

EASTER ISSUE

# America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

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## POPE FRANCIS



A Pope  
Of Firsts

# OF MANY THINGS

I was standing at a food trailer wondering whether the advertised hot dog was really a hot dog or something that the Italian vendor merely thought was a hot dog. Just as I was about to commit, a roar erupted in St. Peter's Square, a mere 50 feet from where I was standing outside the Vatican press office: "Fumo bianco! Fumo bianco!" I poked my head out from behind the trailer and there it was: white smoke billowing from the chimney on top of the Sistine Chapel. There could be no mistake this time; the smoke was unambiguously white. I started to run, hoping to get out of the square before the growing crowd trapped me; I had promised ABC News that I would talk to them when the time came.

As I crossed the Tiber and headed into the city center, the rain was still falling hard. It was a minor miracle that I was able to get through the mob and back to my room in time for the broadcast. Also miraculous, I was soon to learn, was the fact that a Jesuit now sat on the throne of St. Peter. It occurred to me that the only folks more worked up than the Argentines and the people of Rome were probably the conspiracy theorists who see in Pope Francis the final, definitive proof that the Jesuits control the world. I can assure you that a single visit to a Jesuit community meeting would disabuse any reasonable human being of that idea.

The pick was surprising: Jesuits, most of whom take a special vow of obedience to the pope in matters of mission, have, ironically, had a sometimes rocky relationship with Rome over the centuries. There are a lot of reasons for that, too many to go into. Most recently, in the early 1980s, the Vatican intervened in the internal governance of the Society; it was thought that the Jesuits had grown a little too comfortable with liberal democracy and/or Marxist ideology. That the cardinals would even consider choosing a

Jesuit now, I thought, marked a new beginning in that relationship. It is, one prays, a moment of reconciliation.

The cardinals also surprised us by picking a Latin American. It was always possible, of course, but no one here really thought it probable. I don't think they picked him precisely because he's a Latin American, but that they picked a Latin American makes sense, given that the church's center of gravity continues its southerly shift. It is an astonishing historical phenomenon. Just after Columbus's journey, the Jesuits helped to bring the faith to the new world, following, for good and ill, the Spanish and Portuguese flags. Now, more than four centuries later, the new world has sent a Jesuit back to the capital of the old world to lead its new evangelization.

Lastly, the cardinals surprised us by picking someone who is 76 years old. It was his age, in fact, that left Cardinal Bergoglio near the bottom of the list of *papabili*. Nearly everyone believed that the new pope would be a younger man, one with the energy to meet the church's enormous challenges. Still, I can say from my own experience of living with men in their 70s and 80s, that the notion that someone of that age cannot meet the mental and physical demands of hard work is just so much *stronzate*.

As is the custom, sometime in the next few days the superior general of the Society of Jesus, Adolfo Nicolás, will walk the short distance from the Jesuit headquarters here in Rome past the "hot dog" stand to the Apostolic Palace, where he will meet with the new pope and, in the traditional way, assure him of the Society's commitment to serve the See of Peter. In a unique way, on that particular occasion, Father General will carry not only the promise of our filial obedience to the new holy father, but our fraternal love for our brother Jesuit and, if you'll permit me to say so, our pride.

**MATT MALONE, S.J.**

# America

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Cover: Pope Francis on the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica on March 13. CNS photo/Paul Haring

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# Alleluia! He Is Risen!

The Gospels unanimously report that the Lord first appeared to Mary Magdalene following his resurrection. Three of the four Gospels, moreover, maintain that Jesus' first post-resurrection appearance was to Mary alone, and all the accounts include some description of Mary's bewildered, frightened and joyful reactions as well as the condescending dismissal she initially received when she shared the good news with the others. The Scriptures do not describe, however, what happened in the time between Mary's encounter with the risen Lord and the moment when she arrived and joined the other disciples in the upper room.

We can, of course, begin to imagine what those minutes or hours might have been like. We can imagine Mary running, breathless, propelled by hopeful expectation; we hear her heart pounding, almost bursting with joy; we see the tears flowing down her cheeks, past the upturned corners of her ecstatic smile. In those heart-pounding moments, Mary Magdalene would have been the only one who had seen the risen Lord; she would have been the only one in all of history to have heard the good news; she alone was the herald of the Resurrection. Put simply, in those few minutes, she was the church.

When Mary reached the others and announced the good news, the church became, for a time, a handful of frightened believers; but soon they were 100, then 1,000, then 100,000. Two millennia followed, and today there are more than a billion people on five continents, a church of every race and every tongue, yet the one people of God. During her singular moment in salvation history, could Mary have imagined our 21st-century moment? Could she have imagined the world-changing power of her simple message? The world we inhabit, of course, would have been unrecognizable to Mary or any other first-century person. Yet the message we bear is the same; we are heralds of the same Gospel, sharers in the same mission: to testify to the great deeds of God, to invite every person to faith in Jesus Christ.

"Alleluia! He is Risen!"

Our world still needs to hear the Easter proclamation; it longs to hear it, yearns for the freedom it signifies. Yet if our Easter proclamation is to convey the transformative power it bespeaks, then the heralds must be first in faith, repentance and reform. The Easter proclamation is no mere philosophical or theological proposition. It is the beating

heart of a living body or it is nothing. Like Mary Magdalene's, our proclamation must flow from burning, faithful hearts. The disillusioned, weary world that waits in the upper room demands an authentic witness, a credibility that love alone provides. The world must see our salty tears, must sense our breathless hope. They must know that we are not simply vain clanging cymbals in the din of modern life, but the heralds of another person, the One who comes to us in the silence, the creator for whom we long and in whom we dare to hope. If we fail to account for the joy that is within us, then we will have failed to proclaim the risen Lord. In the absence of joy, moreover, a joy that only comes from the one who is truth, then all our other truths are ultimately unintelligible.

In his first homily as successor of St. Peter, Pope Francis said that "to walk, build and confess without the cross means that we are not true disciples of the Lord. We must confess the one cross, and in that way we will be a true church." Like Mary Magdalene, our discipleship must be in motion. "Our life is a path," the pope said. "When we stop, the thing doesn't go."

In Pope Francis, it seems, the Lord has a herald in deed as well as in word. His first gestures as pope proved deeply moving to millions of observers; prayers for Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI united Catholics all over the world; then—before he offered the traditional blessing *urbi et orbi*, "to the city and the world," upon the people gathered below him—came a touching request from the new pope for a "favor," a blessing from the assembled faithful that again united Catholics in a captivating silence. Pope Francis reminded us that our Easter proclamation must not only be heard, it must be seen in humble acts of loving service.

This Easter, then, we give thanks to the Lord for Pope Francis, while we also remember that the latest successor of St. Peter is but one among the billions of successors of St. Mary Magdalene. This Easter we once more join our voices with hers, as we herald among the far and near, amid the untold terrors of earthly life, the good news that is the final hope of the world: "Alleluia! He is risen!"



DETAIL FROM A RELIEF IN NOTRE-DAME CATHEDRAL  
PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/REYNATA SEDMAKOVA

## A Bishop Embraced by Rome

**“BUONA SERA”:** Pope Francis waves to the crowd as he appears for the first time on the central balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica.



When the bells finally pealed and the white smoke wafted from the chimney of the Sistine Chapel, a tidal wave of a roar rushed across St. Peter’s Square, traveled down the main thoroughfare at the foot of the basilica, finally broke at the River Tiber, rushed its opposite shore and flowed into the city beyond. In the following 45 minutes, what seemed like half of Rome made a dash to St. Peter’s. They did something Romans are loath to do: they abandoned their dinners. Making a beeline for the piazza, most of them were running, oblivious to the danger posed by the soaking wet cobblestones. Some even abandoned their cars to the massive traffic jams, while others sat and blared their horns, some celebrating, some venting their frustration.

While Catholics throughout the world were tuning in to learn the identity of the new pope, Romans were rushing to meet their new bishop. The pope is the pope, of course, precisely

because he is bishop of Rome. In recent decades, however, as modern popes have traveled more widely and taken on an ever more prominent role in global affairs, the pope’s role as shepherd of the Roman flock has been downplayed, even delegated. The blessing given *urbi et orbi* (to the city and the world) during the traditional appearance of the newly elected pope on the balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica has been more *orbi* than *urbi* in recent times.

It was significant, then, that Pope Francis chose to address the people of Rome directly in the opening moments of his pontificate. “And now let us begin this journey, the bishop and people,” the pope said in his extemporaneous remarks. “My hope is that this journey of the church that we begin today, together with the help of my cardinal vicar, will be fruitful for the evangelization of this beautiful city.”

Romans took note of the new pope’s words. Though drenched and freezing

cold, all were smiling, some were crying. Cheers of “Francesco! Francesco! Francesco!” resounded throughout the square as the new pope greeted the exuberant crowd in Italian. “The choice of the name was beautiful for us. St. Francis is the patron saint of Italy,” said Celsa Negrini of Rome, who was in the crowd. “He seems very humble; his demeanor seems very positive. He will be a pope who evangelizes people’s consciences,” she added.

Unbeknownst to most of the crowd, the new pope also gently waded into a theological controversy in his opening remarks. A perennial question in theology is the relationship between the universal church (the church spread throughout the world, whose central authority is in Rome) and the particular church (the church of each local place or diocese). Theologians debate which has priority. It is not merely an academic question. How one answers it, theologians say, determines how one views

# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

questions of power and governance, the proper relationship between Rome and each diocese.

In his opening remarks, using an image of a united journey by the bishop and the people of Rome, Pope Francis added, “this journey of the church of Rome, which presides in charity over all the churches, a journey of brotherhood in love, of mutual trust.” In speaking directly to the people of Rome, the new pope was stressing the particular; by mentioning Rome’s presidential function, the pope also appealed to the universal.

All of that, however, was lost on most of the crowd. For one night, at least, the universal and the particular were visibly one, an ecclesial community united in faith hope and love. That feeling of community lingered after the pope said his words of greeting, ending with “have a good night and have a good rest” in Italian. Some hugged each other; many took pictures; many were talking excitedly about what they had just seen. Then the square slowly emptied and the Romans returned to their homes.

MATT MALONE, S.J.

## Silence and Service: Pope Francis Captivates Catholics Worldwide



**FRANKLY EXCITED:** People celebrate the election of Pope Francis outside the Metropolitan Cathedral in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on March 13.

Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, S.J., has become the first pope in 600 years to be elected in time to receive his predecessor’s blessing. But that is far from the only first that will be associated with the Argentine-born pontiff. The firsts begin with the name he selected; he is the first Francis in 266 papacies (no *I* required until there is a Francis II).

Meeting the world media for the

first time on March 16, he explained his inspiration. Upon his election a fellow cardinal had congratulated him and said, “Don’t forget the poor.” He took the words of his friend to heart, he said, and chose to be called after St. Francis of Assisi, “the man of poverty, the man of peace, the man who loves and protects creation,” the same created world “with which we don’t have such a good relationship.”

