

LENT ISSUE

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What Are You Taking Up?

JOHN F. KAVANAUGH • GERALD W. SCHLABACH
MARGARET PFEIL • THOMAS MASSARO

Losing Women
PATRICIA WITTEBERG

I am writing from Rome. I have been here a week and seen no reference to the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, even in the tourist shops attuned to every other observance. In the Vatican bookstore, I discovered splendidly printed versions of the *Missale Romanum* of 1958 and 1962 but not of 2002. It made me wonder, "What does the Vatican Press know that we don't?"

My own invitation to visit Rome from the Graymoor Friars' Centro Pro Unione, an ecumenical center, however, did come with a Vatican II connection. James Puglisi, S.A., the Atonement Friars' superior general, had asked me to speak on developments in justice and peace since Vatican II. As I attended prayer services across central Rome for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, it was clear that the ecumenism initiated by Blessed John XXIII and the council is alive and well among the internationals here in the Eternal City.

The message I brought to the Centro was that through the council the Spirit had made the church a leaven for the world. I am struck by how much confidence church leaders in that time had that the Spirit was at work both in the church and in the world. Ten years after the council, Pope Paul VI could still write: "We live in the church at a privileged moment of the Spirit.

Everywhere people are trying to know him better.... They are gathering about him; they want to let themselves be led by him." Pope Paul understood how much we need the Spirit to overcome the religious inertia that threatens to choke off the Spirit within us.

In the 50 years since the council, Catholics have challenged the powers that be. Polish Catholics like Lech Walesa helped precipitate the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, and Corazon Aquino led the ouster of the Marcos regime in the Philippines. Bishops like Zaire's Laurent Monsengwo and Guatemala's Rodolfo Quesada

Toruño led efforts at national conciliation. Chile's Vicariat of Solidarity pioneered the work of church human rights centers; and in their defense of human rights, bishops like Patriarch Michel Sabbah in the Holy Land and Felipe Ximenes Belo in East Timor served as tribunes of their people.

The coordinated efforts of Catholics round the world helped bring about debt relief for poor nations as part of the Great Jubilee in 2000. The late Angelo D'Agostino, S.J., pioneered the distribution in East Africa of inexpensive anti-retroviral drugs for children afflicted with H.I.V./AIDS, and Catholic migrant agencies have cared for hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons. The Spirit's inspiration is still at work.

While visiting the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, I learned that while plans for the Vatican II anniversary have just begun to be laid, the council has a full agenda, much of it dealing with the environment: water, energy and the Rio Plus 20 global summit on sustainable development. Cardinal Peter Turkson, the council president, also announced a three-day conference in 2013 to mark the 50th anniversary of "Pacem in Terris," the landmark encyclical of John XXIII that launched the church's witness on behalf of human rights.

U.S. Catholics are significant participants in ventures of the Council for Justice and Peace. The Kroc Institute for Peace at the University of Notre Dame is assisting in a global consultation on best practices in peacemaking, and Michael Naughton of the University of Saint Thomas business school is contributing to a project on the formation of business leaders for the common good. Through the work of committed Christians, the Spirit continues to transform the world, much as the fathers of the Second Vatican Council hoped.

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Cover: Students and staff of Sacred Heart School in Wallington, N.J., look on as blessed palms are tossed into a fire in the parking lot last March. Photo: CNS/Octavio Duran

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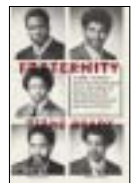
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ON THE WEB

A discussion of the new book *Fraternity* on our podcast, featuring alumni of the **College of the Holy Cross**. Plus, video reflections for Lent and, from the archives, coverage of the opening of **Vatican II**. All at americamagazine.org.



Wheels of Justice

“The mills of the gods grind slowly,” says the old Greek adage, “but they grind exceedingly fine.” There was a time when it seemed dictators and caudillos were exempt from this rule. Justice never caught up with them. In the wake of revolutions, those responsible for mass killings and rights violations were allowed to go free for the sake of political peace. When Communist states in Eastern Europe fell, for example, party strongmen were not brought to justice, only barred from politics in a process called lustration.

The first break in the trend came with the 1998 arrest and trial of the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. Then came the trial of the former Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic, who died before his trial concluded, and the arrests of the Bosnian Serbs Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, who after a long hunt has been extradited to The Hague for trial. In Africa several murderous leaders, most notably Charles Taylor of Liberia, have been tried by regional or international courts. (A final decision in Taylor’s case is still to be rendered.) In Argentina, two former presidents, Jorge Videla and Reynaldo Bignone, have been brought to justice for participation in the torture, murder and disappearance of their fellow citizens. Both were sentenced to life in prison.

Now a Guatemalan judge, Carol Patricia Flores, has charged former President Efraín Ríos Montt with genocide for attacks on indigenous peoples during his country’s 30-year civil war. The Montt indictment demonstrates the reach of international law in ending the legal impunity of tyrannous rulers. Though it will provide scant solace to victims and survivors, the growing record of arrests, trials and convictions should begin to provide a deterrent against despotic policies by other leaders.

Doubt at Davos

Doubt is something we do not associate with the world’s ruling elites. But it was very much in evidence among the titans of business at the recent World Economic Forum in the ski resort of Davos, Switzerland, where many conferees openly questioned the future of capitalism. Not just professors, whose business it is—though too infrequently—to ask hard questions, but chief executive officers and financiers found themselves wondering about the future of free-market economics. The way some businesses, particularly banks and financial services, have been behaving in the years following the world economic crisis has prompted serious self-examination about how capitalism must transform itself to survive. Some participants proposed

that along with profitability, job growth and ecological sustainability must become measures of business success. The excessive emphasis on profit, especially in the financial sector, took some hard hits, and some participants went so far as to suggest that healthy economies must have smaller financial sectors that are more attentive to entrepreneurship, job growth and home ownership.

It was not surprising, then, that the day after the closing of the forum, Sir Philip Hampton, chairman of the Royal Bank of Scotland, returned a £1.4 million bonus after many questioned how a corporation mostly owned by the U.K. government could award a bonus at public expense, after less-than-stellar performance, to an executive who already makes nearly a million pounds a year. As if to put a point on the change, Queen Elizabeth withdrew a knighthood from Fred Goodwin, a former C.E.O. of the bank. The age of excess and irresponsibility is coming to an end. Free-market capitalism will survive, but only in a more agile, responsible, public-spirited form.

Just Posted

When Patrick Gilger, S.J., and his Jesuit confreres saw what the popular Web site Grantland had done for sports and pop culture, they wondered if the same vibrant sensibility could be brought to the world of spirituality. Hence The Jesuit Post. The site (thejesuitpost.org), launched last month, is overseen by Mr. Gilger, a student at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, Calif., and a team of three young Jesuit editors, with a staff of equally young Jesuit bloggers and writers. To date T.J.P. has tackled such eclectic topics as “Dr. Who,” Flannery O’Connor, the new translation of the Mass, “Downton Abbey,” Google, David Foster Wallace and, naturally, Tim Tebow.

Their aim is to reach young adults. “We’ve got to give them a chance; and we have to speak their language,” said Mr. Gilger. “America, Commonweal and U.S. Catholic do a good job covering issues facing the church, but our attention is explicitly focused on young people: how God is at work in their lives, and at work in lives filled with pop culture.” It was perhaps fitting that this new venture began just as another Jesuit publication, Review for Religious, announced that it would suspend publication after 70 fruitful years. Mr. Gilger averred that T.J.P. is not solely for young people; the Gospel, he notes, is attractive to all. But he plans to hand over the site’s management after a few years to Jesuits younger than himself to avoid the pitfalls of 50-somethings writing for youth: “This is about making sure that it’s relevant to what young people are going through, not what I imagine young people are going through.”

Athletes Dying Young

Much of the poignancy of A. E. Housman's poem "To an Athlete Dying Young" lies in the paradox of the tragedy. In classical art the athlete took on god-like dimensions. The "Discobolus" of Myron, for example, suggests not just human perfection but a hint that the discus thrower will live forever. It is the challenge to this illusion of immortality that brings the crowd to silence when the tackled quarterback lies still and is then hustled off the field on a stretcher, or when the heart of the college basketball player suddenly stops in mid-court and he topples to the floor.

Critics have warned against football violence since the 1890s. In 1905, 18 players died on the field. In recent months Americans have been forced to pay more attention to the physical and moral consequences of violent sports, especially given the increased incidence of brain concussions among high school and college football players. Ridge Barden, a 16-year-old defensive tackle playing for John C. Birdleough High School in Phoenix, N.Y., fell to the turf in the third quarter and died within a few hours of a brain bleed. He was the 13th high school player to die on the field since 2005. The boy's father said he still had no objection to the sport: "Ridge loved playing the game, and I know he wouldn't want it to get a bad name."

The problem is even more acute in professional sports, especially football and hockey. In 1955 a New York linebacker told Walter Cronkite, "We try to hurt everybody." In 2010 one reporter tallied the names of 43 National Football League players who suffered concussions. Peter King of *Sports Illustrated*, after witnessing eight brutal "shots" in a weekend, wrote (10/18/10): "Don't tell me this is the culture we want. It might be the culture kids are used to in video games, but the N.F.L. has to draw the line in the sand right here, right now." In mid-January of this year, two New York Giants players targeted San Francisco's Kyle Williams knowing he had previously suffered four concussions.

Society's reaction to injury and death in sports reveals both athletic values and the values of society as a whole. Unfortunately, there is no public groundswell demanding that violent sports be even moderately tamed. Many parents who live vicariously through their sons' football triumphs are aware of the dangers, but they cannot imagine that tragedy could strike their child. Not even better equipment will change the nature of sports that are

built upon violent collisions.

Sometimes the public can be shaken, if only briefly, by a story so egregious that it shocks anyone with a moral sense. The deaths of three hockey "enforcers," at least two by suicide, during the summer of 2011 should be that kind of wake-up call. And the three-part investigative article by John Branch in *The New York Times* (Dec. 4-6, 2011) about the hockey player Derek Boogaard demands a response from all citizens, including religious leaders, who care about human dignity.

Boogaard, 28 years old, 6 feet 7 inches tall and pushing 300 pounds, had a four-year, \$6.5 million contract with the Rangers hockey team not because he could skate or play unusually well but because he could fight. His right fist was gnarled, and he reportedly drank too much and was addicted to a variety of drugs, 15 pills a day, including pain killers prescribed by several doctors. His brain, removed for examination after his death, was found to be so damaged by chronic encephalopathy that if he had lived, he would have become demented by the time he reached middle age. Enforcers, employed by many but not all National Hockey League teams, terrorize the opposition: they start fights and smash the faces of designated opponents as crowds roar approval. Boogaard started his career as an enforcer early. He first broke an opponent's nose at 16, as his coaches and scouts cheered him on. In 2006, playing for the Minnesota Wild, Boogaard deliberately crushed an opponent's face so badly it had to be rebuilt with wire mesh and steel plates.

