffers a similar limitation. Moral argument based uniquely on the sources of revelation easily becomes a sectarian ghetto. Only those who share the church's theological presuppositions could accept it. Genocide is wrong not because majority public opinion or Western democracy condemns it. It is not only because the Bible or the church rejects it. It has something to do with human nature, human dignity and the basic human good of life itself. It springs from the nagging impulse that we should not treat human beings this way just because they are human beings.

The current impasse in the church over natural law is paradoxical. Although we have become agnostic over the value of natural law, we incessantly use natural-law arguments in our moral discourse. Pope Francis' opening speech to the recent Humanum conference is illustrative. He makes no explicit reference to natural law but defends "the union of man and woman in marriage as a unique, natural, fundamental and beautiful good for persons, communities, and whole societies." Despite its cultural variations, human nature endures. The church funeral for natural law is premature. **JOHN J. CONLEY**

JOHN J. CONLEY, S.J., *holds the Knott Chair in Philosophy and Theology at Loyola University Maryland in Baltimore, Md.*

FILM | JOHN ANDERSON

HOPEFUL WANDERERS

The spiritual journeys in 'Wild' and 'Exodus'

While Jesus spent 40 days and nights in the wilderness, Reese Witherspoon spends about three months there in **Wild** as the self-flagellating author Cheryl Strayed, albeit with a nylon tent, gas stove, water-purification tablets, James Michener paperbacks and a paralyzing aversion to serpents. Mortification of the flesh is one thing. Cold/hunger/boredom is quite another.

Which is not to suggest, heaven forfend, that "Wild," Jean-Marc Vallée's ingeniously directed adaptation of Strayed's bestselling memoir, is less than an engrossing, moving and/or well-structured movie, made in a manner that evokes every ounce of sympathy for its heroine in her passion and her thirst for absolution. Of course, the all-knowing Jesus may have more readily handled the gas stove that utterly baffles Strayed, along with every other piece of equipment she hauls in her Witherspoon-sized backpack. Who, exactly, embarks on an 1,100-mile hike along the Pacific Crest Trail without having put up the tent at least once? It does dilute some of the affection we generally feel toward Ms. Witherspoon, who does not give a fully realized performance as much as she puts an adorable face on a story of self-abasement and, ultimately, self-forgiveness.

SHE THIRSTS. Reese Witherspoon in "Wild"

PHOTO: FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES

But is it wrong to hold Strayed's lack of respect for the elements against her? Yes, in the sense that in a Christ-inspired salvation tale, which "Wild" quite definitely is, the sufferer should not welcome the suffering, perhaps, but at least accept it—not throw her ill-fitting boots down a mountain or silently curse the gas stove. Strayed, who in her former life was addicted to drugs, sex and general misbehavior, embarks on her trek the way spiritual seekers often do, at least in fiction, seeking a baptism by fire (so to speak) that will serve as a catalyst toward spiritual enlightenment, something for which all the personal crises serve as prelude. She does not take a cell phone, which would have been tough anyway 20 years ago, when she made the trip. On the other hand, she does not exactly throw herself, à la St. Benedict, naked into the thornbush.

But if the metaphorical counterpart to Strayed is Jesus and his suffering, the precursor to Jesus was Moses, who prefigured Christ's time on earth and served his own 40-day stint in the desert—to be echoed in that 40-year journey out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, all of which are portrayed with the help of

PHOTO: TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX

INTO THE BREACH. Christian Bale leads the charge as Moses in "Exodus: Gods and Kings."

wrath-of-God special effects by director Ridley Scott in **Exodus: Gods and Kings.** An epic of nostalgic excess, this film stars Christian Bale, Joel Edgerton, Hiam Abbass, John Turturro, Goldshifteh Farahani, Sigourney Weaver and Ghassan Massoud—the kind of international cast one puts together these days in hopes of international gold. In terms of pure screen time, it will provide global audiences their money's worth.

Dramatically speaking, one needs to separate the message of God from the message of mammon in "Exodus," even if, like "Wild," its underlying theme is redemption through suffering. To say that Scott's epic is the aesthetic antithesis of "Wild" would be stating the fairly obvious. Vallée, through the lens of his fellow Quebecer, the cinematographer Yves Bélanger, presents a world joyous in its nature and largely unspoiled in its glory, unadorned and, to a large degree, unforgiving.