He told the more than 5,000 media representatives who had come from around the world for the conclave and his election, “How I would like a church that is poor and that is for the poor.”

Francis is the first Jesuit pope; he is also the first pope from outside Europe in 1,200 years and the first pope from South America, where a greater percentage of the world’s Catholics now live than in Europe. “The symbolism of choosing a pope from Latin America delights and touches us, most particularly in developing countries,” said Archbishop Stephen Brislin of Cape Town, South Africa, president of the Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference. “Pope Francis is a person from humble beginnings,” the archbishop said. “He has frequently and courageously spoken of the grave inequities afflicting the world, and his thirst for justice for all people will be a strong characteristic of his papacy.”

His first gestures impressed millions of Catholics—and others—around the world, suggesting a sense of humility and solidarity that could prove a theme of this papacy. That humility is in keeping with the election itself—just about no one in the media considered the Argentine cardinal a contender. It is also true to the pope’s past demeanor as archbishop of Buenos Aires, where he eschewed the prerogatives of his position. Cardinal Bergoglio took the bus to work, cooked for himself and elected to live in a modest apartment instead of an episcopal palace.

Church bells tolled around the world with the announcement of the new pope, about 25 hours after 115 cardinal electors entered a conclave to consider who would succeed the retired Pope Benedict XVI. Catholic leaders worldwide expressed hope and joy, calling the faithful to come together as one

body behind the papacy of Pope Francis. International political leaders also offered words of congratulations and pledged to work with the new pontiff on common goals and concerns in a complex world.

“His election may have taken many of us by surprise, including me,” said Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster, England, president of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales. “But the more we learn about him, the more it becomes clear that the election of Pope Francis is an inspired one and that his papacy will be inspiring.”

Argentines expressed shock and pride at their cardinal’s unexpected elevation. “He came from the end of the world,” the daily *La Nación* announced in a headline, stealing a line the pope used himself the night of his election. Argentines recall Pope Francis as personable, with a common touch—someone who took time for ordinary people.

“He’s the same person now as he was then,” said a hardware store owner, Antonio Franco, who was taught catechism by the young Father Bergoglio.

Despite his reputation as an austere intellectual, Pope Francis showed a deft personal touch as a cardinal, visiting with the Argentine church’s most vulnerable people, the poor and people suffering from AIDS. He has called for more pastoral care of divorced Catholics, and he memorably castigated Argentine priests who refused baptism to the child of an unwed mother as “today’s hypocrites.”

As archbishop of Buenos Aires, Pope Francis led protests against abortion laws and same-sex marriage but reportedly was willing to accept civil unions as a compromise. He also protested against corruption—a touchy topic in Argentina. Pope Francis has been at times scathing in his criticism of

the International Monetary Fund and the global economic system, especially after the peso crisis in Argentina in 2001. “This choice of pope puts service to the poor and tackling injustice at the forefront of the church’s mission in the world,” Tom O’Connor, a spokesperson for Britain’s Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, commented.

Born in Buenos Aires on Dec. 17, 1936, Jorge Mario Bergoglio studied chemical engineering, but then chose the priesthood. In 1957 he survived a severe case of pneumonia, and his right lung was partially removed as a result of the illness. The next year he entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus. He was ordained in 1969. He eventually served as superior of the Jesuits in Argentina in the 1970s during a trying and dangerous time, as a military junta waged the so-called Dirty War against perceived leftists. Thousands perished, including priests, seminarians and religious.

That tenure has long proved controversial, with some criticizing him and other Argentine prelates for not doing more to stand up to the generals or, worse, acting in some degree of complicity with them. In a court deposition he denied acting in any way with the junta, and the Vatican spokesperson Federico Lombardi, S.J., said there has never been “a concrete or credible accusation” against the pope. Lombardi charged that the accusations come from “anticlerical elements to attack the church” and “must be firmly rejected.”

He became auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires in 1992 and later its archbishop, and from November 2005 to November 2011 he was president of the Episcopal Conference of Argentina. He was made a cardinal by Pope John Paul II in 2001.

Hailing from the church’s “growth regions” in the global south, Pope

Francis can be expected to be attuned to the concerns of developing nations and problems of global inequity and human deprivation. His parents were Italian immigrants to Argentina, and he was raised in a thoroughly Europeanized culture. That background may put some of the Roman Curia’s cardinals at ease. If the “only Nixon could go to China” analogy can be applied in this instance, it could be that only a Pope Francis could push through the Curia’s obstructed doors and truly effect its reform.

KEVIN CLARKE



**SERVANT LEADERSHIP:** Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio with residents of a shelter for drug users during Holy Thursday Mass in 2008.

## Surprise: A Jesuit Named Francis

Few Catholics, and even fewer Jesuits, ever imagined there would be a Jesuit pope. Most Jesuits make a promise not to accept ecclesiastical office unless solemnly commanded to do so. St. Ignatius witnessed the corruption of the Renaissance church and wanted to

keep his companions free of the temptations of high office. In the same spirit, there is said to have been a quiet agreement between recent popes and Jesuit general superiors that Jesuits would be appointed cardinals, if at all, only after they reached 80, when they would no longer be eligible to vote in a papal election. Cardinal Bergoglio was one of the exceptions, a residential bishop, pastoring the archdiocese of Buenos Aires.

After the shock wore off, Jesuits rejoiced in the selection. Adolfo Nicolás, the Jesuit superior general, wrote, "All of us Jesuits accompany with our prayers our brother and we thank him for his generosity in accepting the responsibility of guiding the church at this crucial time." Father Nicolás recalled that "a distinguishing mark of our Society" is its tie "to the Roman Pontiff by a special bond of love and service."

In the mind of St. Ignatius, that special bond arises out of the holy father's care for the universal church. David Brooks understood that Jesuit charism when he speculated (New York Times, 3/15) that like St. Augustine, Pope Francis will reject sectarian Catholicism to embrace the world in all its untidiness. Indeed, in an interview before the conclave, the future bishop of Rome, as he prefers to call himself, had told La Stampa, "Between a church that goes into the street and gets into an accident and a church that is sick with self-referentiality, I have no doubts in preferring the first."

There was surprise as well about Francis' choice of a name. No pope before had dared to take up the name of the West's most revered saint. For Jesuits it seemed less surprising. St. Ignatius had great admiration for Il Poverello. Aspiring to do "great deeds" for God like Francis was at the core of

From CNS and other sources.

Íñigo de Loyola's conversion. Later he himself imitated Francis' poverty, begging for his livelihood and the support of his studies; and until he saw the fruitfulness of an active apostolate, he projected that Jesuits too would lead a life of mendicant preaching.

In addition to Francis Xavier, 12 Jesuit saints or blessed bear the name Francis. So in choosing Francis as patron, the new pope sheds fresh light on the spiritual kinship between the Company of Jesus and Francis' Little Brothers.

DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J.

## Social Media Take-Off

It wasn't long before millions watching online live streams of the Vatican chimney on March 13 noticed a bird perched atop the chimney over St. Peter's Basilica, as they waited for the white smoke that signals the election of a new pope. In just a few minutes, "seagull" was a trending topic on Twitter, and at least a handful of Twitter accounts had been set up for the bird, with @SistineSeagull attracting over 8,000 followers, joining @ConclaveChimney with nearly 10,000 followers of its own.

The now famous seagull is just one small example of the role social media played in connecting Catholics around the world to the historic election of Pope Francis. Christopher Hale, co-founder of the online journal Millennial, said that social media allows Catholics in their 20s and 30s to express the views of a demographic that the secular press sometimes ignores.

"They say that we don't care about religion; we hate religion; we ignore religion. That's not true. Social media

offers a new narrative that is reflective of the actual situation," he said. Hale says that most his followers on Twitter are not Catholic, but "based on the feedback I was getting, it was clear that this was not just a Catholic event, but a human event, a world event. There is something mysterious about our faith tradition that draws young people to it."

Leading up to the conclave, several American cardinals tweeted updates that fueled the papal speculation and led, in part, to the media blackout in the days before the conclave began. On the final day of the conclave, Twitter reported that users posted about 130,000 tweets per minute, causing, for a time, every worldwide trending topic to be pope-related. Facebook users got in on the action too, propelling "Pope" and "Vatican" to trending topics on that platform.

Of course, not all comments about the church on social media are glowing. Maura Lafferty, a social media consultant who volunteers for the Archdiocese of San Francisco's Young Adult Council, says the church must become more adept at addressing social media's high-speed negativity. Church leaders must learn "how to navigate the messaging" around "challenging questions," she said. "They

need to understand how to frame issues that won't lead to a rush of criticism."

Though the Twitter account of St. Peter, @Pontifex, was vacant following Benedict XVI's resignation last month, it was back soon after the conclave reached a decision with the first tweet: "HABEMUS PAPAM FRANCISCUM." The message was retweeted over 70,000 times.

MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN is a contributor to America.



**GULL'S GALL: An oblivious bird conquers Twitter.**





# Finding God in Time Off

**M**y brother is one of the hardest-working, most generous people I know. During the rare moments when he is not working successfully at his job or volunteering his time to mentor youth, however, he can be a “waste of space.” While my family is together for a holiday, it’s not uncommon for someone to ask, “Has anyone seen Peter?” only to discover him later semi-comatose on the couch with the television blaring.

My brother is not alone. Americans can work extremely long hours and complain about how busy we are, and yet we still manage to watch, on average, nearly 20 hours of television a week. Perhaps it is exactly because our daily lives can be so stressful that we then seek rather passive forms of entertainment that do not require much thought or energy but also do not really refresh us.

With so many of our few non-working hours spent in front of a screen, what aren’t we doing?

In general, we are less likely to engage in more active, relational forms of leisure. The French spend nearly twice as much time eating and drinking as Americans, for example—and probably much less of that is done while alone at a desk or in a car.

Not only can spending less time in intentional leisure affect our happiness, but it can also affect our spiritual life because of how closely the two are related.

An oft-repeated phrase among people familiar with Jesuit or Ignatian

spirituality is “finding God in all things.” Even with such an expansive vision, however, certain situations and places are privileged opportunities for encountering the living God, just as some forms of recreation are more rejuvenating than television or other forms of screen time.

I could find the glory of God while lying on my bed on a Sunday morning, though I’m much more likely to sleep—or engage in “horizontal meditation,” as one Jesuit I know called it—than to have any profound spiritual insights. Even if my mind frequently wanders at church, communal worship is far more likely to break through the barriers I put up that block my reception of that glory than an extra hour in bed.

Not much seems to be happening much of the time I’m in prayer. “God highs” are not so common in my life. They tend to occur, however, when I carve out time and space when I am not running around like a madman thinking of the next thing I need to do and when I am not plopped in front of a screen.

A farmer cannot force a seed to grow; she can, however, prepare the soil. We, too, can prepare the spiritual soil.