Today professional hockey has moved beyond the tolerated violence of other sports; it is the only sport that deliberately sanctions fights, by using enforcers. That violates the Fifth Commandment. Professional hockey employs physical force far beyond what is necessary to achieve a legitimate goal and encourages a destructive life-style. The practice corrupts society by teaching the young to hurt others and to resolve conflicts by brute force. The combined greed of the N.H.L., the bloodlust of fans and the complicity of the news media, which exploit the violence for ratings, corrupt the public soul. The effect spills over into other sick behavior—sexual abuse, brawls at games and a pattern of drugs, alcohol and bloodletting. If the leagues will not stop this aggressive behavior, government should step in.



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

What Are the White House and The Bishops Fighting About?

A new Health and Human Services mandate issued under the Affordable Care Act for women's preventive care goes into effect in August 2012. That mandate requires that new employer-sponsored health insurance plans include, without deductibles or co-pays, all F.D.A. approved methods of contraception. Among these are procedures and drugs that are objectionable to Catholic moral teaching.

The H.H.S. has offered a narrow religious exemption that frees religious employers like dioceses and parishes from the mandate. But institutions that are not exempt from the new guidelines because their employees and the people they serve come from different faiths or no faith at all—primarily Catholic colleges and universities and health and social service providers—have until August 2013 to figure out how to adapt their employee benefits to the mandate. Obama administration officials have indicated that they consider dialogue regarding the exemption language over.

The divide between the administration and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in this renewed culture war is deep. They cannot even agree on terms. The so-called morning after drugs, Plan B and ella, are among the prescription options that will be required under the new guidelines. The bishops say they are abortifacients; the F.D.A. and the drug makers say they are not. Both sides are right according to their privileged definitions.

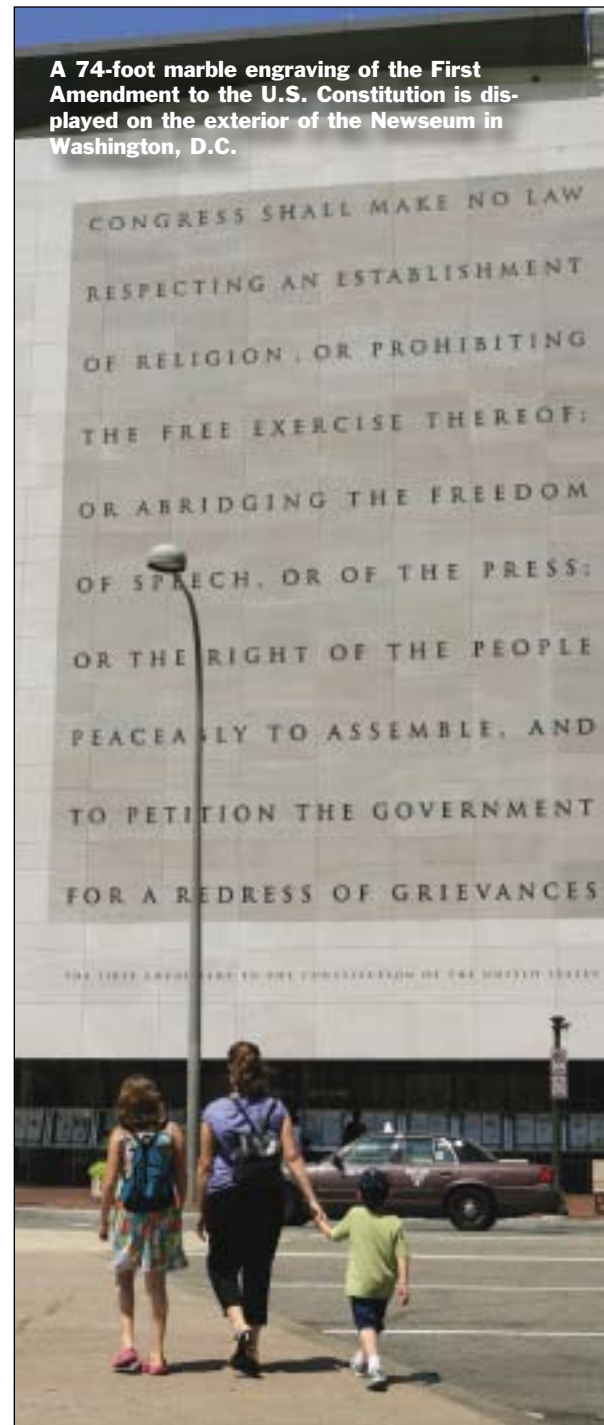
Ella and Plan B work in much the same manner, primarily by delaying ovulation. According to the F.D.A., Plan B may also prevent fertilization. If fertilization does occur, both drugs may prevent a fertilized egg from attaching to the womb. According to the F.D.A., these "morning after" pills cannot be described as abortifacients because no pregnancy occurs. But according to *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, every procedure "whose sole immediate effect is the termination of pregnancy before viability is an abortion, which, in its moral context, includes the interval between concep-

tion and implantation of the embryo."

The dispute also revolves around conflicting interpretations of religious liberty. The president insists that the new guidelines respect the traditional primacy of religious liberty, since individual employees of Catholic institutions remain free to use or not use contraception based on their religious or moral beliefs.

He is supported in that interpretation by the A.C.L.U. "This rule respects religious liberty while preventing religiously affiliated organizations from using religion as an excuse to discriminate and deny services to others," writes Sarah Lipton-Lubet of the A.C.L.U. "Organizations that operate in the public sphere should play by public rules. That's not a 'war' on religion; that's the Constitution."

A 74-foot marble engraving of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is displayed on the exterior of the Newseum in Washington, D.C.



The bishops argue that requiring religious institutions to pay for health care that includes procedures or prescriptions that violate founders' beliefs is a fundamental violation of both institutional and—since all participants in a plan share costs—individu-

al conscience. “The issue,” writes Bishop David A. Zubik of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, “is the right of the church to be able to live its beliefs without contrary beliefs and practices being imposed by departments of the federal government.”

A final major concern of the bishops is the precedent set by the administration’s assumption of a defining authority over religiously affiliated entities simply because they are engaged in providing civic services, like education or health care. Some worry that after “secularization” in this manner by the state, it will not be long before other government mandates will be applied to religious institutions or that in retreat from such mandates, religious entities will be driven from the public sphere altogether.

VATICAN

Creating Cardinals

Pope Benedict XVI will place a three-cornered red biretta on the heads of 21 new cardinals on Feb. 18, a traditional gesture in a ceremony that will differ slightly from previous ceremonies. In early January, the Vatican newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*, reported, “The rite used up to now has been revised and simplified with the approval of the Holy Father,” in part to avoid any impression that becoming a cardinal is a sacrament, like ordination.

At this consistory for the “creation” of cardinals by the pope, red remains the color of the day to remind the new cardinals that they are called to give their lives to God and the church, even to the point of shedding their blood. Tradition and innovation, solemnity and festivity, high honor and a call to

sacrifice are key parts of the ritual. The hushed moment when a churchman kneels before the pope and receives his red hat as a cardinal contrasts sharply with the mood later that same evening when the public is allowed to swarm up the Scala Regia—the royal stairway—and into the Apostolic Palace to meet the new cardinals.

Immediately after the new cardinals are created, all the “princes of the church” are scheduled to vote on the canonization of several new saints, including Blessed Marianne Cope of Molokai and Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha.

This will be the fourth time Pope Benedict has created new cardinals and will bring his total to 84 cardinals, of whom 79 are still alive; 63 of his appointees in the College of Cardinals will be under the age of 80 and eligible to vote in a conclave to elect a new pope.

According to church law, new cardinals must have been ordained at least to the priesthood and should be ordained bishops before entering the College of Cardinals. In recent decades, however, many of the elderly priests named to the college as a sign of esteem and gratitude for their service to the church have requested and received an exemption from episcopal ordination. In keeping with the Jesuits’ promise not to strive for promotion in the church, Karl Josef Becker, S.J., an

83-year-old retired professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, will become a cardinal without first becoming a bishop.

Another small change made to the consistory this year involves timing. The prelates will receive their cardinals’ rings from Pope Benedict during the consistory, rather than at a Mass concelebrated with the pope on Feb. 19. And as is customary, during the



Pope Benedict XVI leads a meeting with cardinals and bishops during an ordinary public consistory at the Vatican on Feb. 21, 2011.

consistory they also will receive their assignments to a “titular church” in Rome, which makes them formally members of the clergy of the Diocese of Rome, as were the church’s first cardinals.

Once the new cardinals are created, the College of Cardinals will have a record-high number of members. The total number of princes of the church will reach 213, surpassing the total of 203 reached with the consistory in 2010. As recently as 2001, the total number of cardinals dipped to 139, just before Pope John Paul II named a record 44 cardinals at once.

Catholic M.D.'s Worry After H.H.S. Mandate

Some Catholics who want to practice medicine in conformity with the church's teachings worry that a new federal regulation requiring health plans to cover contraceptives and sterilization represents a governmental intrusion into health care that could grow. Anne Nolte, M.D., a family physician in New York, said, "If Congress failed to pass an act that provides an exemption for the groups affected by this, and the courts in some incomprehensible way allow [the mandate] to stand, then Catholic health care will have to make a decision to practice civil disobedience." A fourth-year medical student at Tulane University School of Medicine in New Orleans, Sarah Smith made clear during residency interviews that her Catholic convictions prevent her from involvement in abortion, sterilization or contraception. Now she worries that an atmosphere in which she already finds some challenges to her pro-life convictions will further sour. "The one safe environment—Catholic hospitals—is not even going to be safe anymore," she said. Dr. Kim Hardey, of Lafayette, La., believes that some in Washington would like to drive obstetrician-gynecologists like him, who will not perform abortions, out of business. "There are not that many of us...that we'd be too big to go after," he said.

The Young DREAM On

Cardinal Roger Mahony, retired archbishop of Los Angeles and longtime advocate of comprehensive immigration reform, is frustrated with the lack of action from Congress on the issue and hopes that today's young people will bring about a change. "They get it. They're the ones who will make this

NEWS BRIEFS

Hundreds are dead and more than 120,000 have been displaced after **weeks of ethnic violence** between the Murle and Luo Nuer communities in South Sudan's Jonglei State. • Representatives of most of the world's bishops' conferences and 30 religious orders met in Rome on Feb. 6-9 to launch a global initiative to improve efforts to stop clerical sexual abuse and better **protect children** and vulnerable adults. • The **Plowshares activist Bill Bichsel, S.J.**, ended a two-week fast he began in mid-January to protest his transfer to solitary confinement and conditions at the Federal Detention Center near Seattle, Wash. • The Rev. Larry Snyder, President and chief executive officer of Catholic Charities USA, called awarding the agency's Centennial Medal on Feb. 2 to **Cristo Rey Network's founder**, John Foley, S.J., "a tribute to Father John's commitment and dedication to improving the lives of young people in communities that otherwise wouldn't have a chance." • On Jan. 30, Anita Collins and Anita Guzzardi, employees of the New York and Philadelphia archdioceses respectively, were accused of stealing \$1 million each in **decades-long embezzlement schemes**.



Refugees in South Sudan

happen," he told a group of Catholic college and university leaders on Jan. 30 in Washington during the three-day conference of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities. The cardinal lamented the failed effort to pass the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors, or Dream Act, in 2010 that would have helped children of undocumented immigrants work toward legal status and get a college education.