"Exodus" is executed in fabulous, state-of-the-art 3D computer graphics and tells, with reasonable fidelity and sometimes unreasonable overkill, the story of Moses (Bale), his life as a royal ward in Memphis, the revelation of his Jewishness, his break with the Pharaoh (Edgerton), the various plagues—recreated with sometimes disgusting exactitude—and the Exodus itself, replete with a Red Sea sporting tidal waves. It is Hollywood at its most gratuitously, technologically lavish, although in the cause of telling a divinely inspired story.

Despite their stylistic differences, the two films share a kinship of faith. Moses believes undaunted in the God who speaks to him through (spoiler alert) a burning bush, the wonders of the natural world and, yes, a little boy named Malak (Isaac Andrews), whose steely look and intemperate use of toads and boils make him an intriguing and perhaps even convincing stand-in for the Almighty—one who wreaks havoc on Egypt and finally frees the Jews from the yoke of the idol builders.

For her part, Strayed has a largely unarticulated belief that the unspoiled world of the Pacific Crest Trail will restore balance to her soul. That she exhibits a streak of stupidity regarding some elementary truths about the elements makes her less winning than she might have been, but her blind belief in her mission is ultimately inspiring.

Likewise—as has been the case for several millennia—the story of Moses and his leading of the Jews on a 40-year walk around sun-baked Sinai, all the while wondering why God has forsaken them. "Exodus" is entertainment, make no mistake: There are romances, action and scenery chewing, although Bale is his reliably brilliant self, making Moses a believable man as well as a believable prophet. It will intrigue movie fans to see how he approaches a role most identified with an actor and movie unfamiliar with understatement, namely Charlton Heston in "The Ten Commandments" (which these days would likely be titled "The 3D Ten Commandments!"). But Scott—as is the wont of directors who have lived, worked and learned through several decades of movies which, to be taken seriously, have had to take their subjects seriously and not burden them with bombast—strives, between the parting waters and buzzing locusts, to make Moses as plausible as he might have been to the Hebrew ancients. In his turmoil and pain he may not be a reasonable man. But he is a rational dreamer.

The same is true, in her own way, of Cheryl Strayed in "Wild." Vallée does the strategic thing, eschewing a chrono-

logical retelling of Strayed's story and introducing her at the start of her grueling trek—so that, narratively speaking, her penance precedes her sins, and our sympathy precedes the revelations of her bad character. We see her transgressions only in flashbacks of naked flesh and intravenous injections, multiple partners and a saintly ex-husband, Paul (Thomas Sadoski), who later will forward batteries and food to Cheryl at the various ranger stations on her route, which arrive like manna from Heaven (something left out of "Exodus," by the way, which otherwise leaves out very little).

Aptly, the scale of the stories befits their themes: "Exodus: Gods and Kings" is about freeing a nation from its oppressor. "Wild" is about a woman who has to travel 1,100 miles to realize the mother she mourns (Laura Dern, in yet another fine performance) had it right all the time: Despite having no money, no advantages and an abusive spouse, her mother reveled joyously in her children and in life itself. While Moses never got to enter the Promised Land, Cheryl Strayed lived next to it all along.

JOHN ANDERSON *is a film critic for The Wall Street Journal, Indiewire and Newsday and a regular contributor to the Arts & Leisure section of The New York Times.*

BOOKS | NICHOLAS P. CAFARDI

A 'CATHOLIC' JUSTICE?

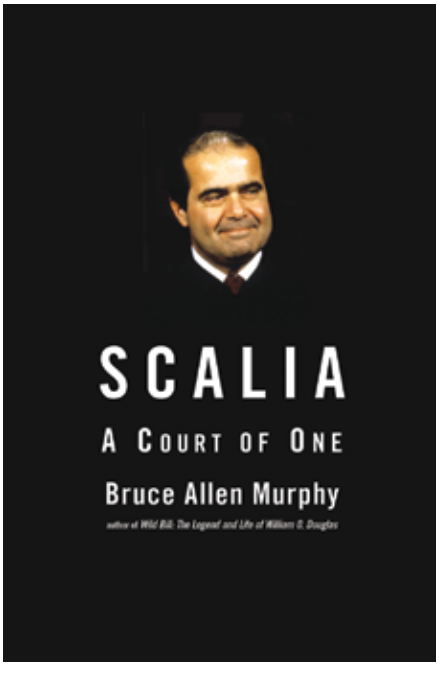
SCALIA
A Court of One

By Bruce Allen Murphy
Simon & Schuster. 656p $35

Antonin Scalia did not grow up the son of typical Italian immigrants. Unlike most of us, whose fathers were brick-layers and masons, carpenters, steel-workers and coal-miners, his father was a university professor. As Scalia has said, he was not the poor son of immigrants who had to lift themselves up by their bootstraps.