This includes time for prayer but also much more. It is no coincidence that the times when I am most impatient with others and spend less time smiling and laughing are usually the periods when I have not made time for beauty, hobbies that I enjoy and meaningful time with close friends.

On the other hand, being creative

or spontaneously helpful to others tends to come when I have put myself in a good place by spending time with God and enjoying God’s grandeur all around me in a deliberate way.

I currently live on a seacoast, and perhaps because I’m trying to make up for decades of living in the Midwest, I try to get to the beach as much as possible. I have noticed how even an hour soaking up ocean breezes can clear my

mind and help release the week’s stress. It is exactly because the beach is such a godsend that I am often shocked by how some of the men in my community can live so close to the ocean but go a year without setting foot on the shore.

Perhaps it’s not so different, however, than

when I lived in a major city. Because I thought I could visit the wonders of the city at any time, I rarely did so. An eager tourist, however, would see more in a week than I did in a year. What I lacked was intentionality.

Similarly, I can’t count the number of times that instead of spending more time in prayer, picking up the phone to call a friend or learning to cook something new, I have checked sports scores yet again or wasted time doing something that did not really refresh me.

“The world is charged with the grandeur of God,” wrote the Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. We don’t have to go far to soak up the beauty. We do, however, need to prepare the soil so that we can actually receive such grandeur.

Some forms of recreation are more rejuvenating than television.

MICHAEL ROSSMANN, S.J., a Jesuit scholar, teaches at Loyola High School in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

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PRESENTS



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RESPONDENTS:

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The quest for the risen,  
historical Jesus

# Accounting for the Empty Tomb

BY WILLIAM LANE CRAIG

*Editor's Note: William Lane Craig is an influential Christian thinker. His claims for the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus have garnered both praise and criticism. Professor Craig acknowledges that the historical sciences cannot furnish definitive proof of Jesus' resurrection. His claim is more modest, namely, that "the hypothesis 'God raised Jesus from the dead' furnishes the best explanation of the historical data relevant to Jesus' final fate, which include the fact that the tomb of Jesus was found empty by a group of his women followers on the first day of the week following his crucifixion." Professor Craig argues that the historical evidence for the empty tomb is reliable according to the criteria of historical investigation, which include early attestation by multiple, independent sources. In the following condensed and edited excerpt from Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics, Professor Craig examines the competing explanations for the empty tomb, Jesus' post-mortem appearances and the origin of the disciples' belief in the resurrection of Jesus.*

**HE IS RISEN: Clergy process around the tomb in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, the site where Jesus is believed to have been buried.**

Six lines of evidence constitute a powerful case that Jesus' tomb was indeed found empty on the first day of the week by a group of his women followers. As a historical fact, this seems to be well established. According to D. H. Van Daalen (1972), "It is extremely difficult to object to the empty tomb on historical grounds; those who deny it do so on the basis of theological or philosophical assumptions." But those assumptions cannot alter the facts themselves. New Testament scholars seem to be increasingly aware of this. According to Jacob Kremer, a New Testament critic who has specialized in the study of the resurrection: "By far most exegetes hold firmly to the reliability of the biblical statements about the empty tomb." In fact in a bibliographical survey of over 2,200 publications on the resurrection in English, French and German since 1975, the researcher Gary Habermas found that 75 percent of scholars accepted the historicity of the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb. Now if this is the case, that leads us to our second main point: explaining the empty tomb. Down through history, those who denied the resurrection of Jesus have been obligated to come up with a convincing alternative explanation. They have come up with about four.

## Conspiracy Hypothesis

According to this explanation, the disciples stole the body of Jesus and lied about his post-mortem appearances, thus faking the resurrection. This was, as we saw, the first counter-explanation for the empty tomb, and it was revived by the deists during the 18th century. Today, however, this explanation has been completely given up by modern scholarship. Let us see how it fares when assessed by the historian C. Behan McCullagh's criteria for justifying historical hypotheses.

1. *The hypothesis, together with other true statements, must imply further statements describing present, observable data.* Virtually any explanation offered for the resurrection will fulfill this first criterion, since such explanations are offered to account for the New Testament witness to Jesus' resurrection and so will imply that the literary evidence contained in the New Testament will exist as a result of the events described in the proposed hypothesis. According to the conspiracy hypothesis the Gospel accounts are simply deliberate fabrications.

2. *The hypothesis must have greater explanatory scope than rival hypotheses.* The conspiracy hypothesis seems to cover the full scope of the evidence, for it offers explanations of the empty tomb, the post-mortem appearances and the origin of the disciples' (supposed) belief in Jesus' resurrection.

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**WILLIAM LANE CRAIG** is Research Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology in La Mirada, Calif. He has written or edited over 30 books.

3. *The hypothesis must have greater explanatory power than rival hypotheses.* Here doubts begin to arise about the conspiracy hypothesis. Take the empty tomb, for example. If the disciples stole Jesus' corpse, then it would be utterly daft to fabricate a story of the women finding the tomb to be empty. Such a story would not be the sort of tale Jewish men would invent. Moreover, the simplicity of the narrative is not well explained by the conspiracy hypothesis—where are the Scripture citations, the evidence of fulfilled prophecy? Why isn't Jesus described as emerging from the tomb, as in later forgeries like the Gospel of Peter? Why isn't Matthew's guard at the tomb already there in the pre-Markan tradition? Even in Matthew's story, the guard appears too late; the body could have been already stolen before the guard arrived on Saturday morning. For a fail-safe alibi against theft of the body, see once more the Gospel of Peter, where the guard (explicitly identified as Roman) is set immediately upon interment of the corpse.

As for the post-mortem appearance narratives, similar problems arise. A fabricator would probably describe the appearances in terms of Old Testament theophanies and descriptions of eschatological resurrection (Dn 12:2, for example). But then Jesus should appear to the disciples in dazzling glory. And why not a description of the resurrection itself? Why no appearances to Caiaphas or the villains on the Sanhedrin, as Jesus predicted? They could be then branded as the real liars for denying that Jesus did appear to them.

But the explanatory power of the conspiracy hypothesis is undoubtedly weakest when it comes to the origin of the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection. For the hypothesis is really a denial of that fact; it seeks to explain the mere semblance of belief on the disciples' part. But as critics have universally recognized, one cannot plausibly deny that the earliest disciples at least sincerely believed that Jesus was risen from the dead, a conviction on which they staked their very lives. The transformation in the lives of the disciples is not credibly explained by the hypothesis of a conspiracy. This shortcoming alone has been enough in the minds of most scholars to sink the old conspiracy hypothesis.

4) *The hypothesis must be more plausible than rival hypotheses.* The real Achilles' heel of the conspiracy hypothesis is, however, its implausibility. One might mention here the usual objections to the unbelievable complexity of such a conspiracy or the supposed psychological state of the disciples; but the overriding problem is the anachronism of first-century Jews intending to hoax Jesus' resurrection. The conspiracy hypothesis views the disciples' situation through the rearview mirror of Christian history rather than through the eyes of a first-century Jew. There was no expectation of a Messiah who, instead of establishing David's throne and subduing Israel's enemies, would be shamefully

executed by the Gentiles as a criminal. Moreover, the idea of eschatological resurrection was unconnected with the idea of Messiah and even incompatible with it. As N. T. Wright nicely puts it, if your favorite Messiah got himself crucified, then you either went home or else you got yourself a new Messiah. But the idea of stealing Jesus' corpse and saying that God had raised him from the dead is hardly one that would have entered the minds of the disciples.

5) *The hypothesis must be less ad hoc than rival hypotheses.* Like all conspiracy theories of history, the conspiracy hypothesis is ad hoc in postulating that what all the evidence seems to point to is, in fact, mere appearance only, to be explained away by hypotheses for which there is no evidence.

Specifically, it postulates motives and ideas in the thinking of the earliest disciples and actions on their part for which there is not a shred of evidence. It can become even more ad hoc, as hypotheses must be multiplied to deal with objections to the theory, for example, how to account for the appearance to the 500 brethren or the women's role in the empty tomb and appearance stories.

6) *The hypothesis must be disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs than rival hypotheses.* The conspiracy hypothesis tends to be disconfirmed by our general knowledge of conspiracies, their instability and tendency to unravel. Moreover, it is disconfirmed by accepted beliefs such as the sincerity of the disciples, the nature of first-century Jewish messianic expectations and so on.

7) *The hypothesis must significantly exceed its rivals in fulfilling conditions two through six.* This condition is obviously not met, since there are better hypotheses, such as the Hallucination Hypothesis, which do not dismiss the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection as fraudulent.

No scholar would defend the conspiracy hypothesis today. The only place you read about such things is in the popular, sensationalist press or in former propaganda from behind the Iron Curtain.

## Apparent Death Hypothesis

A second theory was the apparent death explanation. Critics around the beginning of the 19th century, like Heinrich Paulus and Friedrich Schleiermacher, defended the view

that Jesus was not completely dead when he was taken down from the cross. He revived in the tomb and escaped to convince his disciples he had risen from the dead. Today this hypothesis has also been almost completely given up. Once again, let us apply McCullagh's criteria for the best explanation:

**The appearance of a half-dead man desperately in need of medical attention would hardly have elicited in the disciples the conclusion that he was the risen Lord and conqueror of death.**

1) *The hypothesis, together with other true statements, must imply further statements describing present, observable data.* Again this condition is easily met.

2) *The hypothesis must have greater explanatory scope than rival hypotheses.* The apparent death hypothesis also provides explanations for the empty tomb, post-mortem appearances and the origin of the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection.

3) *The hypothesis must have greater explanatory power than rival hypotheses.* Here the theory begins to founder. Some versions of the apparent death hypothesis are really variations on the conspiracy hypothesis, merely substituting the disciples' hoaxing Jesus' death for their theft of Jesus' body. In such cases, the theory shares all the weaknesses of the conspiracy hypothesis. A non-conspiratorial version of the theory is also saddled with insuperable difficulties: how to explain the empty tomb, given Jesus' merely apparent death, since a man sealed inside a tomb could not move the stone so as to escape; how to explain the post-mortem appearances, since the appearance of a half-dead man desperately in need of medical attention would hardly have elicited in the disciples the conclusion that he was the risen Lord and conqueror of death; and how to explain the anachronism of the origin of the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection, since seeing him again would lead them to conclude that he had not died, not that he was, contrary to Jewish thought (as well as their own eyes), gloriously risen from the dead.

4) *The hypothesis must be more plausible than rival hypotheses.* Here again the theory fails miserably. Roman executioners could be relied upon to ensure that their victims were dead. Since the exact moment of death by crucifixion was uncertain, executioners could ensure death by a spear thrust into the victim's side, such as was dealt to Jesus. Moreover, what the theory suggests is virtually physically impossible. The extent of Jesus' tortures was such that he could never have survived the crucifixion and entombment.