Sarkozy on Secularity

President Nicolas Sarkozy of France rejected calls for secular values to be enshrined in his country's constitution and urged religious leaders to do more to spread their message in the country. "A secular society is one which has

decided to separate churches from the state, so the state doesn't have to account for its choices to churches, and churches don't depend on the state to live and organize—this is secularity, a secular republic," he told religious leaders at a traditional New Year meeting on Jan. 25. "But this doesn't mean churches, respecting the law, are forbidden from speaking. Nor does it mean your words shouldn't go beyond the walls of your places of worship. That would be a strange idea of democracy: Everyone has a right to speak, except you." He said it would be a "strange schizophrenia" to preserve France's religious heritage while insisting religions had "nothing more to say, offer and impart."

From CNS and other sources.

SMALL TOWN SEEKS PARISH PRIEST.



Join America's Navy Chaplain Corps

A small town of 5,500 men and women travel the world on peacekeeping missions, sometimes with no one for spiritual guidance and sacramental opportunities. That is why the Navy needs you. As a member of America's Navy Chaplain Corps, you'll minister to the needs of sailors and share with them the challenges and rewards of Navy life. It's an exciting opportunity for you to see the world, receive excellent benefits, while at the same time, serving both God and country. To learn more about the Navy Chaplain Corps, go to navy.com/chaplain



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Draw Near

Gale force winds are lashing the west coast of Scotland, not for the first time this winter. But this time the storms have brought down the power lines, and we are without light or heat or cooking facilities. The predictions are for a protracted outage.

The scene might appear dismal, but actually it is more like a half-forgotten winter's tale. We have managed to get a log fire burning. On the hearthrug, a large Labrador and a small but determined cat are stretched out in a rare moment of peaceful coexistence. Children, parents and grandparents complete the picture. In the blessed absence of television, computer games or broadband, we talk to one another, share laughter, enjoy one another's company. In the interludes of quiet, I reflect on the power of attraction exerted by a few blazing logs, drawing us all together around the source of flickering firelight and marrow-thawing warmth.

Tonight there is no need to tell recalcitrant children or boisterous pets where they may or may not go. No need for rules. Every creature in the house gathers quite naturally around the center of warmth, light and welcome.

And as I relish this brief dream-time, memories of summer in Australia drift back in the calm of the candlelight. I remember travelling across vast tracts of land, dotted with cattle stations the size of Wales. And I remember being asked how I imagined the cattle could be persuaded to stay

within the bounds of their rightful stations. No chance of fencing in a station that size. So the answer is a water hole. In the presence of a water hole, there is no need to dictate where the cattle may or may not roam. They gravitate quite naturally toward the source of life, the living water. It all comes down to the power of attraction.

The spirit of the Gospel is a spirit of attraction, not coercion. We see this again and again in the life and words of Jesus, who invites us to come to him and rest (Mt 11: 1-8), to drink from the living water (Jn 7:37), to make a journey with him to "come and see" (Jn 1:39). He reminds us that "I know my own and my own know me" (Jn 10:14). This is the knowledge that draws us to the center of attraction, the voice in our hearts that we most deeply desire to follow. There is no need for fences in the world of Jesus of Nazareth, where God's love is a welcoming smile, not a threatening finger. People do not need to be told to follow him; they are powerfully and naturally attracted to his presence.

A wise saying tells us that "God draws, the devil drives." It follows that when our hearts are feeling drawn by the power of divine attraction, there God is at work; but if we are feeling the pressure of coercion, this is not of God. It is not hard to see the difference between human communities that revolve around a center of attraction, where love glows and draws, and those that rely on fences and demarcations to keep the flock within the prescribed boundaries. Where the spirit

of love is the center of attraction, many will find their way to that center, drawn like iron filings to a powerful magnet.

Where the spirit of love and warmth and light flows, people will always be attracted to its source. Where it is blocked by our own determination to be in control and rules and sanctions are the driving force, people will remain distant or walk away.

Those who remain will huddle around the edges, fearfully striving to stay in favor. Expansive loving response will shrink into fearful obedience or disillusioned withdrawal. This should not surprise us.

Like the planets, we are at peace with ourselves and one another

when we are orbiting around the deep center of attraction. God's love, like an all-pervading gravitational pull, draws us to where our hearts long to be, rendering all fences superfluous. And ultimately this is the only place where we are truly sheltered from the storms that rage around us.

As Lent begins, we might take to heart the wisdom of St. Augustine of Hippo: "Love, and do as you will." When our focus is on the heart of God, the rules and fences fade into insignificance. A Maori proverb reflects the same wisdom: "Turn your face to the sun, and the shadows fall behind you." May Lent be an invitation to draw closer to the center of attraction and reconnect to our true place of belonging, in orbit around the source of our being.

The spirit
of the
Gospel is
a spirit
of attraction,
not coercion.

MARGARET SILF lives in Scotland. Her latest books are *Companions of Christ, The Gift of Prayer* and *Compass Points*.

CFCA presenter practices what he preaches

Father James O'Toole, one of the 33 members of the Christian Foundation for Children and Aging weekend presenters team, visits Catholic churches in the U.S. inviting parishioners to answer the Gospel call to serve the poor by sponsoring a child.



Marta, Father O'Toole's sponsored friend in El Salvador, graduated as an administrative computer programmer.

Through the past 11 years, Father O'Toole has helped find sponsors for thousands of children, youth and elderly people enrolled in CFCA's Hope for a Family sponsorship program. The program helps provide basic life necessities such as food, education and health care to families in 22 developing countries. It also empowers them to begin building a path out of poverty through skills training and livelihood initiatives.

"Father O'Toole is an extremely passionate individual," said Tim Deveney, U.S. outreach manager at

CFCA. "He's a great storyteller. He invites and moves people to sponsor."

He also practices what he preaches.

Father O'Toole currently sponsors nine children through CFCA: six in India and three in Guatemala. He sponsored seven others, who have since graduated.

Marta, who is from El Salvador, is the most recent of Father O'Toole's sponsored youth to finish her studies, graduating from college as an administrative computer programmer. She found a full-time job at a local driver's license processing office.

Marta's drive to achieve academic success inspired Father O'Toole to sponsor her. The encouragement he provided through letters twice a year helped Marta persevere.

"He told me that he wanted to sponsor me because he felt I could reach my dream of becoming a professional," Marta said. "I offer him my deepest gratitude for believing in me, for sponsoring me for four years when I needed it most," she said.

When Father O'Toole speaks at parishes, his joy in sponsoring through CFCA is contagious. People respond positively to his message to give children and their families an opportunity to build a path out of poverty.

"I couldn't even put in words what sponsorship means to me," said Father O'Toole, who prays daily for the children he sponsors. "It's a great gift, beyond expression. To know these beautiful people and to know they're in my life, it's a gift from God."



CFCA priests are messengers of hope

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FEWER YOUNG WOMEN ARE PRACTICING
THEIR FAITH: HOW THE CHURCH
CAN WOO THEM BACK

A Lost Generation?

BY PATRICIA WITTBURG

In Western societies like Europe and the United States, women are more religious than men. That is a sociological truism supported by a wealth of survey data. Women are more likely to join churches and to participate in worship services; they are more orthodox in their beliefs generally and more devout in their daily religious practice. Among people raised in a nonreligious family, women are more likely than men to adopt a religion. And women are less likely (12 percent as compared with 19 percent of men) to profess no religion at all.

The Faith Matters Survey, conducted for Harvard University in 2006, found that in comparison with men, U.S. women were more likely to say that they were “very spiritual” and had experienced the presence of God. They were also more likely to read Scripture and to believe in divine guidelines for good and evil. In their summary of this survey, Robert Putnam and David E. Campbell noted, “no matter the specific yardstick, women exhibit a greater commitment to, involvement with and belief in religion” (*American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, Simon and Schuster, 2010).

The greater religiosity of women has a long history within Christianity. More than twice as many women as men, for example, entered their era’s version of religious life: from the fourth-century Middle East (the consecrated virgins as compared with the hermits) to 12th- and 13th-century Europe (the Beguines and cloistered nuns as compared with the friars), to 17th-century France and 19th-century North America. Sometimes, as in 19th-century Ireland and Quebec, the ratio was as high as four to one. Among Protestants, the same gender disparity was observed as early as the 17th century. As the Puritan clergy-

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man Cotton Mather wrote in 1692, "So still there are far more Godly women in the world than there are men, and our Church Communion give us a little demonstration of it." Among historians, sociologists and psychologists who have studied the matter, the greater religious propensity of women is an axiom. It may no longer be true, however, for the youngest generations of Catholic adults.

Young Women Opt Out

In the mid-1990s, surveys began to indicate that, while older Catholic women in the United States were indeed more religious than Catholic men of their age, the Catholic women of Generation X (born between 1962 and 1980) barely equaled their male counterparts in regular Mass attendance and were significantly more likely than the men to profess heterodox opinions on women's ordination, on the sinfulness of homosexual acts and premarital sex and on whether one could be a good Catholic without going to Mass.

More recent data (2002-8) from the annual General Social Survey indicate that the reduced religiosity of American Catholic women extends to the millennial generation (born between 1981 and 1995), as well. Millennial Catholic women are even more disaffected than Gen X women are. This is evident when they are compared with Catholic men in the same age ranges. Both genders of millennial and Gen X Catholics are much less devout and much less orthodox than their elders, and many practice their religion infrequently if at all. But the decline is steeper among women. Millennial Catholic women are slightly more likely than Catholic men their age to say that they never attend Mass (the first generation of American Catholic women for whom this is so), and the women are significantly more likely to hold heterodox positions on whether the pope is infallible and whether homosexual activity is always wrong. None of the millennial Catholic women in the survey expressed complete confidence in churches and religious organizations.

Data on those entering religious life and the priesthood reveal the same disturbing trend. Much has changed since the 19th and early 20th centuries, when between three and four times as many American Catholic women entered religious life as did men (even when those ordained to the diocesan priesthood are added to the male totals). Currently, the proportions are nearly equal or in reverse: 1,396 men were in initial formation in religious institutes nationwide in 2009, compared with 1,206 women. A study of Catholics in vocation formation in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in 2010 found 173 men preparing to be priests, brothers and deacons, but only 30 women preparing to be sisters. And while half the men in religious formation are millennials, only a third of the women are. More than a

third of the women entering religious life today are over 40, whereas fewer than a quarter of the men are that old. Millennial Catholic women are less likely than their male counterparts to say they have ever even considered a religious vocation.

A similar decline has not occurred among young Protestant women. According to the General Social Surveys, millennial Protestant females remain slightly more likely than their male counterparts to attend religious services weekly and less likely to say that they never attend. These women are significantly more likely than the men of their generation—and even more likely than older Protestant women—to say that they have a great deal of confidence in organized religion.

All this is not to suggest that millennial Catholic women are not interested in spiritual things. Both Protestant and Catholic millennial women are significantly more likely than the men their age to consider themselves "very spiritual" persons. The danger is that Catholic millennial women who remain disproportionately interested in spirituality and religious practice will seek an outlet for this interest outside the church in which they grew up.