He attended Xavier High School in Manhattan, a Jesuit school, and from there he went on to Georgetown, the nation's pre-eminent Jesuit university, and then Harvard Law School. He caught the debating bug at Xavier and honed it well at Georgetown and Harvard. He has used those skills expertly as an appellate judge, not just in his questioning of counsel during oral arguments, but also in judicial conferences after oral argument and in his written opinions, which often skewer what Scalia sees as the faulty reasoning of those who disagree with him.

The subtitle of Bruce Allen Murphy's extensively researched biography, *Scalia: A Court of One*, is indicative of what would appear to be Scalia's tragic flaw—his inability to let



go of his side of an issue to the point of alienating even those who are in partial, if not total, agreement with him. Murphy's book recounts numerous Supreme Court cases where Scalia's biting opinions attack even those justices on his own conservative side of the judicial spectrum for not seeing things exactly his way. When he was Chief Justice, William Rehnquist had to write Scalia about the bitterness of one of his draft opinions, dissenting from an opinion written by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. "Nino," Chief Justice Rehnquist wrote, "you are pissing off Sandra again. Stop it."

Murphy spends a good bit of his biography pondering how Scalia's Catholicism has affected his judicial decisions and his judicial philosophy. I must admit that I feel a bit queasy about these exercises because of their easy potential for Catholic-bashing. One of Murphy's chapter headings is "Opus Scotus," a pun on "Opus Dei," the controversial Catholic organization, replacing "Dei" or "of God" ("Opus Dei" means "The Work of God") with the initials for the Supreme Court of the United States, "Scotus." While there may be a potential value in this exercise, I found it troubling reading. Do we evaluate the Jewish justices on the Court for how their faith has affected their judicial philosophy and opinions? And as for evaluating how any Protestant justices on the court are affected by their faith, we need to recall that for the first time in its long history, there are no Protestants on the nation's highest court.

Murphy does not claim that Scalia is a member of Opus Dei, but he does see a clear connection between Scalia's conservative version of Catholicism and his judicial philosophy of originalism. Originalism is Scalia's announced yardstick for deciding whether a law is constitutional or not. Scalia holds that the original meaning that would have been given to the words of the Constitution or its amendments by the persons living when those terms were adopted controls the meaning of the words. (In the oral arguments on

a case concerning whether the First Amendment prohibited a California law that outlawed the sale of unusually violent video games to minors, Scalia's conservative colleague on the court, Justice Samuel Alito, joked that what Justice Scalia really wanted to know was what James Madison thought about video games.) But Murphy ponders whether Scalia's version of Catholicism, which Murphy refers to as "pre-Vatican II" and his originalism theory of constitutional interpretation are not "so parallel in their approach that Scalia could not help but realize that by using his originalism theory he could accomplish as a judge all that his religion commanded without ever having to acknowledge using his faith in doing so."

Murphy's analysis clearly implies that Scalia's well-known opposition to Roe v. Wade—because nothing in the constitution mentions a right to an abortion, which is Scalia's originalism analysis—is really based on his Catholic faith's abhorrence of abortion. That is quite some charge, and I wonder if it would be made about a judge of any other faith. Murphy also writes about the "possible link between the existing Catholic majority on the Court and the reversal of the [partial birth] abortion decision in the Gonzales v. Carhart case." Unfortunately Murphy is not alone in this speculation, citing as he does a number of national journalists and bloggers who expressed similar thoughts. Instead of blaming the majority's Catholic faith, might not the reason for Gonzales lie in the fact that pulling a child part way out of its mother's womb in order to end its life is something that no civilized society can accept as a fundamental value worthy of constitutional protection?

Scalia has numerous times had to deny that he functions as a "Catholic" justice. He has said, "There is no such thing as a Catholic judge," just as there is no such thing as "a Catholic way to cook a hamburger." When pressed, he has admitted that only two teachings of his faith affect his judicial work: "Be thou perfect as thy heavenly Father is perfect," and "Thou shalt not lie." Those are hardly uniquely Catholic concepts.

Of course, there is always the possibility that Scalia is being disingenuous, that he says one thing and does another. But, at least from my point of view, his "originalism" decisions are far from four-square with the Catholic faith. As Murphy recounts, Scalia has yet to see a death penalty that he does not believe the Constitution approves of, including executing 15-year-olds. The court's decision in Employment Division v. Smith, which Scalia authored, did more to eviscerate the constitutional rights of churches than any other Supreme Court decision before or since. And on that video games case, where California tried to keep extremely violent video games out of the hands of minors on the quite reasonable proposition that playing games like those taught impressionable kids the acceptability of violence against one's neighbors—you know, those people Christ said to love—Scalia vot-

ed to overturn the law.