The suggestion that a man so critically wounded then went on to appear to the disciples on various occasions in Jerusalem and Galilee is pure fantasy.

5) *The hypothesis must be less ad hoc than rival hypotheses.* The apparent death hypothesis, especially in its conspiratorial instantiations, can become enormously ad hoc. We are invited to imagine secret societies, stealthily administered potions, conspiratorial alliances between Jesus' disciples and members of the Sanhedrin and so forth, all with nary a scrap of evidence in support.

6) *The hypothesis must be disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs than rival hypotheses.* The apparent death hypothesis is thoroughly disconfirmed by medical facts concerning what would happen to a person who has been scourged and crucified. It is also disconfirmed by the unanimous evidence that Jesus did not continue among his disciples after his death.

7) *The hypothesis must significantly exceed its rivals in fulfilling conditions two through six.* This theory also is hardly a standout. For that reason it has virtually no defenders among New Testament historians today.

### Wrong Tomb Hypothesis

First proposed by Kirsopp Lake in 1907, another theory holds that the belief in Jesus' empty tomb was based on a simple mistake. According to Lake, the women lost their

way that Sunday morning and happened upon a caretaker at an unoccupied tomb in the garden. He said something like, "You're looking for Jesus of Nazareth. He is not here." The women, however, were so unnerved that they fled. After the disciples had experienced visions of Jesus alive, the women's story developed into the account of their discovery of Jesus' empty tomb. Unlike the previous two theories considered, Lake's hypothesis generated virtually no following but was dead almost upon arrival.

1) *The hypothesis, together with other true statements, must imply further statements describing present, observable data.* This condition is easily met.

2) *The hypothesis must have greater explanatory scope than rival hypotheses.* Lake's theory does not really explain the resurrection appearances. Some additional hypothesis will have to be conjoined to the wrong tomb hypothesis in order to explain Jesus' appearances. In that sense the theory fails to have sufficiently wide explanatory scope.

3) *The hypothesis must have greater explanatory power than rival hypotheses.* Because the wrong tomb hypothesis says nothing to explain the post-mortem appearances, it has no explanatory power in that respect. It also is anachronistic in its explanation of the origin of the disciples' belief in Jesus' resurrection. Merely going to the wrong tomb and seeing a man there telling them that Jesus is not there would hardly lead a first-century Jew to conclude that Jesus was

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risen from the dead—especially if this were reported by women and could not be verified. In fact, the question of verification reveals that Lake’s hypothesis has weak explanatory power even with respect to the empty tomb. For any later check of the tomb would have revealed the women’s error. After their initial fright, would not the women have attempted to retrace their steps by the light of day? Certainly the disciples themselves would have wanted to verify the empty tomb. The state of the actual tomb could not have remained a matter of complete indifference to a movement in the same locale based on belief in the resurrection of the dead man interred there. And in any case, since the burial site was known to Jew and Christian alike, the Jewish opponents of the Christians would have been only too happy to point out the women’s error.

4) *The hypothesis must be more plausible than rival hypotheses.* The wrong tomb hypothesis is also implausible in light of the evidence we do have, for example, that the site of Jesus’ tomb was known to Jew and Christian alike in Jerusalem, that the empty tomb story is extremely early and shows no signs of theological development and reflection and so on. Insofar as the hallucination hypothesis proves to be implausible, Lake’s theory will share that, too.

5) *The hypothesis must be less ad hoc than rival hypotheses.* Lake’s theory is ad hoc in that it treats the evidence selectively and arbitrarily. For example, Lake regards the

women’s visit to the tomb with the intention of anointing the body as historical but must discount their noting, precisely because of that intention, where the body was laid (Mk 15:47; 16:1). But why accept the one but not the other? Or again, Lake regards the angel’s words ascribed to the caretaker, “You’re looking for Jesus of Nazareth. He is not here,” as authentic but passes over the words, “He is risen!” But all of the angel’s message is the language of Christian proclamation if any of it is. Similarly, there are no grounds for taking Mark’s “young man” to be a human rather than angelic figure, the Greek word used here being often used of angels and the man’s white robe being typical for the Jewish portrait of angels. Moreover, the women’s fear and astonishment is a characteristic Markan motif that presupposes the angelic confrontation, so that one cannot regard the women’s reaction as traditional and historical while historically excising the angel as a legendary accretion.

6) *The hypothesis must be disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs than rival hypotheses.* The wrong tomb hypothesis will be disconfirmed by the generally accepted beliefs that Joseph of Arimathea buried Jesus and thus could point to his burial location, that the empty tomb tradition belongs to very early rather than late tradition and so on.

7) *The hypothesis must significantly exceed its rivals in fulfilling conditions two through six.* Obviously, nobody thinks that this is the case.

### Displaced Body Hypothesis

In one of the few Jewish attempts to deal with the facts concerning Jesus’ resurrection, Joseph Klausner in 1922 proposed that Joseph of Arimathea placed Jesus’ body in his tomb temporarily, due to the lateness of the hour and the proximity of his own family tomb. But then he moved the corpse later to the criminals’ graveyard. Unaware of the displacement of the body, the disciples erroneously inferred Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Although no scholars defend Klausner’s hypothesis today, I have seen attempts by popular authors to revive it. In light of what has already been said of other theories, its shortcomings are evident:

1) *The hypothesis, together with other true statements, must imply further statements describing present, observable data.* No problem here.

2) *The hypothesis must have greater explanatory scope than rival hypotheses.* The displaced body hypothesis has narrow explanatory scope. It tries to explain the empty tomb but says nothing about the post-mortem appearances and the origin of the disciples’ belief in Jesus’ resurrection.

3) *The hypothesis must have greater explanatory power than rival hypotheses.* Klausner’s hypothesis has no explanatory power vis-à-vis the appearances and the origin of the Christian faith. As for the empty tomb, it faces the same

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obstacle as the wrong tomb hypothesis: since Joseph and any servants with him knew what they had done with the corpse, the theory is at a loss to explain why the disciples' error was not corrected—unless, that is, one resorts to ad hoc conjectures, like the sudden deaths of Joseph and his servants. It might be said that Jesus' corpse would have no longer been identifiable; but that is to miss the point. The point is that the earliest Jewish/Christian disputes about the resurrection were not over the location of Jesus' grave or the identity of the corpse but over why the tomb was empty. Had Joseph displaced the body, the Jewish/Christian polemic would have taken a quite different course.

4) *The hypothesis must be more plausible than rival hypotheses.* The hypothesis is implausible for a number of reasons. So far as we can rely on Jewish sources, the criminals' graveyard was only 50 to 600 yards from the site of Jesus' crucifixion. Jewish practice, furthermore, was to bury executed criminals on the day of their execution, so that is what Joseph would have wanted to accomplish. Therefore, Joseph could and would have placed the body directly in the criminals' graveyard, thereby obviating any need to move it later or defile his own family tomb. Indeed, Jewish law did not even permit the body to be moved later, except to the family tomb. Joseph had adequate time for a


simple burial, which probably included washing the corpse and wrapping it up in a sheet with dry spices.

5) *The hypothesis must be less ad hoc than rival hypotheses.* The theory is somewhat ad hoc in ascribing to Joseph motives and activities for which we have no evidence at all.

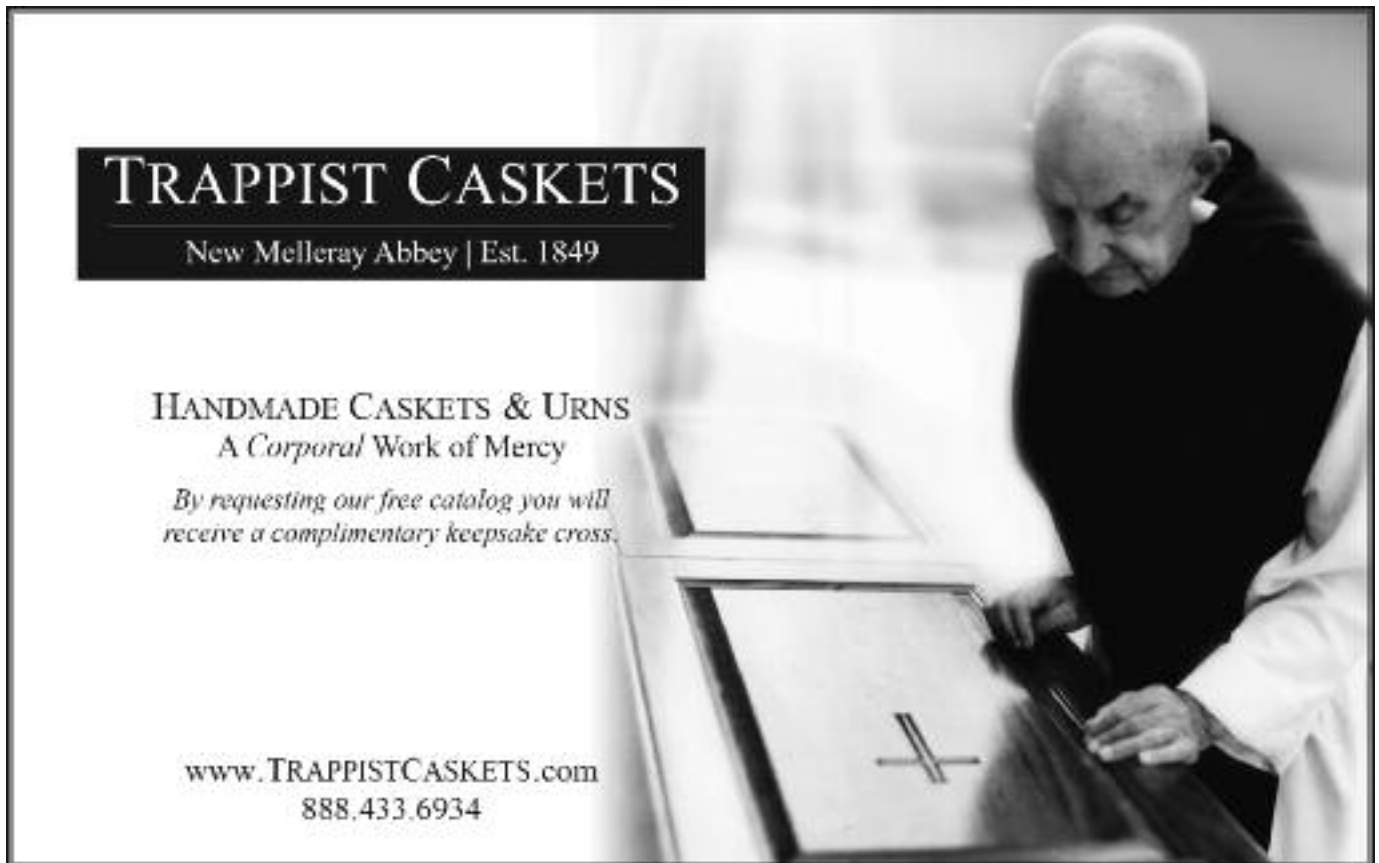
6) *The hypothesis must be disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs than rival hypotheses.* The theory suffers disconfirmation from what we know about Jewish burial procedures for criminals mentioned above.