This is hardly the first time women have become disaffected from the church. Both the Cathars in the 13th century and the Protestant Huguenots in the 17th century attracted more women than men to their ranks. In both instances, Catholic officials, alarmed by the prospect of losing the mothers of the next generation of Catholics to these groups, provided new opportunities for Catholic women. The creation of "apostolic" teaching and nursing orders in the 17th century and later, for example, was a direct result of the Huguenots' appeal to French women. In contrast, while today's Catholic officials have expressed concern about the overall decline of religiosity among "the young," I have not seen evidence of alarm about the disproportionate decline among young women.

Three Conclusions

1. *Some readers may see these trends as further support for the view that the church must allow the ordination of women.* The lack of women's ordination in previous eras did not drive women from the church, however. That is at least partly because new religious orders offered women more opportunities for religious leadership and influence than existed in secular society at the time. Today, by contrast, leadership opportunities in the secular world are much more visible and accessible. Nearly a quarter of senior managers in U.S. firms, for example, are women; women head national government offices and state and city governments; women start thousands of small businesses and lead prestigious universities. As a result, the limited opportunities for women to use their leadership gifts and

talents in the church are less attractive.

In one survey of millennials, 70 percent of college students (male and female) said they would not consider the priesthood or religious life because they had a different career in mind. Even in Asia, which has been a growing source of new entrants to religious communities, vocations to religious life are decreasing.

Some 60 percent of young adult Catholics, male and female, think that the church should be more proactive in empowering lay ministers and should pay them more competitive wages. Meanwhile, the number of formation and training programs for lay ministers in the United States is actually decreasing. Since 80 percent of lay ministers in parishes are female, this decrease represents a reduction, not growth, in the number of opportunities for women to exercise religious leadership and service in the Catholic Church.

If the lack of opportunities for spiritual leadership is a major cause of the disaffection of young Catholic women, then one obvious remedy would be to open up more opportunities for them. Some women already hold leadership positions in diocesan charities and personnel offices and on the local and national review boards that consider ethics and morals charges against clergy and lay staff. These women and their work could be profiled in the various media that reach young Catholic women, and other efforts could be made to attract other women to fill similar roles. More women could be appointed to head secretariats in local dioceses and in the Vatican. Women could be ordained as deaconesses and, with the appropriate change to canon law, could even be appointed cardinals—ideas that have been discussed for decades.

2. *Other readers may see in these statistics evidence that the church needs to proclaim more strongly a “true feminism” to counteract the corrosive effects of secular feminism on the young. “True feminism” was described in Pope John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*. This strategy, however, has not shown much success so far at influencing mainstream Catholic culture. Affecting—let alone changing—a widely held cultural value is difficult and requires considerable time, personnel and financial resources. If the church hopes seriously to promote this idea, it must take more concrete action. Focus groups, surveys and other research would need to be conducted to explore what “feminism” actually means to today’s young people. While some effort has been made to depict alternate, church-centered interpretations of the term, this would have to be greatly expanded. New professional journals, blogs, speakers’ bureaus and institutions would have to be set up with a focus on feminism, and an expanded electronic presence would have to be maintained, for example, on Facebook, Twitter and other venues.*

More theologians and scholars would also have to think deeply and write persuasively about the role of women in



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the church under this alternative vision of feminism. To be effective, their writings would need to be promulgated beyond the narrow circle of conservative Catholics who currently read them. And more researchers, media directors, authors, Web gurus and theologians ought to be women. The church would have to establish and fund teaching positions for experts in Catholic feminism. In turn, these experts would offer courses at universities and seminaries and train an entire cohort of engaged and creative academics, film producers/directors, Web designers and popular authors committed to developing and disseminating "true feminism," the Catholic version.

3. *Of course, the church could also do nothing.* The consequences of this last alternative, however, would be fewer young women, and likely fewer of their children, remaining in the Catholic Church. If that were to happen, practicing Catholics in North America and Europe would run the danger of dwindling to a small and eccentric fringe group, stereotyped in the popular imagination as quaint, irrelevant, self-limited and oppressive. Without attracting more women from Generation X, the millennials and subsequent generations, the church could cease to be an influential voice in Western societies. 

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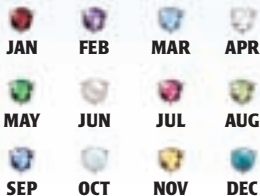
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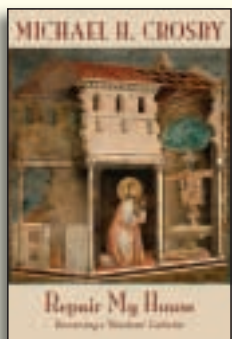
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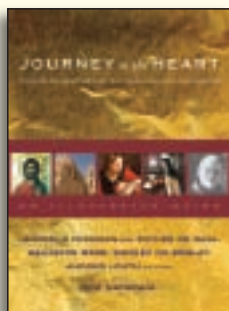
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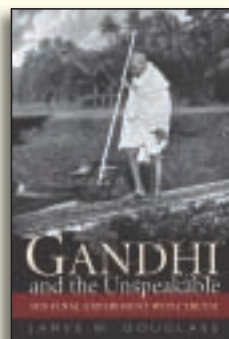
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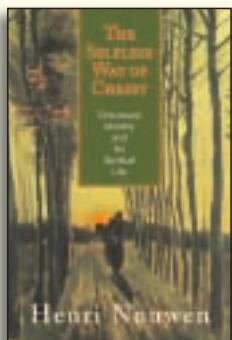
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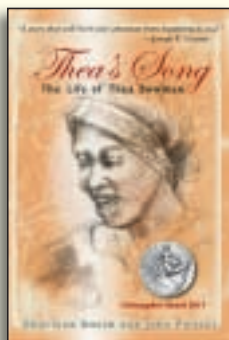
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What Will You Take Up?

Suggestions for action and reflection during Lent

To help readers experience something fresh this Lent, beyond the typical practice of “giving up” x or y, we asked four writers to focus on practices Christians might “take up” instead—an activity or discipline that would deepen the doer’s spiritual life while it also improved local conditions or the environment, relationships within families or parishes and even the political process during this presidential election year. We hope their suggestions help you rethink and celebrate this season.

The Editors

Try the Asceticism of Truth

BY JOHN F. KAVANAUGH

For many of us, the default mentality in approaching Lent still seems to be giving up something. It is a vestige of the long and often wise tradition of bodily mortification, or asceticism. Yet spiritual wisdom figures tell us that asceticism of the ego is more important than the control of our bodily inclinations. We might have great constraint over our physical appetites and still be radically self-centered or deluded.

That is why, especially in the context of the sacrament of reconciliation, I often surprise a penitent with a penance of five minutes of solitude a day or a half-hour walk with a friend or family member every week or a weekly visit with marginal persons who make us uncomfortable. The discom-

fort factor usually motivates our avoidance of solitude, relationships and the world of wounded persons. In each of these arenas we have to exercise a discipline far more challenging than giving up something. It is the asceticism of truth, truths we would rather not face, even though they might set us free.

I count myself among those who long for quiet but seem unable to make time for it. We have so much to do—with e-mail and the news, radio and television, tasks and projects. Even when we have quiet, our minds buzz with plans and possibilities or regrets and replays. What are we when we are not performing or producing or, much worse, pretending and comparing ourselves to others? The simple truth can be daunting at first because it has little to do with action or comparisons. What is unique about each of us is the faith, hope or love we offer in risk to each other and to God. Perhaps that is why Jesus himself is so impressed by those who offer them.

And everyone, to be sure, hungers for relationship. Yet, paradoxically, the depth of relationship is frightening. In true intimacy we will be found out, our vulnerability revealed. Better to spend our time with games and pets that have no ego to daunt us. But if we have the courage to allow ourselves to be known, we will discover what it is to be loved for who we are—no longer haunted by the suspicion that

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/EDER

others love not us but a pretense.

Finally, we face our deepest selves when we are willing to encounter persons who cannot pretend. The marginal, the very old and dying, the imprisoned, the deeply distressed, the profoundly handicapped, by whom we initially might be repelled, reveal the truth about ourselves that Ash Wednesday proclaims: we are fragile as dust. This truth, too, is not as terrible as it might seem at first.

The paschal mystery is the culmination of Jesus' full entry into the truth of our humanity, not only our dying and vulnerability but also our very sinfulness. If we have practiced the disciplines of truth, we will find not only our splendid gifts but our deepest wounds as well glorified.

JOHN F. KAVANAUGH, S.J., is a professor of philosophy at St. Louis University in St. Louis, Mo.

Love the Enemy in Your Pew

BY GERALD W. SCHLABACH

We Christians have struggled for centuries to understand how Jesus really expects us to love our enemies. (Bracket those vicious enemies who may actually be out to violently destroy us and ours.) To be ready for that kind of discipleship we must first learn to love our sisters and brothers in the Christian community itself. They are the ones close enough to stick in our craw.

So this Lent, listen to uncomfortable voices in your community. Listen without arguing back, for as long as it takes to really hear. Listen deliberately. Listen for the back story behind positions you may never agree with. Debate later.

Listening is the virtue this proposed Lenten discipline would inculcate if practiced throughout the year; it could become a lifelong habit. Especially in our era of culture wars, in which the blogosphere allows us to flame "enemies" we never meet face-to-face, nothing may affect us short of sitting down over coffee or on a park bench to listen face-to-face.

Listen particularly to someone who represents all you think might be wrong with the church. A Catholic neighbor, for example, who is so impassioned about some ways of defending life that he or she seems to ignore other ways. Or an openly gay Catholic who continues to receive the Eucharist or an activist campaigning to make same-sex marriage unconstitutional. Listen to the fan of that dangerous neoconservative columnist George Weigel, or the fan of that idealistic peacenik Jesuit John Dear; the parish liturgist who still includes those awful guitar-Mass ditties in the new Roman Mass or the patriarch in the next pew who glares when someone changes "his" to "God's," for "the good of all God's holy Church."

Alas, Catholic culture makes it easy to leave Sunday

Mass, week after week, without talking at all, much less inviting real conversation elsewhere in the week. But resolve to try conversation at least once, for Lent. Whoever your conversation partner is, ask to hear his or her back story. Resolve that while you may ask for clarification, you may not argue. Trust might begin to develop, though probably not in a first meeting. If the other person reciprocates and asks for your back story, wonderful. Share your own story, but do not argue your position even then.

What if this encounter starts to soften your position? Yes, there is that risk. But this is Lent. Our Lord risked all, abandoning any self-defense other than the vindication of his Father. The cycle of the church year intends to teach us this: Resurrection is coming, but not without our dying to even the most righteous of causes, as we identify with the One who did so before us.

GERALD W. SCHLABACH is professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis, Minn., and executive director of Bridgefolk, a movement for grass-roots dialogue between Mennonites and Roman Catholics.