Murphy's analysis of the Supreme Court decisions that Scalia has been involved with, apart from his religious speculation, is quite well done. Murphy has a true ability for explaining complex legal issues in a way that is easily accessible to the layperson. This is a doorstop of a book, about a man who has had a phenomenal influence on American law, worthy of a long read, but with a grain of salt when it comes to trying to guess what a justice's religious motivations are in rendering a particular decision.

NICHOLAS P. CAFARDI *is a professor at Duquesne University Law School in Pittsburgh.*

MARK J. DAVIS

MAJORITY RULES

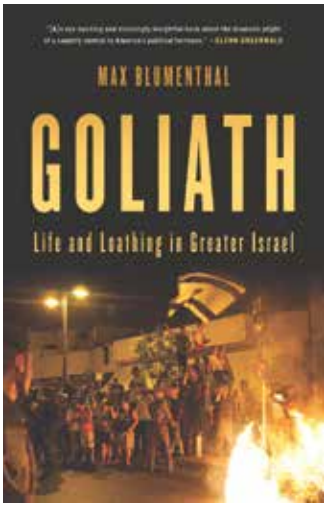
GOLIATH
Life and Loathing In Greater Israel

By Max Blumenthal
Nation Books. 496p $27.99

When Pope Francis, during his recent visit to the Holy Land, spontaneously got out of his jeep in Bethlehem, touched his forehead to the security wall that separates Jews from Arabs and silently prayed for the suffering of Palestinian children, the gesture was widely seen as an expression of his love for humanity. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, however, was reportedly taken aback and asked the pope to visit a memorial to the Jewish victims of terror attacks.

Netanyahu's objection reflected his core belief that only Jewish suffering matters. As Max Blumenthal documents in *Goliath*, this belief has since the 2009 parliamentary elections led to policies that have eroded the rights of Palestinians living in Israel and the occupied territories.

The 2009 elections took place against the backdrop of Operation Cast Lead, Israel's invasion of the Gaza Strip to punish and destroy Hamas for launching rocket attacks on southern Israel. The simultaneous election and military campaigns confirmed the rightward drift of Israeli politics, fueled by the influx of a million Russian Jews who have immigrated to Israel since the 1980s. Ehud Barak, the Labor party leader and defense minister in charge of Cast Lead, hoped that the aggressive military force, which killed over 1,400 Palestinian civilians, would appeal to Israeli voters.



Nonetheless, Labor finished in a disappointing fourth behind Netanyahu's Likud party, the centrist Kadima party and the ultra right-wing Yisrael Beiteinu party, led by the Russian-born Avigdor Lieberman, a former night club bouncer whose campaign slogan was "No loyalty, no citizenship." Lieberman's harsh rhetoric against Palestinians, including calls to expel them from Israel, appealed to his Russian base, which yearned for a Putin-type strongman. As a result of the elections, Netanyahu formed a government in which Lieberman became foreign minister and his party an influential partner of the governing coalition.

Relying on interviews of government and party officials—Knesset members, intellectuals, activists, Jews and Palestinians from every position on the political spectrum—Blumenthal explores how the government's policies have affected the daily lives of Israeli Arabs, Palestinians in the occupied territories and African refugees.

Blumenthal, an investigative reporter and author of a book about the Republican Party, presents many aspects of contemporary Israeli life that have not generally been reported in the American press. Some of the facts, particularly the surge of Israeli hatred of Arabs and African migrants, make for uncomfortable reading. Particularly chilling are Blumenthal's eyewitness accounts of street violence against minority populations fomented by extreme religious youths and gangs affiliated with Yisrael Beteinu. These events are consistent with respected opinion polls that show most Israelis would prefer to be completely separated from their Palestinians neighbors. Thus the security wall, originally intended to be temporary, has become a permanent symbol of the separation that most Israelis prefer.

At the root of this turmoil is the overriding concern of every political party about the demographic threat the rapidly increasing Arab population poses. In 2010 the Israeli government approved legislation originally proposed in 1984 by the outlawed extremist Rabbi Meir Kahane that would deny full citizenship to any immigrant who refuses to sign a loyalty oath recognizing Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people. In 2011 the Knesset enacted a law that permitted towns to reject Palestinian Israelis as residents on the basis of "social suitability." In 2012 Israel's Supreme Court upheld a law that banned West Bank Palestinians from obtaining citizenship if they married Israeli citizens and blocked them from receiving temporary residency. In

Blumenthal's view, these and similar actions reflected the majority Israeli view that preserving the essential Jewish character of the state trumps minority democratic rights.