7) *The hypothesis must significantly exceed its rivals in fulfilling conditions two through six.* Again, no historian seems to share this estimation.

...

As we look at these hypotheses proffered to explain the fact of the empty tomb, it is striking that scarcely any modern historian or biblical critic would hold to these theories. They are almost completely passé. You may say to yourselves at this point, "Well, then, what explanation of the empty tomb do modern critics offer who deny the resurrection?" The fact is that they are self-confessedly without any explanation to offer. There simply is no plausible natural explanation available today to account for how Jesus' tomb became empty. If we deny the resurrection of Jesus, we are left with an inexplicable mystery. 

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# The Valleys Sing

## Joy and the psalms

BY JAMES MARTIN

One of my favorite sources of laughter is the 1975 film “Monty Python and the Holy Grail.” Briefly put, the British comedy is based on the story of King Arthur and his quest for the Holy Grail, the cup that Jesus used at the Last Supper. Like all the Monty Python movies, “Holy Grail” is a mashup of surprising erudition (it hews closely to the legend of Arthur) and sublime silliness (it features a “killer rabbit”). It may be the funniest movie ever made.

At one point Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table are visited by a dazzling vision of God, who appears in the heavens framed by fluffy white clouds and wearing a bejeweled crown.

“Arthur, Arthur, King of the Britons!” he thunders. When King Arthur bows down, God reacts in an unexpected manner.

“Oh, don’t grovel!” says God. “If there’s one thing I can’t stand, it’s people groveling!” Apparently God doesn’t like people apologizing either. “Every time I try to talk to someone, it’s ‘sorry this’ and ‘forgive me that’ and ‘I’m not worthy.’”

In response, King Arthur adopts a reverent pose.

“What are you doing now?” shouts God.

“I’m averting my eyes, O Lord,” says Arthur.

“Well, *don’t!*” says God. “It’s like those miserable psalms. They’re so depressing!”

Yes, those miserable psalms. So depressing. That is a popular conception of the psalms: always lamenting some woe that has befallen the people of Israel, mourning over the sad days, repenting of sinfulness and weeping “by the rivers of Babylon.” There is, in fact, an entire category of psalms called psalms of lament.

There are, however, several other categories of psalms. Some scholarly commentaries note a variety of types: royal psalms, in which the king speaks; wisdom psalms, which are



connected with wisdom literature from the Old Testament and offer advice and counsel; liturgical psalms, which played a role in ancient worship services; and historical psalms, which recount narratives about the people of Israel.

### ‘They Shout and Sing for Joy’

But there is another important category: praise psalms. The *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* suggests three basic parts to a psalm of praise: first, an introduction that sets a tone of praise; second, the body of the text, in which the reasons for praising God are listed; third, a conclusion, which often

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JAMES MARTIN, S.J., is editor at large of *America*. This essay is adapted from *Between Heaven and Mirth: Why Joy, Humor and Laughter are at the Heart of the Spiritual Life* (HarperOne).

includes a wish or blessing.

Central in most of the praise psalms is joy. Indeed, finding joy in the psalms is not hard at all: the very first word in the very first psalm is “happy.” “Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,” says Psalm 1, “but their delight is in the law of the Lord.” You do not have to look hard in the psalms for joy, happiness and delight, which flow

earth and made it an inhospitable place for people; third, for the abundance of those same waters, which make the plants grow and the earth bear fruit.

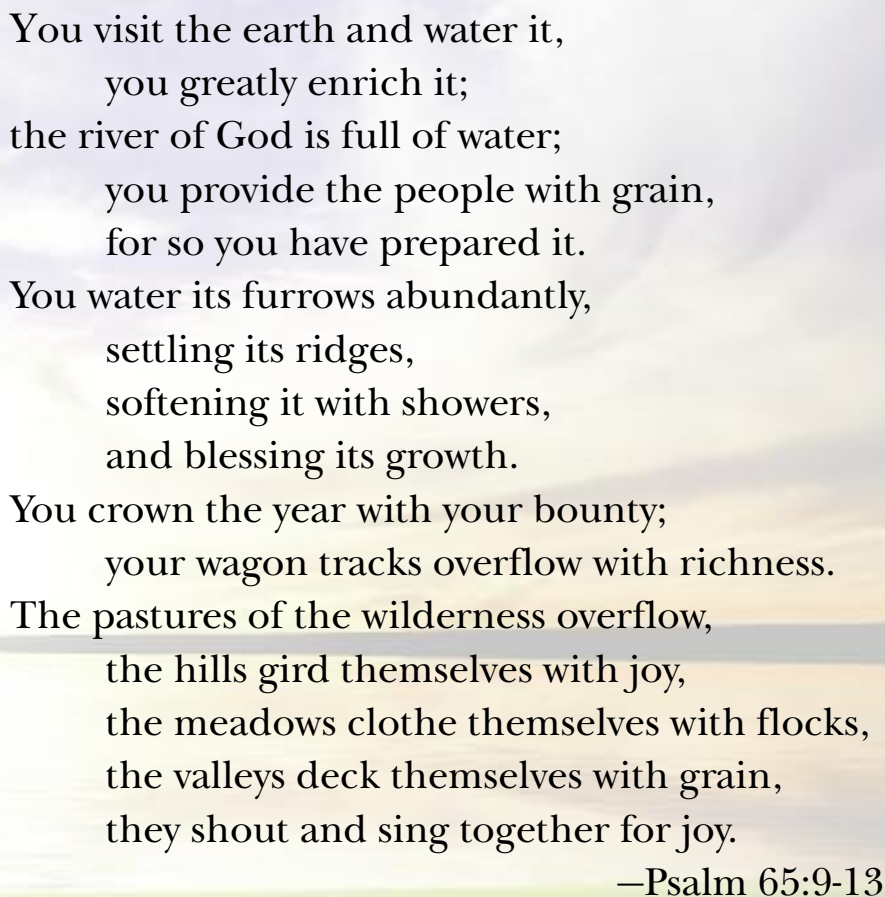
In that final part, the psalmist includes some of the most vivid imagery in the Old Testament. God visits the land with water and enriches it, “softening it with showers, and blessing its growth,” so that people may enjoy its harvest of grain and fruit. In response to this wonder, the earth itself exults in joy: “The pastures of the wilderness overflow, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sing together for joy.”

Why do the hills “gird themselves with joy”? One possible answer: The earth puts on a mantle of happiness in response to the Lord’s blessing. In the Anchor Bible series volume *Psalms II: 51-100*, Mitchell Dahood, S.J., a Scripture scholar, translated that same line as follows: “Visit the earth, make her skip with mirth.” The visitation of God leads to joy (as it will for Mary and Elizabeth in the Gospel of Luke’s story of the Visitation). This is why the hills gird themselves in joy and the valleys sing: in praise of God’s blessing, of God’s visitation.

Is there a more joyful passage in the psalms? The earth cannot contain its joy over the wonders of the God

who created it. It is hard to read this without feeling a little of the happiness that the psalmist must have felt when he wrote it around the time of King David, 1,000 years before Christ.

Preceding those beautiful lines is this one: “You make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.” Father Dahood offers a more playful translation: “Make the twinkling stars of dawn and dusk shout for joy!” He notes that in ancient times the stars were thought of as the source of rain. Thus, the exaltation of the stars sends forth showers on Israel. It is strange, and strangely wonderful, to think of



You visit the earth and water it,  
you greatly enrich it;  
the river of God is full of water;  
you provide the people with grain,  
for so you have prepared it.  
You water its furrows abundantly,  
settling its ridges,  
softening it with showers,  
and blessing its growth.  
You crown the year with your bounty;  
your wagon tracks overflow with richness.  
The pastures of the wilderness overflow,  
the hills gird themselves with joy,  
the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,  
the valleys deck themselves with grain,  
they shout and sing together for joy.

—Psalm 65:9-13

naturally from gratitude to God.

One obvious example of this is the relatively straightforward Psalm 65, which most scholars identify as a prayer of thanksgiving for an abundant harvest (or, say a few scholars, a prayer for rain). Let us look at this passage in greater detail, as a way of revealing its joyful undertones.

Psalm 65 praises God for three things: first, for making Zion a place for the holy people, where their sins are forgiven; second, for overcoming the primordial waters (water could be a terrifying thing for ancient peoples, connected as it was with floods and drownings) that had covered the

the earth and the heavens shouting for joy, and in their joy nourishing humanity.

## A Happy Earth

Now, you may live nowhere near a meadow or a valley or a pasture. (When I look out my window in New York, for example, I do not see any meadows, valleys or pastures. I cannot even see any trees or grass, just the brick wall of a neighboring building!) But I will bet you know something of that feeling the psalm described. That is, it may not be all that strange for the psalmist to write of the earth having human feelings. How else could the psalmist speak not only of what he was seeing around him (the glorious vision of the earth's richness) but also of what he felt inside of him (gratitude)?

Sometimes when you are happy, you feel that you might burst—in song, in praise, in thanksgiving. You feel covered in delight. You “gird yourself with joy.” And when a happiness-inducing event occurs in your life the world around you seems changed, transformed. Things around you look different. The earth itself feels happier.

A few years ago, I found myself on an eight-day retreat at a Jesuit retreat house in Gloucester, Mass. The retreat house is located right on the Atlantic Ocean and is also only a few hundred yards away from a freshwater pond. It is one of the

most beautiful spots you could imagine. The place teems with wildlife and all manner of trees and flowers.

For several days I was praying about a difficult problem in my life. Suddenly I had a wonderful insight that cleared everything up. This I ascribed to the working of grace. After I spoke about it with my spiritual director, I walked outside the house to get a little fresh air. As I walked I noticed that things seemed to look different. On that cold and clear winter's New England day, the sky seemed bluer, and the snow whiter, than they had been just a few hours before. The earth seemed, well, happier.

In reality, of course, there was no physical change in my surroundings. The weather had not altered at all. (I had been outside not long before my meeting.) Nor had someone scrubbed the sky or bleached the snow. Rather, I was able to notice the beauty around me more easily. My happiness enabled me to focus less on myself and more on the world around me. My surroundings seemed girded with joy. Perhaps the writer of Psalm 65 once had a similar experience.

Sometimes the earth even seems to share its joy. Now I realize I am, like the psalmist, anthropomorphizing the earth, but so be it. There are few things that cheer me up as much as seeing the countryside. When I am out of doors, or even catch sight of trees or flowers from the window of a car

or train, I am filled with a strange sort of joy. Sometimes I wonder if we are hard-wired to respond to the sight of nature. Seeing a flowering field or autumn leaves or the winter sky has an immediate calming effect on me. And a “joying” one, too.