Feed the Hungry With Local Food

BY MARGARET PFEIL

At the end of a tree-lined dirt road surrounded by farmland, a boy with tousled blond hair smiles shyly behind a door that leads to a space that might serve as a garage for more conventional American families. At this home, though, the door opens onto a neatly arranged work area where an array of homemade bread awaits pickup. The boy's mother, Melissa, bakes for the Monroe Park Grocery Cooperative in nearby South Bend, Ind. She is part of an extended community of young Amish families trying to navigate the vicissitudes of a globalized food system by farming the old-fashioned way—with draft horses, respect for the land and strong bonds of relationship rooted in faith.

Melissa's baked goods are a hot item at the co-op, located in a mostly African-American neighborhood with a history of gang violence, a high school graduation rate of 47 percent and few prospects of employment in the middle of this rust-belt city. More than a mile removed from the nearest full-scale grocery store, Monroe Park qualifies as a food desert. It could also be considered a food swamp, since it hosts a couple of convenience stores flooded with snack food options high in calories but low in nutritional staying power.

Opened last spring in the local Catholic Worker community's drop-in center, the grocery co-op emerged from conversations among neighbors about the scarcity of fresh, healthy, affordable food in an urban area surrounded by

ON THE WEB

The editors share recommendations for Lenten practice.
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some of the richest farmland in the country; it is a double paradox, in that growers here struggle to find sufficient market venues for their goods.

Running a community grocery stocked with local foods and cultivating cooperative economic practices represent civic actions of nonviolent love.

Co-op members have high hopes, too: that area farmers will have more incentive to grow a variety of crops, knowing firsthand the needs of their customers; that inner-city residents will have access to affordable, fresh food and new opportunities for mindful consumption, in tune with the rhythms of creation. We hope that the bonds of social relations, sundered by the alienating effects of industrialization, will flourish again and that people of every age and background will have a chance to learn or retrieve time-tested skills for growing and preserving food.

In response to the direct challenges to food security posed by climate change, oil dependency and corporate agriculture, the act of setting up a local food system is a peace-building practice. Dorothy Day, co-founder with Peter Maurin of the Catholic Worker Movement, probably would have called it "the little way of love." With her contemplative gaze, she noticed the interrelationship of the violence in our hearts, on our streets and among nation-states. Following St. Thérèse of Lisieux, she tried to meet the brokenness of the person right in front of her with the healing power of God's love. To the extent that our local community can rely less on a globalized food system fueled by depleted energy supplies contested in international conflicts, our efforts to reconnect with one another and with the earth offer a little way of love.


MARGARET PFEIL is an assistant professor in the theology department at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana.

Get to Know Your Legislators

BY THOMAS MASSARO

When sociologists set out to measure how civic voluntarism interacts with religious communities in the United States, they consistently find that Catholics are among the least likely believers to participate in projects of civic engagement. We Catholics write advocacy letters to members of Congress, for example, only one-third as often as Protestants do. Maybe our civic underachievement is an artifact of a top-down style of church polity. Or perhaps it is a function of parish cultures that render Catholics strangely passive in civic affairs, despite strong church social teachings that commend activism for social justice. Whatever the reason, Lent is an excellent time to shake off our slumber and commit ourselves to new civic involvements.

One of the perennial goals of sincere Lenten discipline is



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to re-convert one's own soul, but it is all the better when our faith-saturated activities produce the added benefit of improving the quality of the lives of many others in need. Think of civic involvement for structural change as an alternative form of almsgiving, one that holds the promise of making lasting changes that will benefit the downtrodden. If it is good to provide a single meal for a hungry person, how much better it would be to advocate for more generous and reliable public food assistance programs for the long haul.

The most effective way to fight poverty and hunger is to let your voice be heard by those with the power to change public policies. For all its unpopularity these days, the U.S. Congress is still the only game in town. And, speaking of towns, there is no overriding reason to book a ticket to Washington, D.C., since each member of the House and Senate maintains a district office. I have always found these offices easy to locate and convenient to visit. It is not hard to book an appointment with a constituent-services assistant or liaison. If your timing is right, you may be able to share your talking points on impending legislation with the boss in person!

The best social justice advocacy is, of course, not limited to a one-time lobbying visit but spills over into such long-

term commitments as network-building and maintaining relationships with legislators and many others in ongoing ways. Use the full power of your citizenship to forge lasting social change. Sticking your neck out in this way may feel intimidating and will surely cost you something in time and energy; but you need not feel alone in these efforts, and you certainly need not start from scratch. Groups already working on such issues include the hunger advocacy organization Bread for the World, whose president, the Rev. David Beckmann, was interviewed by *America* (see Signs of the Times, 1/30, and the online podcast of 12/19/11). If you are looking for a template for your Lenten effort, check out the successful Circle of Protection campaign that Bread for the World and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops championed in 2011.

If you still prefer to think in terms of "giving up something for Lent," then let it be apathy that you relinquish. Take advantage of this holy season to step up your commitment to the poor by advocating for measures that will benefit low-income people here and abroad.

THOMAS MASSARO, S.J., teaches social ethics at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, Chestnut Hill, Mass.

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Jesus Among Muslims

How interfaith exploration made me a better Catholic

BY JORDAN DENARI

Wrapping my hair in a scarf and slipping off my shoes, I stepped onto the prayer rug, squeezing in shoulder-to-shoulder among the other women. The only Catholic student on Georgetown University's Muslim retreat, I followed my friends' ritual movements as the prayer leader chanted the verses in Arabic. While the students placed their hands flat against their stomachs in prayer, I found myself wanting to fold my hands. This simple gesture brought me a feeling of comfort, a connection to God. That moment, however unlikely it may seem, was the start of my journey back to the Catholic faith.

Growing up, I went to Catholic grade school and attended Mass with my family every Sunday. One of my most vivid memories from childhood is of sitting in church, drawing pictures of a skinny-limbed Jesus while nibbling on Cheerios. Despite my upbringing, however, I became bored with Catholicism as I entered my

JORDAN DENARI is a student at Georgetown University in Washington D.C.



teenage years and questioned why I needed to believe in Christ if I believed that the adherents of other faiths would also achieve salvation.

When, as a freshman at a Jesuit high school, I took a required course on world religions, I became enthralled by Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism, but especially by Islam. Outside the classroom, the poetry of the Muslim mystic Rumi provided me with a new, vast image of God, and I became fasci-

nated by Muslims' dedication to prayer, fasting and modesty. I took my own religion for granted and had lost my emotional connection to it, and I wondered if Islam could give me the depth of faith I sought.

Continuing an exploration of Islam during my first semester at Georgetown, I formed a small faith-sharing group with two friends, a Muslim and a Protestant. We wanted an informal place to learn about our religions from one another, so we met weekly over chai tea, bringing along our holy books.

Our conversations, especially those about the nature of God and our relationship with God, led me to an understanding of the similarities between

Islam and Catholicism. Our smiles grew wide when the words of biblical and Koranic stories about Abraham matched up almost perfectly.

Two Views of Jesus

I also came to understand some crucial differences. In the past I had often questioned the significance of Jesus. But in learning about Islamic theology I was reminded that the Incarnation—God becoming one of us—is an

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important difference in the way I understood my relationship with God. While Muslims worship the God of Abraham and revere Jesus as a holy prophet, Islam does not acknowledge Jesus' divinity. The Koran, which considers the Trinity to be in conflict with monotheism, says: "God is indeed just One God. Far be it from His glory that He should have a son. To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and in the earth. God is sufficient for a guardian" (4:171). This view of God seemed more distant than the one I had grown up with, one in which Jesus guides us on life's path. I was compelled to investigate further Christianity's unique perspective on God.

In studying Catholicism I realized that believing in Jesus is about more than assenting to specific doctrines. It means understanding something quite fundamental about our relationship with God. By entering into human history through the person of Jesus, God chose not to watch from afar but instead to participate in the human experience. The term incarnation does not refer simply to a single historical event. Instead, it points to the way God continues to interact with us every day: through human relationships. Jesus' existence tells us more about God than his words or actions ever could—that God wants to walk among us.

I began to understand that, in Islam, a Muslim's life is spent on "the straight path," a path *toward* God, whereas in Christianity, one's life is spent on the path *with* God incarnate. Neither understanding of God is more right than the other. If I learned anything from Rumi, it is that God exists beyond all human categories or understanding. I felt I could have a deeper relationship with God through Jesus by understanding God as a friend who walks with me.

Critical Distance

Yet it was only through engagement with Islam that I was able to recognize

the value in my own tradition's conception of God. Because Catholicism was so close and familiar, I had lacked a critical distance from which to examine it.

Islam, a faith not my own, became the medium through which I came to love the faith of my childhood. I think immersion into other religious traditions could have helped me in the same way, raising questions and presenting alternative viewpoints that allowed me to reflect back on Catholicism with new perspective and a curiosity to learn more.

According to the church, interreligious dialogue goes beyond talking to other believers. It requires lived engagement: sharing meals, attending religious services and working together to promote justice—which is why I chose to attend the Muslim retreat and to pray alongside my Muslim friends. I have also served on the Muslim Students Association board and lived in the university's Muslim living-learning community, which is housing

reserved for Muslim undergraduates and those interested in Islam. When Muslims celebrated the end of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, at the end of August, I joined them for the banquet.

Inspired by my friends' love for Islam, I come away from every meal or thoughtful conversation with a renewed energy to embrace Catholicism. Through my faith journey, I have concluded that engaging in interreligious dialogue is a crucial activity, not only for learning about others but, more important, for enriching one's own faith.

In his encyclical "Redemptor Hominis," Pope John Paul II wrote that participation in dialogue "does not at all mean losing certitude about one's own faith or weakening the principles of morality..." Rather "the strong beliefs and the moral values of the followers of other religions can and should challenge Christians to respond more fully and generously to the demands of their own Christian faith."

It has been the Islamic commitment to prayer that has most challenged me in the way the pope describes. My Muslim roommate would wake before sunrise to perform her first prayer of the five prescribed throughout the day. Scheduled prayer allows Muslims constantly to keep their mind on God and provides a moment for quiet reflection in a world that often moves too fast.

That dedication to prayer made me want to cultivate a deeper Catholic prayer life, and I enrolled in an Ignatian "Prayer in Daily Life" retreat at Georgetown and began frequenting the on-campus chapel almost daily. This has led me to a deeper connection to God and an ability to notice his workings more often throughout my day. It is a process and a habit I would not have started without some interreligious inspiration. I have to thank Islam for helping me make the choice to reclaim my own faith—for making me a better Catholic. **A**

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FILM | KAREN SUE SMITH

A GROCER'S DAUGHTER

Phyllida Lloyd's *The Iron Lady*

If you buy a ticket to **The Iron Lady** to be enthralled by Meryl Streep's performance as Margaret Thatcher, you will not be disappointed. Streep looks and sounds as much like the aged, dementia-fogged, former prime minister as she does the middle-aged, perfectly groomed and self-possessed politician who rose through the Conservative Party ranks to win its highest post. She has the acuity, the diction, even the various gaits to be convincing as Mrs. Thatcher over three decades or more. Streep shows once again why she has won more Oscar nominations than any other actor.