These actions raise the larger question of whether Israel can exist as both a Jewish and a democratic state. While Blumenthal's method is to present the fruits of his interviews instead of arguments, his selection of facts reflects his belief, expressed in other writings, that the answer is no. In fact, Blumenthal believes, contrary to Zionist orthodoxy, that the creation of Israel was flawed at its inception because it expelled over 700,000 Arabs from their homes during the 1948 War of Independence to create a majority Jewish population and then refused the refugees the right to return. Blumenthal also shows how Netanyahu cynically uses the Holocaust to advance narrowly nationalistic goals while deleting from school textbooks references to the expulsion of Arabs. Despite Israel's dominant military position, Netanyahu constantly evokes the Holocaust to oppose a Palestinian state and remains content with what he calls "the Big Quiet," neither war nor peace but a status quo in which the subservient population is managed.

Thus, Blumenthal disagrees with many critics of Israel, including liberal American Zionists, who believe the 1967 war, when Israel captured the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, was the defining event that compromised the democratic values of the Jewish state. These critics of the occupation, including Peter Beinart, the author of *The Crisis of Zionism*, celebrate the birth of Israel but mourn the loss of democratic values since Israel became an occupier.

While *Goliath* has been largely ignored in the United States, some critics have derided Blumenthal for presenting a one-sided view, but Blumenthal presents interviews with defenders of the current policies. Moreover, Blumenthal's account is a necessary corrective to a vacuous U.S. dialogue in which any criticism of Israel is harshly condemned. Secretary of State John Kerry was recently compelled to state that he misspoke when he predicted that the breakdown of peace talks might lead to apartheid, even though prominent Israelis, like Barak and Ehud Olmert, have for years compared the occupation to apartheid. Unless Americans prefer to believe, like many of Netanyahu's defenders in the United States, that Israel can do no wrong, *Goliath* presents troubling facts that every American should at least consider.

MARK J. DAVIS, *a retired attorney, lives in Santa Fe, N.M.*

JEROME DONNELLY

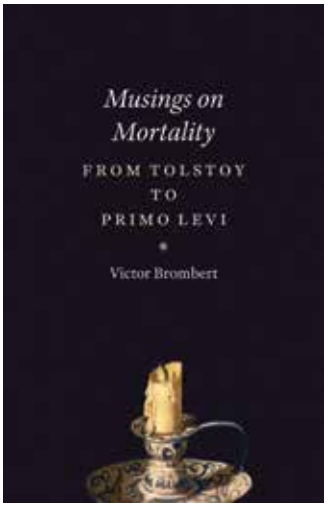
WHERE IS THY STING?

MUSINGS ON MORTALITY
From Tolstoy to Primo Levi

By Victor Brombert
University of Chicago Press. 200p $24

Almost invariably, most of us go through life as if death is something that happens to other people. Yet every day that passes means we have one less day to live. Death is Time's shadow. Gnosticism and acedia assure death's prominence in Modernism.

Victor Brombert, now late in life, examines the place of death in the work of eight modern authors, nearly everywhere displaying a mature critical acumen and moving effortlessly among authors whose works he reads in the original languages. All eight, except for Tolstoy, were born in the 20th century; and except for J. M. Coetzee, all of them are now dead.



No novelist has dealt any more directly with the fact of death than Tolstoy in his classic, *The Death of Ivan Ilych*, where "Tolstoy's unstated cultural references invite us to consider *The Death of Ivan Ilych* as a meditation on mortality." Brombert finds only "ambivalence" in the meaning of Ivan's last moments and concludes that Ivan's "Epiphany" "can stand as an encounter with nothingness or as a metaphor of revelation." He wonders if Ivan's last thought ("Death is finished…it is no more") alludes to John Donne but is unaware that both Donne and Tolstoy are recalling Paul's words, "Death shall be no more: Death shall die." Here and elsewhere, Tolstoy's "cultural references" include the New Testament; Ivan's dying is filled with them.

In Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, death is the victor. Aschenbach, a writer hoping for a rejuvenating rest in Venice, allows his obsessive stalking of a young Polish boy vacationing there with his family to destroy him, as he refuses to leave during a cholera epidemic. Mann's story, as Brombert shows, also portends Europe's heading into an abyss. Aschenbach's erotic fascination has something demonic about it, as Brombert observes, and is part of "the death wish [that] is a recurrent motif in Mann's work." The "self-destructive course of the artist… and that of a diseased society" in the Venetian novella "prefigure themes" developed in other of Mann's major works.