By ascribing the human experience of joy to the earth, the psalmist may be describing several experiences at once: first, his gratitude for the abundance of the land; second, his idea of the gratitude that the earth, a divine creation, must have for God; third, his gratitude for the blessings of his own life. So along with him, and the land, we “shout and sing together for joy.”

The psalms of praise, like Psalm 65, which have nourished believers for thousands of years, are filled with joy, delight and gratitude. Even happiness.

So, in the end, many of the psalms are not so depressing after all. They are songs of joy. And maybe Monty Python's God did not know his Bible as well as he should have. **A**

### ON THE WEB

A video introduction to Father Martin's new e-book, *Together on Retreat*. [americamagazine.org/video](http://americamagazine.org/video)

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# Building Bridges

Governing the Holy See in a pluralistic and globalized world

BY MIGUEL H. DIAZ

**P**ope Francis, the new holder of the title Pontifex Maximus—the great bridge-builder—faces the difficult task of bridging the divide that exists today among persons and nations of diverse human experiences, and between the world of secular rationality and the world of religious belief. During his pastoral visit to the United States in 2008, Pope Benedict XVI spoke of the present moment as a crossroads marked by increased interdependence among persons and nations, yet paradoxically also characterized by polarization, conflict and divisions. The speech he delivered at Westminster Hall in London in 2010, considered among his most important speeches with respect to foreign policy, underscored how the church and society needed to enter “into a profound and ongoing dialogue, for the good of our civilization.” As the shepherd of the world’s 1.2 billion Catholics, as a world religious leader and as the sovereign head of the Holy See, the new pope will inherit this global context and challenge.

Now that the white smoke has cleared the top of the Sistine Chapel, the newly elected pope will need to strike the right balance with respect to pastoral, diplomatic and managerial responsibilities. As a pastor, he will need to step out of Vatican City in acts of solidarity toward persons marked by great pain and suffering. The new pope will need to redouble the Holy See’s efforts to reach out to the victims of sexual abuse and attend to the cries of the poor, immigrants, those suffering in conflict and war-torn areas, and

others who experience marginalization and rejection within the church and society as a result of gender, sexual orientation, physical disabilities or other human conditions. As a diplomat, the pope will need to cultivate deep listening skills to engage the increased diversity of opinions and the complex, hybrid and fluid nature of human identity that defines the signs of our time. As a manager, he will be well served by



**BETWEEN POPES:** Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, in black, Vatican secretary of state, officially took over as camerlengo on Feb. 28.

justly, inclusively and wisely administering the financial and human resources available within his papal household and throughout the global church.

Gathering around himself a diverse and competent group of leaders and entrusting them with responsibilities related to the governance of the church might be the keys to success for a leader with such an extensive network of relations and a multilateral agenda. Choosing good collaborators would also be a first step in restoring international confidence in Vatican diplomacy, which in recent years has suffered from poor administration. Although the pope will continue to govern from the eternal city, he will need to look less to the past and ancient Roman rulers and more to the present and future as sharing and cooperation increasingly become the model for our world’s servant leaders.

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**MIGUEL H. DIAZ**, former U.S. ambassador to the Holy See, is the University Professor of Faith and Culture at the University of Dayton, Ohio.

PHOTO: CNS/SERVIZIOfOTOGRAFICO/CFP

## A Community of Nations

The new pope will also need to work closely with the community of nations in sustaining and promoting stable democracies and defending the fundamental human rights enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Partnering with other nations on specific foreign policy objectives will require great diplomatic skill on the part of the Holy See, given manifold and often contrasting cultural, social, political, religious and economic interests. Notwithstanding this challenge, I was often reminded during my tenure as ambassador that popes have been engaged in some form of diplomatic activity with foreign leaders since the Council of Nicaea in 325. With the weight of history and tradition behind him, with practical wisdom at his side and with competent persons within the Secretariat of State empowered to make prudential judgments, the new pope can secure a place at the table in five crucial areas related to foreign policy: 1) the defense of human dignity and fundamental human rights, 2) development and humanitarian assistance, 3) the global experience of migrations, 4) conflict resolution and 5) environmental protection.

*The defense of human dignity and fundamental human rights.* The Holy See's insistence on the universality and indivisibility of human rights and its objection to what it terms "new rights" will require deepening its diplomatic engagement. In pursuing conversations relative to the fundamental question of whether human rights are universal because a majority of countries recognize them or because of an ethical claim that lies prior to their recognition by states, the new pope will face some stormy waters. Navigating between its strong and venerable tradition of defending the fundamental dignity of all human persons and what the Holy See characterizes as "new rights," especially related to gender and human sexuality, will not come easily.

Ongoing conversation with the community of nations has been indispensable to confronting human suffering, advancing the cause of justice and defending and protecting the fundamental dignity of numerous marginalized persons. On one hand this conversation continues to express the Holy See's concern to enshrine the "right to excess" (an escalation of demands that becomes unlimited and indiscriminate) and, on the other hand, respects and takes into account the increasing number of human rights advocates within this community that would argue that explicitly and

intentionally promoting these so-called "new rights" might open new possibilities to bridge existing policy differences. Beyond these concerns, many will expect the new pope to continue the work of his predecessor and raise his voice in defense of religious freedom throughout the world, the dignity of human life at various stages and under various social, economic, cultural and political threats, and the protection of vulnerable persons against human trafficking.

*Development and humanitarian assistance.* A wide range of global challenges loom large on the horizon: the global economic crisis, war and conflict, global health and the likelihood of confronting more natural disasters. With its global network of educators, humanitarian agencies and health care providers, the church is strategically situated to partner to address the contemporary needs of the human family. Through organizations like Caritas Internationalis, Catholic hospitals, Catholic universities and numerous lay-led communities, the new pope can multiply his capacity to listen to the needs of the human family and respond to future natural and human-caused disasters.

*The global experience of migrations.* This age has been described as the age of migrations. The International Organization for Migration estimates that there are about 214 million migrants today; one of out of every 33 persons in the world is a migrant. Through its pontifical councils, especially those that address the care of migrants and engage in cultural activities and interreligious dialogue, the new pope will have valuable resources for understanding the diversity encountered in every corner of our world, which all too often has been associated with violence and confrontation. At a time when cultural, religious and other human differences have become walls separating communities rather than bridges of opportunities for encountering others and their distinctive otherness, the new pope will need to devote much effort to foster oneness out of the catholicity that characterizes the church and society.

*Conflict resolution.* An endless cycle of conflict and violence prevails in many parts of Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Asia, South America and North America. In particular, violence against women and girls has reached epidemic proportions. Studies estimate that up to 70 percent of women experience physical or sexual violence from men during their lifetime. Women and girls are also more likely to be victims of human trafficking, homicide and genital mutilation. Strengthening the Holy See's advocacy on behalf

## Strengthening the Holy See's advocacy on behalf of women and girls, and supporting more policies that promote their dignity, would draw immediate international praise.

of women and girls and supporting more policies that promote their dignity, participation and leadership within church and society would certainly draw immediate international praise.

In addition, the church is justifiably concerned about the future of Christian minorities in the Middle East. The new pope faces unresolved tensions in Syria and several countries in Africa, the possibility of the world confronting a nuclear Iran and failure so far to promote lasting peace in the Middle East through an Israeli-Palestinian accord. Redoubling efforts to engage in interreligious dialogue and fostering authentic relationships among Christians, Muslims and Jews for the sake of advancing peace and the common good should be a primary foreign policy objective of the new pope.

*Environmental protection.* Dealing with the global environmental crisis should make the top of the list for the new pope. As Pope Benedict XVI argued in his 2010 World Day of Peace message, cultivating peace and protecting creation go hand in hand. The Vatican has consistently raised concerns about climate change, the need for sustainable energy sources, shortage of potable water, deforestation and desertification. Reaching consensus on regulations necessary to protect the environment has not been easy due to

competing socio-political and economic interests. If the new pope uses the power of the papacy through networks of Catholic institutions and appeals to other religious leaders to leverage international legislation on behalf of the environment, significant progress might occur in this area.

With the strong increase in the Catholic population of in sub-Saharan Africa, steady growth in both Asia-Pacific and North America (especially among Latino and Latinas in the United States) and with Latin America overtaking Europe as the most Catholic region of the world, the man

who has stepped into the shoes of St. Peter will need to exceed his predecessors' and the Roman Curia's engagement with the global south. Issues of social justice, especially the ongoing discrepancy between richer and poorer peoples and nations, will need to be addressed. The exercise of power, privilege and the disproportionate influence of some interest groups in the church will also need his critical examination.

Exercising the Petrine ministry in the image of the triune God who rules with, through and in others would be music to the ears of so many people around the world who have become disillusioned with the failure of ecclesial and political leaders to thoughtfully, constructively, inclusively and creatively govern the institutions entrusted to their care. **A**

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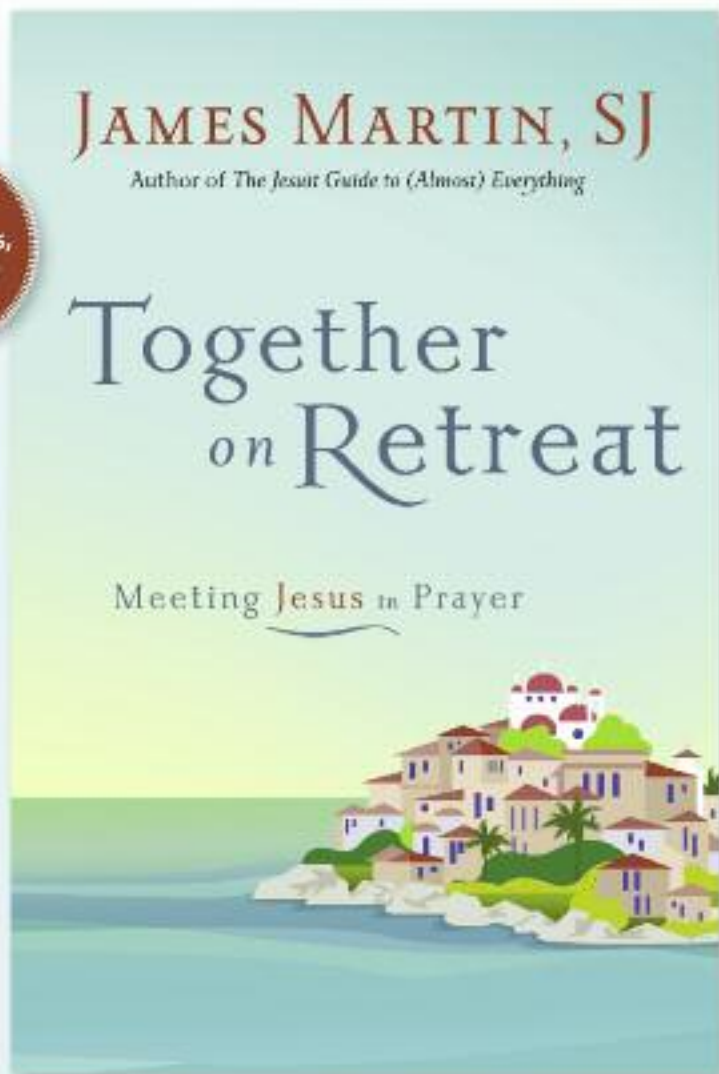
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FILM | JOHN ANDERSON

## HUNGER FOR CHANGE

*The urgent message of 'A Place at the Table'*

“Close-knit” and “desperate” are terms used to describe Collbran, Colo., the very white, very western town featured in **A Place at the Table**, the revelatory new documentary about hunger in the United States. Collbran serves its movie well: Girdled by the Rockies, rustic and charming, the town has God in its heart and a gnawing in its stomach. Despite its veneer of normality, Collbran is full of people who cannot get enough to eat and, blessedly, a surfeit of people who want to help and do so.