To appreciate fully this film's distinctiveness, however, one must look elsewhere—at its unexpected point of view. For although this is partly a biographical film about a world leader—with historical facts, archival footage and epochal decisions—it is first the story of a woman. The film's director, Phyllida Lloyd, and the screenwriter, Abi Morgan, depict their subject's life in personal terms, rather than focusing squarely on Mrs. Thatcher's 11-year tenure as leader of the United Kingdom and the woman who danced with Ronald Reagan (literally and figuratively) on the world stage. A real life, after all, is not merely a series of world-class achievements; it is shaped by early happenstance, like one's parents, gender, birth order, social class and hometown, as well as by opportunities, hardships, decisions, relationships and the times.

Margaret Roberts (played with just the right mix of innocence and steel by

Alexandra Roach) was a small-town grocer's daughter who imbibed her father's political views and Methodist values, including hard work and principled self-reliance. Her adult incarnation of those virtues, especially the latter, explains why she could make tough, unpopular decisions as a political leader and why she was eventually dubbed by the Russians "the iron lady." All her life she was, by choice, a "doer." She gained admission to Oxford, ran for political office three times after her graduation and eventually won, worked as a chemist and became a tax lawyer (both positions are unmentioned in the film), a member of Parliament, and secretary of state for education and science under Edward Heath.

The filmmakers' story begins in the present-day, with Margaret Thatcher living in England, and unfolds through a series of flashbacks. Events seem to invade the memory of the Baroness Thatcher as they once shattered the peace of the moment in which they took place. A close colleague is suddenly killed in his car by a bomb placed by the I.R.A. (Reportedly, Mrs. Thatcher was not actually present, as shown in the film, but the point is well taken: the sudden murder affected her personally.) Striking miners protest in the streets of northern England and, in a different strike scene, disgusted Londoners dump their uncollected garbage in front of 10 Downing Street. Without warning, Argentina's military

invades the Falkland Islands. In most of these cases, it is clear from Mrs. Thatcher's speeches and actions where she is coming from and what she hopes to accomplish, but the events have a staccato quality that recalls real life and is nearly as disorienting.

A few close relationships provide the solid ground upon which events break. While Prime Minister Thatcher wielded more raw power than any other woman (and most men) in modern times, she is also a wife who, in the film, depends on the love and moral support of her husband, Denis. Mr. Thatcher (played as a strong, equal mate by Jim Broadbent, a true Denis look-alike) infuses the film with humor, a vital role that saves us from drowning in seriousness. Perhaps he played a similar role in the real Mrs. Thatcher's life. Denis's living presence to the aging Margaret in the film, though in reality he died years earlier, shows not only the measure of her dementia but of his continuing importance to her. History may forget him, but the director and writer have attempted an inside job, a life seen from their subject's own vantage.

This approach has limits, however. What are we to make, for instance, of

Thatcher's retort to Alexander Haig, the U.S. secretary of state, who had come to negotiate the Falklands war? She

compares the Argentine invasion of the islands to the Japanese assault on Pearl Harbor. It is a great laugh line. But if it is historical, there seems to be no record of it. Yet on this matter, Mrs. Thatcher did in fact ask President Reagan over the transatlantic hotline, What would you do if Alaska were invaded? It is possible that the fiction-

ON THE WEB

Victor Stepien reviews
the film "W.E."
americamagazine.org/culture



Meryl Streep as Margaret Thatcher and Anthony Head as Geoffrey Howe in “The Iron Lady”

al line was built on that. To discover the historical Thatcher, though, one should read history books.

Still, the insider approach can be revealing. Take the Thatcher twins: Carol (Olivia Colman), who as an adult regularly cares for her aged mother, and Mark, who calls her from his home in South Africa but never sets a foot onscreen. It is his company Margaret misses; her daughter’s she blindly takes for granted. Yet these maternal relationships were long on Mrs. Thatcher’s mind and pulled at her heart, as when she left her youngsters to drive off to the office or as a mother decided to send young British soldiers off to war; and decades after she has left politics they still tear at her. How much of this is fiction? That is unclear. But by combining the Baroness’s real roles of wife, mother and leader, the film’s portrait of her does what many purported “lives of great men” fail to do—namely, show the person in context, in the quotidian.

This broadening of scope, however,

leads to a sort of diminishment of the person. As long as a leader’s family life is kept in the background, deemed unimportant compared with the public work, a leader can loom larger than life. Adding the human touches turns even the greatest leaders back into mere mortals. As depicted in “The Iron Lady,” Margaret Thatcher was for decades an influential leader, yet she was also a woman affected by

childhood taunts, strengthened by a helpful spouse and reduced in her last decades by physical impairment. That realistic view could provide a better basis for spiritual reflection on the meaning of life, and the stages of life, than a handful of films about hyped-up “great men of the world.”

KAREN SUE SMITH is editorial director of *America*.

BOOKS | PETER HEINEGG
ELUSIVE SANCTITY

PARTS OF A WORLD

By A. G. Mojtabai
 TriQuarterly Press. 204p \$24.95

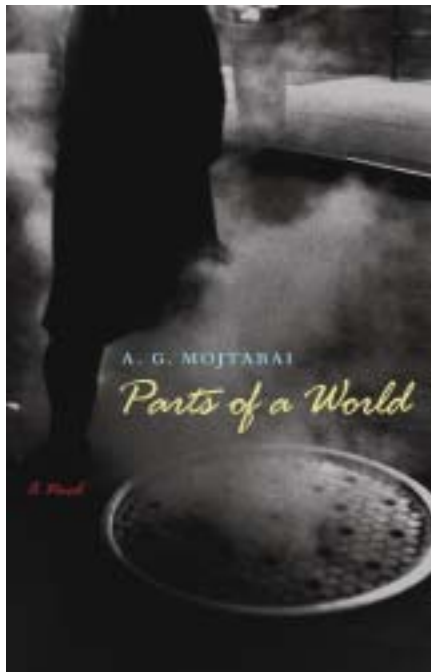
Holiness, however defined, always seems to be in short supply—which explains why so many people are so attracted to it, despite George Orwell’s dictum that “a saint should always be

judged guilty until proved innocent.” The novelist A. G. Mojtabai (born Ann Grace Alpher in 1937 to a non-observant Jewish family in Brooklyn) shares this longing; but with an austere, relentless clarity she shows how nearly impossible it is to satisfy it.

The narrator-protagonist of her dreamlike, Kafkaesque tale is a vague-

ly sketched Manhattan social worker named Tom Limbeck, who tells us about his dull, deteriorating personal life and his obsession with a lost-soul client of his named Michael. A homeless, gentle, mystical character, 28-year-old Michael has been dubbed “Saint Francis of the Dumpsters,” both because he was found as a newborn in a dumpster (abandoned by his 14-year-old mother) and because he often scavenges in dumpsters for food supplies that he believes his mother (whom he has never seen) keeps leaving for him.

Actually, a less catchy but more accurate nickname would have been St. Benedict Joseph Labré of the Dumpsters. Labré (1748-83) was a blissfully pious French misfit (rejected by three monastic orders on suspicion of being insane), who wandered to pilgrimage sites around Europe and eventually died a beggar in Rome. He is considered a patron of bachelors, the



homeless and the mentally disturbed.

And he closely resembles Michael, whom Limbeck sets out to save—or be saved by. Michael is in what looks like real danger; a defenseless loner, he

has been the victim of savage beatings, and he almost died from eating out of a dumpster sprayed with rat poison. Along with Limbeck, the kindly but rock-solid and no-nonsense Father Evans, who runs the nearby St. Joseph’s halfway house, would do almost anything to help Michael, but, like a footloose Bartleby the Scrivener, Michael would prefer not to be helped.

Limbeck’s struggle with Michael is an allegory of faith and unbelief. Raised by a lapsed Catholic turned “devout atheist” father, the rationalistic Limbeck wants to cure Michael of his life-threatening delusion by tracking down his long-lost mother and setting up an interview between the pair. In a system governed by protocols and procedures, such an intervention is more than a little dubious; but Limbeck thinks one good look at the loony, selfish, non-Lady-Bountiful woman will squelch Michael’s fantasy. But will it, and will Michael even show up?

Beyond that, is Limbeck the doctor or the patient? He certainly needs Michael more than Michael needs him: He has just broken up with his longtime girlfriend, June (who constantly skewers him with dead-on diagnoses of his cluelessness and anomie), and is unconnected to anyone else, except a sister in L.A. (who wants him to relocate there, but of course he won’t). The office he works in is a frigid warehouse of detached nonentities. The city is weirdly empty and predictably joyless.

But there is something like a sacred quest in Limbeck’s sessions (often missed) with Michael, as in the classic etymology of “beat” from “beatific.” Though he often appears affectless, he is obviously in touch with something that Limbeck wishes he could be. Cowed as he is by his father’s atheism, he cannot quite buy it. But, he adds, “I cannot say that I believe—anything. Always, always, I hedge my bets. I shift from foot to foot.” At one point he visits a church slated for demolition,

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where a statue of the Virgin has mysteriously begun to weep. Limbeck admires the passionate, resolute faith of the distressed parishioners; but he remains an outsider looking in. Nevertheless, he cannot let go of Michael's case, even when the rule-book says he should.

If this were some sort of consoling parable, it would end with an epiphany, a magic (or at least masterful) formula, a koan packed with meaning. Needless to say, it does

not—in fact, it doesn't really end at all. In desperation after another one of Michael's disappearances, Limbeck goes to see Father Evans, the only wise and compassionate man in sight, and flatly asks him what his secret is. "You want to know what faith is..." the priest replies.

Personally I don't think it has much to do with weeping statues. It's not a thunderbolt. It's not *knowing*. It isn't even belief—too

often, a head trip. Faith and belief...people tend to think they're the same thing.... All that talk about a 'leap of faith'... No leap for me. It's nothing at all like flying. *Slogging*, maybe—more like it.... Faith is the opposite of certainty, I think. Stumbling through darkness as though it were light. Only—once in a great while, well, maybe a glimmer of.... Better not quote me on this, it's not exactly the Party line.

Mystery Upon Mystery

The moon rises late, long before I dream.
Wisdom, and the supreme first cause lie hidden
under darkness, the profound cloud goes on.

I close my eyes to see what is beyond mind,
beyond brightness, to the center of the core,
praise the common fire that devours the flames.

Where do I find you? In my spouse, the flower,
mountain buds and salty streams. I hear you
in my heart where the spheres can't contain you,

approach you and call, breathing without a sound.
Oh strange fragrance, why don't I find you
when Everything appears right in front of me?

LEONARD J. CIRINO

LEONARD J. CIRINO is the author of 19 chapbooks and 17 full-length collections of poetry. His collection, *Homeland, Exile, Longing & Freedom*, was published by AA Press in 2011.

And that's as far as Evans can go. One thinks of Kafka's sublime shaggy dog story, "Before the Law," where the doorkeeper tells the expiring man who has spent (wasted?) his entire life waiting for admittance to the Law, "No one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you. I am now going to shut it" (tr. W. & E. Muir). Mojtabai is less bleak than that: at least the absurdist seeker—and, for all we know, his elusive saint—is still alive as the curtain falls.

In "Religion and the Writer: A Missed Connection" (1995), Mojtabai argued that writers, because they live surrounded by members of their own skeptical species, are too removed from the religious reality of other people's lives. A decade and a half later, she levels the same accusation; but it is unclear whether she herself has bridged this distance.