Franz Kafka's work is also suffused with death. His incessant ruminations on "the miseries of the human body" began well before he contracted tuberculosis. In "The Metamorphosis," Gregor Samsa, having become a disgusting bug, refuses food his sister offers him. The "rejection of food" is a "recurrent Kafka motif," Brombert observes. Gregor muses, "I am hungry enough, but not for that kind of food." Perhaps a dim longing for some other kind of food stirred Kafka's taste for Kierkegaard years later. Brombert recalls in that connection Thomas Mann's characterization of Kafka as a "religious humorist." But Kafka could not shake a preoccupation with death and suicide, which he comes to see as liberation.

Gnosticism can be recognized in much of this pessimism, not only in Kafka. Virginia Woolf shares with him a sense of imminent catastrophe in a meaningless world. J. M. Coetzee's "gloomy view of history" recalls Mann's despair over Europe. As a young man, Albert Camus had written, "There is no love of living without the despair of living." For Woolf, the temporary solace found in literature and writing can only temporarily stave off the haunting presence of death ("It will end, it will end").

If Coetzee is resigned to the bleak prospects of empires, wars and human cruelty, Camus eventually sees beyond them. His famous use of Sisyphus, as Brombert says, was only "a starting point." Camus escaped from the spiritual wasteland of his Existentialist confederates. In his Nobel speech, he referred to the "intellectual grand inquisitors who threaten to establish kingdoms of death ('les royaumes de la mort')." Brombert concludes that "ultimately his musings on mortality lead him to a notion of transcendence." (Brombert seems unaware that in the year before he died, Camus requested baptism.)

Essays on George Bassani (*The Garden of the Finzi-Continis*) and Primo Levi foreground the great outpouring of death in the Shoah. Levi had seen much of death in Auschwitz. Yet, like Woolf, Levi had flirted with suicide even as a child. Paradoxically, Auschwitz did not lead to his eventual suicide; Auschwitz postponed it. There, "survival remained the supreme value." Brombert attributes Levi's later self-destructive bent to his conviction that "Death is at the center of nature," adding that "a sense of the sin of existing seems to underlie his recurrent sensation of an immense void." Levi felt "political and cultural despair." Brombert sees him as "a suicidal Job."

JEROME DONNELLY *'s reading of* The Death of Ivan Ilych *appeared in the Spring 2013 issue of LOGOS.*

Children of Hope

HOLY FAMILY (B), DEC. 28, 2014

Readings: Gn 15:1–6, 21:1–3; Ps 105:1–9; Heb 11:8–19; Lk 2:22–40

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him (Lk 2:33)

The truth of the supposedly clichéd phrase "every child is a miracle" hits home for most people when a child is born to them or an adopted child is welcomed into the family. The instantaneous recognition of the child never before seen is a spiritual experience made tactile as a mother takes the newborn in her arms and a father gazes at an infant who evokes on sight the deepest of loves.

We tend to think of childbirth, especially today, as something that is simple and straightforward. It is certainly natural; and for many people, both in conception and at delivery, it poses no problems. Yet, there are many others for whom having a child is a struggle. We have no idea why some couples have no children and other families have one, why some women have miscarried numerous times or had ectopic pregnancies that threaten the lives of mother and child. We should never judge the size of a family, for we have no knowledge of the hidden burdens that many women and men carry. Many of the model families throughout the Bible were overjoyed that God blessed them with one child, a child they had long desired.

The miraculous nature of conception and childbirth is a theme that runs through the Old Testament and is often seen in families that have only one child. Numerous women who were considered "barren" give birth to a child of hope, often when it seemed such hope was out of reach. In this number we count Rebekah, Hannah and the mother of Samson, all blessed with children when it seemed it could never happen. But the pre-eminent example is the first one we see in Genesis: Sarah.

Sarah was too old, as was Abram, to have and raise a child. Genesis tells us she was 90 years old and Abram 100. Abram petitioned God, saying, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." God promises Abram, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." But how could it be? Sarah laughed at the promise of a child given to her after natural hope had vanished.

But God gave them Isaac, a child of promise and a child of hope for Abram, now called Abraham, and Sarah and for the future of a promised nation. The promised Messiah would come from this lineage and be given miraculously to Mary, which reveals another part of the equation: never having engaged in sexual intercourse, she was given a child by God—a child given to this new mother and her husband-to-be, but a child of hope for the whole world.