Just what, exactly, constitutes normality anymore in these United States

is what “A Place of the Table” tries to get its audience to wrap its head around. It is a movie that speaks to the once unspeakable—that America cannot feed itself—although a reviewer in *The New York Times* said the film reveals “little that a moderately informed viewer won’t already know.” Really? This presumes that most people are already aware of the following: that 50 million Americans—one out of four of them children—currently suffer “food insecurity,” i.e. an uncertainty about where the next meal is coming from; that a sizable portion of people otherwise eligible for U.S. military service are considered unfit due to

improper nutrition; that the corporate welfare Congress happily ladles into the trough of agribusiness each year helps keep fast food affordable and healthy produce increasingly unattainable; that obesity is an outgrowth of poverty; and that hunger is not limited to single mothers on food stamps in Philadelphia. It is part of the undernourished fabric of life in Collbran, Colo.

The film, directed by Kristi Jacobson and Lori Silverbush, is full of statistics and catchy graphics and some terrific music by The Civil Wars and by the film’s music producer, T-Bone Burnett (even if he insists on imposing all-too-predictable bottleneck-guitar riffs on the movie when it visits Mississippi). It also has interviews: We hear from Tom Colicchio, who is a celebrity chef and hunger



PHOTO COURTESY OF MAGNOLIA PICTURES

Barbie Izquierdo and children in “A Place at the Table.”

activist (he is also married to Silverbush and is one of the film's executive producers); from the food-policy writer Raj Patel (author of *Stuffed and Starved*); from Marion Nestle, a long-time professor of public health and nutrition; and with Billy Shore, the head of Share Our Strength, the organization behind the No Kid Hungry campaign, whose spokesman is the actor Jeff Bridges.

It is a curious moment when Bridges enters the film; all kinds of things become clear. One is that an Oscar-winning actor can deliver a much better sales pitch than most of the film's other on-screen evangelists, especially when that actor has been devoting himself to the hunger issue for more than 30 years. But Bridges's matter-of-fact pronouncements, which are stirring, also make a somewhat depressing statement about public discourse in the United States, whether it is about childhood hunger or anything else—namely, that it is almost impossible to get traction in this country by making a moral argument about public policy.

A fatal mistake would have been for "A Place at the Table" (formerly titled "Finding North," after the song by The Civil Wars that bookends the movie) to suggest that anyone is entitled to anything. The filmmakers avoid this, almost religiously. As is pointed out, one of the reasons hunger goes unnoticed in this country is that the people suffering are ashamed. For all the self-serving, elitist blather about welfare cheats and 47 percenters sucking at the public teat, very few Americans are immune to the humiliation that accompanies having to ask anyone for anything. Which is why the movie is so valuable: It brings a problem out of a closet whose door is virtually nailed shut—not by those at fault, but by their victims.

When Bridges begins to frame the issue as one of national security or patriotism or even national ego—

What kind of country do you want? he asks, one in which very fourth child goes to bed hungry?—you can feel the walls of resistance collapsing. Frame the problem in terms of its cost, in



other words, and you may have a winning argument. It costs the United States when its people go unfed. There are long-term costs to health, productivity and education when a country allows its people to go unfed. It is slightly shameful, but when "A Place at the Table" implies that the poor should be fed because it is merely the right thing to do, one can feel the unconverted finding their escape route out of the argument.

This recognizes the state of American political thinking circa 2013, despite all the alleged Christianity occupying the center ring of our political circus—little of which recognizes the call to do unto others, or sell what you own and give the money to the poor, or the spiritual balm to be found within the Gospel of Matthew ("I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink..."). Jesus said the poor will always be with us. So why bother?

The devoutly Catholic and unlikely disciple Stephen Colbert recently put it rather succinctly: "If this is going to be a Christian nation that doesn't help the poor, either we have to pretend that Jesus was just as selfish as we are, or we've got to acknowledge that He commanded us to love the poor and serve the needy without condition and then admit that we just don't want to do it."

Smartly, "A Place at the Table" does not lean on Stephen Colbert or Christ to make its arguments, but it does use its people to great effect. Rosie, a sweet-faced fifth-grader from Collbran, was falling behind in school until her teacher, Leslie Nichols, spotted in the girl something she once experienced herself: an inability to learn, due to a nagging hunger. Rosie, thankfully, now gets food deliveries via Nichols, who volunteers with Pastor Bob Wilson of the Plateau Valley Assembly of God in Collbran, a church whose food-bank efforts are enormous. (For Rosie, getting the food delivery is like Christmas.) The point made repeatedly, however, is that all the private-sector charity in the world—all the thousands and thousands of points of light that a government might hope will fill its shoes—are not the solution to a national problem rooted in unwise and even corrupt food and welfare policies. Barbie Izquierdo, a funny, articulate, unemployed single mom in Philadelphia, gets a job and loses her benefits, leaving her in worse shape than before. It is hard to pull yourself up by the bootstraps when the government is

confiscating your sandals. It should not be cheaper to feed a family at McDonald's than at the produce section of a supermarket. But as the documentary tells us—and this really is no secret—farm subsidies support the wrong foods for the wrong reasons, and the government, a government supposedly of, for and by the people, is not on our side when it comes to food. "A Place at the Table," meanwhile, is on the side of the angels—even if it takes great care not to mention them.

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

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# A Fool in the ‘Reign’

Contrary to popular opinion, I think it's sometimes good to be a fool. Most people approach foolishness in one of two ways. The first is to avoid any such scenario at all costs. The specter of failure and embarrassment haunts the professional, emotional and social lives of millions, quietly hindering people from sharing their opinions or speaking up in front of others.

The second is to exploit one's potential foolishness to an extreme degree. While those who wish to avoid appearing foolish might recoil at the thought of public humiliation, hundreds of people have risen as stars of YouTube, reality television and daytime talk shows by acting as foolish as possible.

Neither of these approaches shows well what I have in mind—something that could be called evangelical foolishness, becoming “God's fool,” a term applied to St. Francis of Assisi. There is perhaps no better time for a Franciscan friar's first column in **America** than the issue dated April 1, the traditional day of fools, right after the election of the new pope, who will be known as Francis. St. Francis might rightly be regarded as the patron saint of fools. He might also offer us a surprising, if uneasy, Christian virtue between two foolish vices.

As Stephen Bullivant reminded us in this magazine a few weeks ago (2/11), the very core of Christianity appears “foolish” to the world. This

was a truth that St. Paul recognized early in his ministry to first-century Gentiles, who could not easily reconcile the God of Jesus Christ with their Hellenistic worldview (1 Cor 1:23). The expectations of their time and culture did not smoothly align with the preaching of the incarnate Word or the crucified and risen Christ. Likewise, the ethical implications of the words and deeds of Jesus for those disciples who would follow him were not always in step with the standard practices and behaviors of their day, just as they aren't always easily compatible with those of our time.

This is where evangelical foolishness comes into play. Francis earned the title because of his allegiance to the Gospel over against the culture of his rearing. He refused to accept money in the newly emerging merchant society because he saw how this nascent system began valuing people according to their wealth. He refused in other ways to participate in the power imbalances of his day because he recognized that following in the footprints of Christ meant prioritizing solidarity and relationship with all people instead of pursuing the accumulation of personal wealth and power.

Francis' commitment to this way of being in the world, what he would call the *vita evangelica* (“Gospel life”), appeared foolish to his peers in Assisi. He was at first mocked and called insane for his new lifestyle and commitments.

Francis was a certain type of fool, a fool whose life and actions revealed Gospel wisdom.

I have often heard other Franciscans say: “If Francis applied to enter religious life today, he'd never make it beyond the psychological exam!” Even retrospectively, Francis is dismissed as a “madman.”

The risk of appearing foolish never stopped him from embracing the Gospel as best he could, protesting the injustices of certain social systems and letting nothing get in the way of his relationship with others. The virtue between the two foolish vices of avoidance and exploitation is the embrace of evangelical foolishness

Francis was a fool whose life and actions revealed Gospel wisdom.

to become one of “God's fools.”

As Paul makes clear to the Corinthians, being a Christian means appearing mad, foolish and out of step with the rest of society at times. This is because a Christian's priorities aren't measured by popular culture, but according to the reign of God that Jesus preached and modeled. It is the counterintuitive and gratuitous foolishness of God's love revealed in the healing of the broken and broken-hearted, forgiving the unforgivable and loving the unlovable.

Becoming a fool for God's sake is not something to avoid out of fear or exploit for personal gain, but a vocation to embrace in revealing the love of God in our lives. Are we up to the challenge?

Happy April Fools' Day!

---

DANIEL P. HORAN, O.F.M., is the author of several books, including *Dating God: Live and Love in the Way of St. Francis*. He blogs at [DatingGod.org](http://DatingGod.org).

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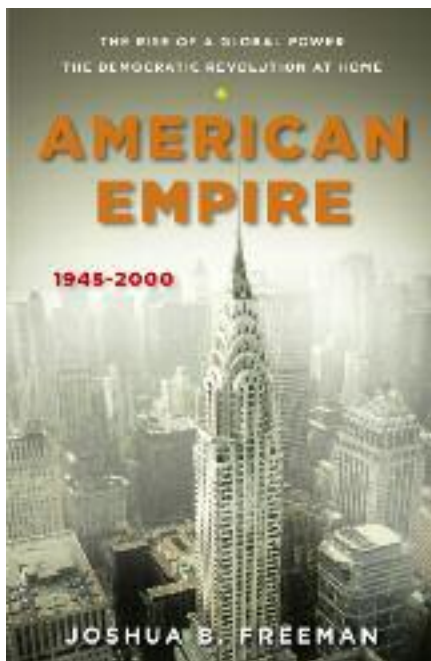
## AMERICAN EMPIRE

**The Rise of a Global Power, the Democratic Revolution at Home 1945–2000**

By Joshua B. Freeman  
Viking Adult. 512p \$36

In writing *American Empire*, Joshua Freeman handed himself a daunting assignment: to chronicle, and make sense of, the seismic forces that rocked and reshaped the United States and its place in the world over the turbulent decades stretching from the end of World War II to nearly the present day—in less than 500 pages.