Still, one thing is not in dispute here—she knows the territory: the mindset and verbal tics of American urbanites, from jaded bureaucrats to overworked priests to depressed Dostoevskian superfluous men. Her prose is spare, incisive and, in contrast to its subjects, keen-eyed without being self-absorbed. What she gives us is not so much a world as parts of a world, which might someday come together in a coherent whole—or not.

PETER HEINEGG is a professor of English at Union College, Schenectady, N.Y.

PEGGY ROSENTHAL

ALL IS TRANSIENCE

THE BACK CHAMBER Poems

By Donald Hall

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 96p \$22
(paperback)

The Back Chamber is the latest volume of poems by one of America's most revered poets, Donald Hall, now in his 80s. Above all, this is a volume about transience: about the diminishment of aging, about death and loss.

Death haunts this book. Primarily it is the death of Hall's wife, the poet Jane Kenyon, in 1995, when she was only 48. His grief for her permeates the poems. Interwoven with this devastating loss is Hall's heightened awareness of the nearness of his own death and of the physical and mental losses that come with aging. Typical is this image

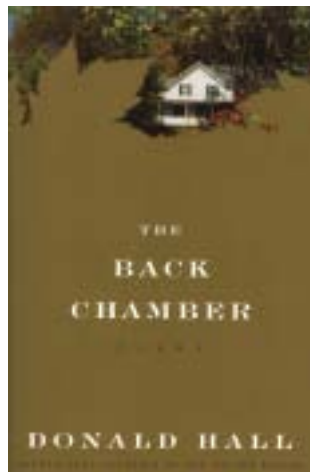
of himself from the book's closing poem, "Green Farmhouse Chairs": fantasizing a Jane who had not died, he writes that "She looks after him as he shuffles/ into a bent and shriveled other."

Equally distressing to Hall is his sense of the loss, with age, of his poetic skills. This distress dots the poems and is the poignant theme of "Poetry and Ambition," where he presents himself "pick[ing] at lines that try to become a poem." His self-portrait continues:

*An octogenarian
sits in the blond maple chair*

*writing, crossing out,
picking up a thesaurus, trying to
find a metaphor—
and makes a doddery language
with no poetry in it.*

Yet I wonder if Hall's motif of losing his poetic craft isn't a gentle self-mockery, or more an anticipated fear than a reality, because diminishment of poetic skill is not much evident in these superbly crafted poems. Take "Convergences," its three-line stanzas each ending with the word "water," through which "converge" the lives (and deaths) of his mother and his wife, along with Jesus turning water into wine. From this Gospel miracle, the poem's final stanza moves into gratitude for poetry's own



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miraculous transformative power:

*Within the poem he and she—
hot, cold, and luke—
converge into flesh of vowels and
consonant bones
or into the uncanny affection of
earth for water.*

Three poems in this collection are shaped in Hall's signature "baseball"

form: nine stanzas of nine lines each, with nine syllables in each line. Hall clearly continues to enjoy the challenge of this form. Although in one of the poems, "Meatloaf," he presents himself as a pathetic old poet "counting nine syllables on fingers," his mastery of the form is undiminished.

As is his playfulness. "Meatloaf," for instance, is a tour de force, intertwining baseball, travel adventures and a

meatloaf recipe. The recipe starts off straight—"Buy two pounds of cheap fat hamburger/ ...add leaves of basil,/ Tabasco"—but then the list of ingredients moves whimsically into "newspaper ads, soy sauce,/ quail eggs, driftwood, tomato ketchup,/ and library paste."

There is playfulness at points throughout the book. But it is sadly missing in a sequence of poems about the sexual encounters into which Hall (as he confesses in his recent memoir, *Unpacking the Boxes*) threw himself helplessly in response to Jane's death. I find the explicit sexual details uncomfortable and painful, and pain is the poems' predominant emotion. All incorporate a sense of mysterious hopelessness of the loss of fulfillment even before it is found.

This is also the theme of the volume's central, long (21-verse) poem, "Ric's Progress." Here, however, Hall crafts an ironic distance from his sexually driven narrative, which is a spinoff from Hogarth's famous series of paintings, "A Rake's Progress." One can see that this modern morality tale would have been fun for Hall to write, but this reader found it more tedious than engaging.

More successful are the many poems in which Hall focuses on his beloved New Hampshire farmhouse: his poignantly waning life in this house where his ancestors lived, his gratitude for small things that can still be held onto even as time pulls them from our grasp. Both the title poem and the opening poem ("Things") create a beautifully delicate balance between the preciousness of particular things and their inevitable loss. In "Things," the poem's single sentence deftly enfolds four generations' apparently trivial belongings ("a white stone perfectly round,/ tiny lead models of baseball players, a cowbell..."): memories for those who kept them, "valueless" for those who come later and will throw them away.

POETRY CONTEST

Poems are being accepted for the 2012 Foley Poetry Award.

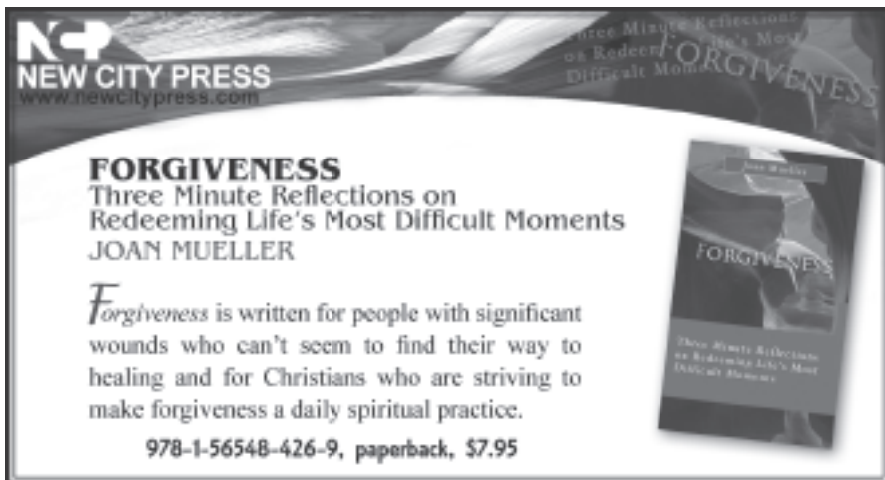
Each entrant is asked to submit only one typed, unpublished poem of 30 lines or fewer that is not under consideration elsewhere. Include contact information on the same page as the poem. Poems will not be returned. Please do not submit poems by e-mail or fax. Submissions must be post-marked between Jan. 1 and March 31, 2012.

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In "The Back Chamber," the poem tenderly touches with words the things filling Hall's childhood bedroom in this house. The objects carry the life of those who saved them: "A graduation dress/ That Ben's wife Lucy made in homespun,/ Reports from school in nineteen-one...." Each of the two single-sentence stanzas, however, ends with the blunt word "dead." In Donald Hall's world, the "dead" come alive in their belongings.

But dead they are, as he knows he will soon be. All is transience in this

world of his, of ours. Yet the paradoxical wonder is that transience is, in a sense, held at bay by these very poems. Poetry gives transience a language and hence at least a relative permanence. Touching the things of this world with words crafted into art, Hall extends their life and offers them to us to treasure.

PEGGY ROSENTHAL's books include *The Poets' Jesus*, (Oxford Univ. Press) and *Praying through Poetry: Hope for Violent Times* (St. Anthony Messenger Press).

KAREN SUE SMITH

THE SPIRITUAL HEDONIST

CARAVAGGIO

A Life Sacred and Profane

By Andrew Graham-Dixon
W.W. Norton. 514p \$39.95

The life of Caravaggio (1571-1610) is as starkly dramatic and riddled with violence as the paintings he made. Without the art, a film version would resemble Martin Scorsese's "Mean Streets," full of compulsive behavior and gang warfare. But drama and violence cannot account for Caravaggio's artistic status in the Roman art world, where he was widely considered to be the best living painter in Italy. Nor can these account for his monumental reputation today.

According to Caravaggio's biographer, Andrew Graham-Dixon, a British art critic, the artist's handling of religious subject matter, in particular, continues to speak to us. His biography is especially compelling because he identifies Caravaggio's religious vision as the distinguishing factor in the artist's work. Graham-Dixon's interpretations of specific paintings make up the best, most original parts of this tome.

Michelangelo Merisi, later called

Caravaggio after his hometown, grew up in rural Lombardy. His father worked in nearby Milan. At 6, Michelangelo lost his father, grandparents and uncle to the bubonic plague, which left his mother struggling to support the family. At 13 he was apprenticed to an artist for several years, and at 21 he moved to Rome, where hundreds of other artists earned a livelihood decorating new and existing churches, including St. Peter's Basilica, which was under construction. In this Counter-Reformation period religious art was used to woo the Catholic faithful, to catechize and inspire. Caravaggio, aware that Rome was Christianity's pre-eminent pilgrimage site, liked to place his works inside the churches on the pilgrim route where they would be widely appreciated. He lodged in squalid artists' quarter.

By day he painted fruit and flowers, angels and saints. By night he was a

sword-wielding tough, involved in rumbles described in Roman court records. An early chapter describes an artist who arranged to have his mistress's face slashed with a razor after he found her in bed with his brother. That artist was not Caravaggio, but Gianlorenzo Bernini, the sculptor who designed St. Peter's Square and whose work adorns the interior of the Basilica. The author cites the slashing to stress that violent revenge was common; Caravaggio was not the only artist caught up in it.

As Caravaggio gained commissions, patrons and artistic maturity, one glimpses another side of Rome, reflected in the glistening palaces and dazzling art collections of cardinals and powerful dynasties like the Medici, the Borgias and the Colonnas. His link to this world was Constanza Colonna, a distant "family friend" whose wet nurse was the artist's aunt. More than once Caravaggio sought her protection. His first patron was the kindly Cardinal del Monte, a father figure and mentor who arranged the artist's first church commission.

In Italy Catholics ascribed to different schools of spirituality. By examining Caravaggio's paintings, Graham-Dixon shows that the artist embraced the teachings of the pauperist reformers, Carlo Borromeo and Filippo Neri, who welcomed the poor and saw the renunciation of worldly

wealth as a way to imitate Christ. The painter was also influenced by the religious practices of Lombardy, which included re-enactments of religious scenes; he regarded his religious paintings as re-enactments, too, and positioned his models for theatrical effect.

Of Caravaggio's painting "The Crucifixion of St. Peter," Graham-



Dixon writes, "It is a challenge as well as a call to conscience: viewers are brought into its space and invited to take the place of Peter's executioners, at least in the mind's eye—to make good their failings, to show compassion and mercy, to open up to the light of God."

In "The Calling of St. Matthew," Caravaggio seems to have considered how miracles take place, not with thunderclaps but in the barely discernible aspects of life. God, who is light, is subtly present in the painting. "The innkeeper cannot see it, but by standing where he does he casts a shadow on the wall that gives Christ a dark but unmistakable halo," writes Graham-Dixon. He also attributes some of the artist's subtleties to "a careful reading of the Bible." The author presents Caravaggio as a master, able to grasp and convey on canvas profound spiritual truths.