Yet the stories of the matriarchs, Mary and their unique children indicate to us the miraculous nature of every birth. True, our children will not be patriarchs of a nation, as Isaac was for Israel; and certainly none can be Jesus, the Messiah, the savior, both God and man. But the mothers were real mothers, just like women today, who raise many children, one child, or yearn for a child. And their children were real children, who had to be loved and raised. God chose to work his miracles not in opposition to nature but through the most natural of ways: childbirth.

But every family, whether gifted with many children or none or one, has a role to play in God's dramatic story of salvation and shares in the miraculous gift of hope children represent. Each child has been willed by God to serve a unique purpose.

And it was through the birth of one child that all of us share in the hope of salvation. As Simeon says in Luke's Gospel of the newborn baby boy Jesus, "My eyes have seen your salvation,/ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,/ a light for revelation to the Gentiles/ and glory for your people Israel."

Mary and Joseph were "amazed at what was being said about him," for he was the fulfillment of all hopes. But in the reality of the Holy Family, we see the miraculous nature of every child and every family reflected.

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How does the Holy Family inspire your family in hope?

ART: TAD A. DUNNE

JOHN W. MARTENS *is an associate professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn. Twitter: @BibleJunkies.*

Journey of Hope

EPIPHANY (B), JAN. 4, 2015

Readings: Is 60:1-6, 21:1-3; Ps 72:1-13; Eph 3:2-6; Mt 2:1-12

"Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?" (Mt 2:2)

A summer ago my family set off on a cross-country car trip from Minnesota to Vancouver, B.C., in part to pick up a wooden bench that my great-grandfather had made when my family immigrated to Canada. It was the first thing he built when he arrived. As an old man, he was too old to work in the fields, so he took care of his grandchildren as they played outside and he needed a bench to sit on.

About two hours into our journey, we realized that we had forgotten our passports. We had to turn around and drive back home, which added four hours to our long and looming drive time. It was an unforeseen glitch, and all journeys are full of them. But when there is a purpose to your journey, all the missteps are made worthwhile.

On the porch of my house an old bench sits now, almost 90 years old. It is not much of a bench in some ways. It is a simple bench, built without screws or nails. It is a connection to our family's past, a journey of hope for our future. We drove a long way to bring it home.

According to the Gospel of Matthew, the Magi knew where they were travelling and they knew whom they had come to see, for they asked: "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." The late Raymond E. Brown, S.S., reminds us that beyond the historical realities of their journey are deeper spiritual realities that Matthew's Gospel is driving at, connecting the natural revelation of the pagan world to the revelation of the Jewish Scripture and to the divine manifestation of Jesus himself.

But when we imagine the journey, coming from ancient Persia, Babylon or Arabia, we wonder, what had they experienced to arrive in Bethlehem? How long was a journey of hundreds of miles on camel, donkey or foot? Did they ever think to turn around and just go home? Matthew does not focus on their daunting journey, however, only on their arrival, because they had travelled to discover the source of salvation.

But when they arrived, they were lacking something, which is why they went to Herod. What they lacked was the special revelation given to the Jews, as embodied in Matthew's citation, combined from Mi 5:1 and 2 Sm 5:2: "And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel."

As for the Magi: "When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh." On a journey of hope, the disappointments and struggles dissipate the moment you arrive at your destination.

They would return home warily because they had been "warned in a dream not to return to Herod," but it is not wrong to suspect that they were transformed people when they arrived back home, for they brought home a new light. Compare this to Herod, who had access to the revelation of Scripture but whose only journey was one of despair. Jesus was a threat to Herod's narrowly conceived power; the hope represented by Jesus was something to destroy, not celebrate.

Perhaps the Magi faced questions when they returned about why they travelled so far: Why go to see this child? Why follow that star? It was a journey of hope, not just for them, but for all of humanity. Father Brown went on to say of this journey, "In these Magi Matthew sees an anticipation of Jesus' promise, 'I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven'" (8:11). The Magi, ultimately, are a symbol of the journey we are all on, the true journey, which takes us not far from home, but back home to God. This God took on human form and came to us as an infant child to show us how to journey home.

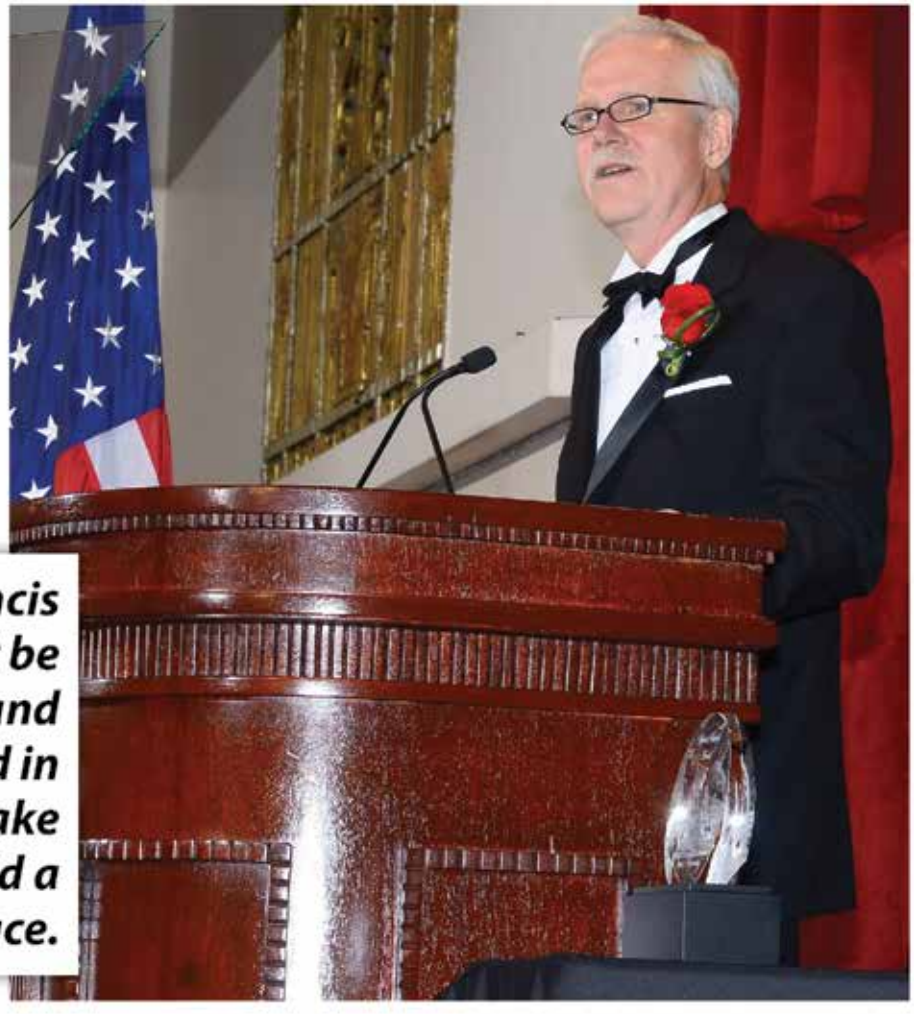
JOHN W. MARTENS

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

How does God coming to live among us help you on your journey?

America (ISSN 0002-7049) is published weekly (except for 13 combined issues: Jan. 6-13, 20-27, April 28-May 5, May 26-June 2, June 9-16, 23-30, July 7-14, 21-28, Aug. 4-11, 18-25, Sept. 1-8, Dec. 8-15, 22-29) by America Press Inc., 106 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019. Periodical postage is paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. Circulation: (800) 627-9533. Subscription: United States, $56 per year; add U.S. $30 postage and GST (#131870719) for Canada; or add U.S. $56 per year for international priority airmail. Postmaster: Send address changes to: America, P.O. Box 293159, Kettering, OH 45429.

ST. JOHN'S
bread&life



Pope Francis said we must be courageous and never timid in order to make the world a better place.

Anthony Butler, Executive Director
St. John's Bread and Life
2014 Spirit of Service Award Honoree

The St. John's University "Spirit of Service Award" acclaims individuals whose vision, accomplishments and good works embody the essence of St. Vincent de Paul and reflect the mission of the University.

St. John's Bread and Life, Brooklyn's largest emergency food provider, located in Bedford-Stuyvesant, has been feeding poor people in Brooklyn and Queens since 1982. Inspired by the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, Bread and Life's mission is to bring food to the poor and accompany them on their journey to wholeness by providing necessary services.

Bread and Life, a nonprofit 501 (c)(3) is the face of Catholic Social Teaching in Bedford-Stuyvesant and in the other poverty-stricken communities that we serve. *Be brave, join us to make the world a better place.*

This year, put Bread and Life on your priority list for end of year giving. Your tax-deductible gift will help us feed thousands of hungry people.

ST. JOHN'S BREAD AND LIFE, 795 LEXINGTON AVENUE #2, BROOKLYN, NY 11221 718-574-0058 WWW.BREADANDLIFE.ORG