Nevertheless, in a duel in 1606, Caravaggio killed a longtime enemy,

Ranuccio Tomassoni. When their "seconds" entered the fray, the artist was injured. For this capital crime, he was exiled from Rome, condemned as a murderer and subject to a "capital sentence"—anyone in the papal states could kill him with impunity. For the rest of his life, the artist was on the run.

Caravaggio had often painted his likeness into his works. He smiles as "Bacchus," peers out as one of "The Musicians," closes his eyes as "St. Francis of Assisi in Ecstasy" and witnesses "The Martyrdom of St. Matthew." After the murder of Tomassoni, however, he paints his face on the severed head of the giant in "David with the Head of Goliath." "He is like one of the damned souls glimpsed by Dante in the *Inferno*, an outcast moaning forever in torment," writes Graham-Dixon.

The final chapter of Caravaggio's life contains its apex and its nadir. He paints his way into membership in the Knights of Malta, a strict religious order of soldiers. But his role in injuring a fellow knight quickly sends him to prison. After he escapes, an old

enemy exacts revenge, slashing him in the face. Caravaggio never fully recovers. He dies on his way back to Rome, trying to rescue three paintings. He was 38.

Could anyone so angry, compulsive and unable to form lasting relationships have had the depth of religious understanding this biographer ascribes to Caravaggio? I am skeptical, but am almost persuaded by this passionately argued case.

KAREN SUE SMITH is editorial director of *America*.

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LETTERS

Getting Rich by Being Good

As one who has participated in socially responsible investing for a number of years, I was initially very interested, but ultimately disappointed in Thomas Healey's "Good Returns" (1/16). While anyone rightly hopes to earn a reasonable return on a financial investment, the hope or expectation of making a higher than average gain on a socially responsible investment seems to introduce an instrumental consideration into an otherwise socially worthwhile activity in and of itself. I appreciate the logic of Mr. Healey's argument and am pleased to learn of the increase of these investments generally. But given the questionable social/ethical standards of numerous "successful" businesses today, I would hate to see the success of socially responsible investments tested by whether it beats the S&P 500.

ELIZABETH STELTENPOHL
New York, N.Y.

Student Meets Teacher Again

Reading "What We Must Face" (1/16), I see how lucky I was (as Maureen McGinn) to have had John Kavanaugh, S.J., as a teacher at St. Louis University. I am delighted, as a new subscriber, to become reacquainted with his voice, which rings not only with clarity but with compassion. I am hopeful for the future of the church because all people long for God.

I am now raising three tiny children, and their thirst for the divine and

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tendency toward clear-eyed faith is inspiring. They hate it when I want to watch "Meet the Press" or "Morning Joe," but today at Mass they tried to sing along to the hymns even though they did not know the words. We have reasons to hope.

MAUREEN FARRELL
The Woodlands, Tex.

Responsibility Check

Re "Failure to Protect" (Editorial, 1/30): I was very disturbed when I read the following sentence regarding a destitute mother's tragic decision to kill herself and her children, "One can only hope that institutional reassessments lead to procedural reforms that can prevent a tragedy like this from happening again."

It is troubling that the first response to a story regarding a mother who was unable to feed or clothe her children is that we can "only hope" that some bureaucrats conduct "institutional reassessments" and make "procedural reforms." Where were the local churches during this tragedy? Does the local diocese offer Catholic social services? What is our responsibility as Catholics? To wait for the government

to do something? Your editorial is exactly what I would have expected to read in *Time* or *Newsweek*, not **America**.

BRIAN PERO
Dublin, Ohio

Church Fail

In "Failure to Protect," the editors assume that more spending on welfare-like programs will help prevent parental violence. In my experience the problem is narcissistic personality and the secular view of ethics that parents and particularly "boyfriends" assume and accept as reality. The programs you advocate will never substitute for the command to love one another. Rachele Grimmer needed the people of a church who would make her part of their lives.

I think welfare programs make things worse because people see them as a solution and see their voting for these policies as significantly contributing to their obligation to take care of the fragile members of our communities. This was not a state welfare failure; it was a failure of the Christian churches.

HAROLD HELBOCK, M.D.
Vacaville, Calif.

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CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY, a Jesuit Catholic University in Omaha, Neb., is seeking a Director for its Creighton Center for Service and Justice (C.C.S.J.). The Director will oversee and direct the work of engaging students in community service, reflection and action on behalf of justice and sustainability as an integral part of their Jesuit Catholic university education. The Director must possess knowledge of Catholic social teaching and Ignatian spirituality with skill leading ministry teams of professionals and/or university students. The Director will be expected to work collaboratively across a variety of cultures and in a multifaith environment. The ideal candidate will have: 1) Experience of community service, 2) Experience with Jesuit/Ignatian spirituality, 3) Knowledge of Catholic social teaching, 4) A minimum of two years' experience leading college students in faith-justice ministry, 5) A minimum of two years' experience in supervision/administration, 6) Master's of Divinity, M.A. in theology/ministry, social work,

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An astronomer by training, Father Coyne has devoted much of his life to researching the surfaces of the moon and Mercury, interstellar matter, binary stars and distant galaxies in order to gain a greater understanding of them. He has taught astronomy at the University of Arizona in Tucson, and has served as both director of the Vatican Observatory and president of the Vatican Observatory Foundation. His teaching in particular has been guided by Father Coyne's belief that studying the natural sciences allows students to gain a better understanding of themselves, and that such understanding is an essential component of a liberal arts education.

The chair that Father Coyne holds is made possible because of a \$50 million endowment that was bestowed upon Le Moyne through the estate of Bob and Kay McDevitt, longtime friends of the College. The endowment also will support chairs in computer science, information processing and physics, and will endow professorships, as well as fund related staff, research, technology and overhead costs. In addition, it will support the new McDevitt Center for Creativity and Innovation.

Father Coyne's arrival comes at a time of exceptional student interest in the natural sciences and allied health fields. Opened in January 2012, the College's new science complex houses the physical, life and health sciences. This addition is a 50,000-square-foot building that will adjoin the reconfigured Coyne Science Center for a total of 105,000 square feet of academic space. The complex includes teaching facilities to accommodate large introductory-level classes and small upper-level classes, as well as cutting-edge facilities for faculty research and faculty-mentored student research.

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Budget Busts

Re "Failure to Protect": Under the guise of budget cutting, both the Republicans and the Democrats have strategically cut huge holes in the safety net. Not only do children suffer unconscionably, but programs for the most desperate folk, especially those with mental illness, have been cut to the bone. We find a way to spend \$660 billion on military toys and saber rattling but cannot seem to afford even small change for those who are in desperate need. The Lord hears the cry of the poor. It is not just the job of the churches; everyone in our society is responsible for the welfare of their neighbor.

MIKE EVANS
Anderson, Calif.

The True Conservative

I commend "A Catholic Candidate?" (Current Comment, 1/30), with its emphasis on the gaps between former Senator Rick Santorum and the Catholic Church's social justice teaching. Mr. Santorum considers himself a true conservative; but when he questions the value of government help to poor families and says that suffering is just a part of life, he does not preserve the context of the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark (14:7): "The poor you will always have with you." Jesus does not proclaim the inevitability of poverty or a lack of concern. The words evoke the "poor law" in Deuteronomy, which contains prescriptions about relaxation of debts and care for the poor, so that there will be no one in dire need. "Give freely and not with ill will; for the Lord, your God will bless you for this in all your works and undertakings" (Dt 15:10).

JIM LINEHAN
Hockessin, Del.

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Into the Deep

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT (B), FEB. 26, 2012

Readings: Gn 1:8-15; Ps 25:4-9; 1 Pt 3:18-22; Mk 1:12-15

He also went to preach to the spirits in prison (1 Pt 3:19)

Pity masquerades as compassion, though it is anything but that. In fact, many Buddhists call it a near enemy to compassion. That is, pity is close enough to imitate compassion even as it undermines it. Pity says something like this: “Her affliction horrifies me and I feel sorry for her.” Being repelled by the misery, we actually separate ourselves from that person whose condition so bothers us. And, of course, we cannot help feeling a bit superior: “Thank God I am not her!”

Compassion, in contrast, is based on love, and it draws us deep into others’ lives to walk with them in their pain. Compassion also makes us vulnerable to one another. I have found it revealing that the Buddhist term for compassion is *karuna*, which means “quaking heart.” All the more fascinating is the corresponding term in the New Testament, *splanknizomai*, literally “moved from the bowels.” Compassion calls on our depths and takes us deeply into some of the most profound exigencies of the human condition.

Compassion also strongly bonds us to one another. Consider someone who has entered your life with great compassion at a time when you have been particularly hurting. Or consider a time when you have done this with another. The bond thus forged is not

easily forgotten. How could it be, when you have shared such vulnerability, when your hearts quaked together, when your souls were stirred to their foundations?

The Gospel reading tells of Jesus going into the desert for 40 days and then beginning his public ministry. Mark describes the desert period in only two sentences: “At once the Spirit drove him out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for 40 days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and angels ministered to him.” Consider his vulnerability, driven out by the Spirit, harassed by the tempter and dwelling among the extremes of creation. His life was not his own.

Today’s reading from the First Letter of Peter is part of what is widely believed to be a post-baptismal exhortation. In this short reading Peter describes Christ’s death as a sacrificial atonement and alludes to the Noah story (our first reading) as a great image. The flood “prefigured baptism, which saves you now.” Peter also says something that is, quite frankly, weird: “He also went to preach to the spirits in prison, who had once been disobedient....” I do not take this claim literally, as if the post-crucified,

pre-resurrection Jesus spent Holy Saturday sharing a version of the Sermon on the Mount. Rather, I see this as the Crucified One bringing his saving presence to the darkest possible place of the human condition. Old Testament Sheol was a watery world of no hope, no life and no God. Jesus shared this experience. With his freeing love he entered into the abyss of human darkness.

On this first Sunday of Lent, we would do well to consider this period as a particular time of compassion—that is, a deeper entering into the human condition with an engagement that moves us to our depths. The traditional three practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving make a good start. We pray so



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Consider a time when you expressed deep compassion.
- What enabled you to do this?
- Think of your compassion as a sign that you are being reshaped into Christ; thank him for this.

that we can more profoundly commune with the One who has called us into being and draws us into his universal love. We fast to bond with the two billion people around the world who go to bed hungry. We give alms to free ourselves from greed so as to become free for union with those in great need.

Lent is a time for us to be especially mindful of our capacity for compassion. Lent calls us to enter deeply into human existence with great vulnerability and great love, to live with a quaking heart.

PETER FELDMIEIER

PETER FELDMIEIER is the Murray/Bacik Professor of Catholic Studies at the University of Toledo.



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Reconsiderations IV

Augustine: ancient inspiration, modern muse.

Reconsiderations IV will look at Augustine in his time and beyond his time: what is there about his life and thought that has so often been accepted as a guide through cultural change? How does he end up having an impact on the self-image of ages other than his own? Those who have claimed him as mentor include renaissance figures, philosophers, theologians, educators and political theorists. His resurgence today – whether recognized as acceptable or not – depends on insight into his life and thought and an appreciation of the intervening history.

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