The reader's mind reels considering all the historic ground he has to cover, fast: from the civil rights movement to the beginning and end of the cold war, from Vietnam and the counterculture to the Reagan revolution. The rise of the Rust Belt and the Sun Belt, and the warp-speed spread of suburban living. Watergate. The terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The supersizing—literally and figuratively—of a nation whose postwar wealth and power transformed it into a corporate, consumer and military global empire. But, Freeman stresses, an empire roiling from within over race, the role of government and what



its cultural values should be.

Freeman, who teaches history at Queens College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, appears to be an author on a mission in these pages, not merely a flat-toned, traditional textbook writer.

This is American history framed by a strong point of view. Throughout *American Empire*, Freeman is not shy when it comes to describing his dismay with leading postwar political actors and many of the forces that have given us the country we have today.


He laments the emergence of multinational corporations and the successful strategies they invoked to marginalize labor unions; he is blunt about the long shadow that racial strife has cast over the country; and he is unsparing on the economic stagnation of the 1970s and the brand of conservatism it wrought. Freeman seems to chide every postwar president for what he views as their failure to bring full equity to American life during the era or for buckling to corporate power or military hegemony. But he saves his strongest ire for two Republicans—Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush—and the deep imprint their policies and political beliefs left on the nation and the world.

Of Reagan he writes: “He seemed to believe the country to be blessed, exempt from the need to consider the long-term effects of its policies and way of life. In this, he represented the spirit that had come to animate elite circles, particularly in the corporate world, as probity, foresight and stewardship were nudged aside in the quest for quick profits and indulgent consumption.” At another point in the book, to symbolize that same point, he notes that Nancy Reagan carried a \$1,600 handbag to her husband's inaugural.

So this is not an American history book you can expect to see on the shelves at the Heritage Foundation.

Nonetheless, it is hard to regard Freeman's effort in *American Empire* entirely as a polemic, or just a lefty's screed. Sometimes he cannot help but marvel at the nation's remarkable postwar evolution, showing a storyteller's eye for the kind of small, vivid details that speak volumes about big national events and illuminate how profoundly American culture changed or convulsed during these decades.

Take, for example, the soaring number of calories in an order of McDonald's French fries. They tripled from 1960 to 2000, Freeman notes, a



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telling sign of the junk-food-fueled obesity epidemic that burst into view in recent decades and has become a national public health crisis.

Or how during the 1970s, in the wake of court-imposed busing to promote racial diversity, Boston's public schools swiftly went from being 60 percent white to 37 percent white—a searing statistic that shows how vexing questions of race gripped America

throughout the era before and even after the triumphs of the Civil Rights Movement.

And who knew that during the Vietnam War, the U.S. Army set up 40 small plants there to make ice cream for American soldiers facing a determined enemy holed up in jungle caves with no such creature comforts?

Those anecdotes and others Freeman recounts make parts of

*American Empire* a memorable mural of American life in the second half of the 20th century. But Freeman is rushing to write about so many disparate trends and seminal events since 1945 that at times the narrative becomes a jumble, moving over so much turf too quickly for its own good. In the span of just a few pages, he bounces somehow from Jack Kerouac's iconic *On the Road* to dam building in the West and later from the rock-and-roller Chuck Berry to Rachel Carson's groundbreaking environmental book *Silent Spring*. It is a dizzying ride.

It can also be a depressing one, especially for readers accustomed to history books by authors with the habit of seeing even the county's most bitter struggles or bad habits nonetheless as a rocky path to forming a more perfect union. At times, Freeman even seems to scold Americans in the post-war era for not demanding more of their political leaders or for falling prey to rampant consumer excess. What's more, the America that Freeman sees at the end of the 20th century is a "can't do imperial power, an incompetent, blustering, sometimes brutal nation."

To readers skeptical toward Freeman's tone and emphasis in *American Empire*, one supposes he would say: The truth hurts. There is, after all, no doubting that as the United States begins a new century, it is saddled with deep, divisive political and cultural problems that were either born or stoked in the decades that are his focus. He has written a provocative but sometimes grating and too gloomy book, with biases not hard to find. Yet *American Empire* also serves as a stark challenge, a call for a country that perhaps can learn from its mistakes and mindset at home and abroad in the last century and come closer to fulfilling its grand promise in this one.

RENE SANCHEZ is the managing editor of *The Star Tribune* in Minneapolis.

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BART JONES

# IMMIGRATION'S BODY COUNT

## SHOWDOWN IN THE SONORAN DESERT Religion, Law, and the Immigration Controversy

By Ananda Rose  
Oxford University Press. 208p \$29.95

In the last decade or so, more than 2,000 migrants have died in the Arizona desert while crossing from Mexico into the United States. Most die from lack of water during the treacherous, days-long trek, including one woman named Yolanda González, who gave her baby her last sip of water before perishing herself.

These deaths are the most egregious effect of a U.S. immigration system and border policy that is almost universally decried across the political spectrum as dysfunctional. And as Ananda Rose points out, the deaths in the desert raise a moral question for those who call themselves “people of faith and conscience.” Does one help migrants who are breaking the law by entering the country illegally, if their lives are in danger?

This is not just a moral-academic question. Currently, to do this in the United States is in many cases a crime.

Rose, who holds a doctorate from Harvard Divinity School, spent weeks in the rough and tumble field on the Arizona-Mexico border searching out the answer to this question. She gets the perspectives of everyone from nuns running scruffy border town soup kitchens that serve desperate migrants to gun-toting members of groups like

the Minutemen Project who try to augment official U.S. border patrols by mounting their own informal posses to track down “illegals.” In doing so, she attempts to tackle one of the most urgent yet intractable national problems.

Like others before her, Rose points out that U.S. border policies have had the same effect as the U.S. war on drugs in Latin America. Cracking down on the problem in one area has merely shifted it to another. A series of federal operations, starting in the mid-1990s—“Gatekeeper” in California, “Hold the Line” in Texas, “Safeguard” in Arizona—has not stopped illegal immigration. Instead, it has

pushed it into the most desolate—and dangerous—areas of the Arizona desert.

The result of this “militarization” of the border and “funnel effect,” she says, has been a spiraling number of deaths.

Into the breach have stepped several religiously inspired organizations, including No More Deaths and Humane Borders. For them, the answer is clear. Their Judeo-Christian beliefs dictate that they must provide “radical hospitality” to the “stranger” in their midst. This is especially urgent when these migrants are facing triple-digit temperatures in the Sonoran desert, little food or water and “coyotes” or smugglers who rape women migrants so commonly that

many take birth control pills before making the perilous trip, knowing what lies ahead.

The groups have installed water stations throughout the desert, or given basic medical aid or a ride to a hospital to dehydrated migrants whose lives seemed in danger. Some of the activists have faced criminal prosecution for their actions because it is a crime to “harbor” an illegal immigrant, for instance, by transporting him or her somewhere.

On the other side of the ledger, Rose explores the thoughts of the anti-illegal immigration crowd who, while expressing sympathy for migrants in distress, contend that laws must be obeyed to avert chaos. Offering help to the migrants, they say, merely encourages more illegal immigration.

They point out that they have taken casualties as well. In 2010 a rancher named Robert Krentz Jr. was shot to death, apparently by Mexican drug smugglers.

The mess on the border, of course, could be partially resolved by a more sane immigration policy, according to Rose and others. Princeton professor Douglas Massey, a leading researcher on Mexican migration patterns, says migrants from Mexico and farther south have been circulating for decades into and out of the United States to work on farms and factories. Some guest worker programs in the past virtually eliminated illegal immigration, he says, but since the 1960s, after abuses with the “bracero” program were exposed, this type of broad-based program was discontinued.

Rose doesn't have any magical solutions beyond some proposals already on the table, and urges a grand dialogue involving everyone from law enforcement officials to human rights groups to the migrants themselves. While exploring all viewpoints, she clearly favors the



### ON THE WEB

Read about this month's  
Catholic Book Club selection.  
[americamagazine.org/cbc](http://americamagazine.org/cbc)

“people of faith” who are reaching out to the migrants.

Parts of her book read like a doctoral dissertation, with some awkward term-paper-like language, and can be repetitive. But she provides a good overview of the clashing viewpoints involved in the debacle in the desert.

CYNTHIA-MARIE O'BRIEN

## COMMUNING WITH GOD

### HELP, THANKS, WOW The Three Essential Prayers

By Anne Lamott  
Riverhead Books. 112p \$17.95

“God can handle honesty and prayer begins an honest conversation,” the spiritual writer Anne Lamott asserts. Moments when she approached, even accepted it, honesty occurred when prayer was spontaneous, inarticulate.

She brought me back to my own experiences. In a dark emergency room, I waited for morning light's arrival, with its evocation of resurrection. After revelation of a brain tumor, I thought how wrong I had been about God's plans for me. I was devastated, nearly naked, left with truth so many plans had denied: all was God's will. Control was illusionary. God and his deputies, like the surgeon whose tools would open my skull, would decide life or death. How light I felt: strange, sweet, terrible relief. Years later, lost on a street corner, mind unraveling into madness, my gaze instinctively went to the sky, to God. I still understood he was there. In that there was hope.

Despite intimate stories similar to mine, Lamott's *Help, Thanks, Wow* never quite achieves the honesty expected; sarcastic humor and dense themes not unpacked undercut trust in her disclosure. Flippancy—her Presbyterian pastor being “paid to have faith”—distracts from the question of how to find the light she

Until the U.S. resolves its immigration mess, the opportunities and conundrums for people of faith who want to try to save lives in the desert seem likely only to expand.

BART JONES *has covered religion and immigration for Long Island Newsday.*

describes as grace. Fascinating questions—Can humans handle honesty in conversation with God? How can we have conversations not answered in language or conducted according to our comprehension of what interaction means?—receive short shrift in loosely linked anecdotes. As Catholics, mystery is central to our relationship with God; profound questions cannot always lead to certainty. But what disappoints is that Lamott does not throw her bold, daring, capable spirit into addressing how we identify, let alone respond to God in the conversation.

In a rhetorical move characteristic of this book's unsatisfying, intriguing texture, after declaring that help, thanks and wow are the only three prayers she ever needs, Lamott adds this grace note, “besides the silence, the pain and the pause sufficient for me to stop, close my eyes and turn inward.” Grace notes change compositions, and this promises a depth unfulfilled. Three conditions singled out for importance float away, unanchored by sufficient reflection.

Lamott edges in the direction of something extremely urgent and original, the relationship between prayer and mental illness. Whether inten-

tionally or not, she directs us here with a jarring abundance of terms, like “crazy,” “delusional,” “self-obsessed,” “madness,” “crazed,” “anxiety” and “saner.” She deems her atheist parents' life influences “mentally-ill junkies”—yet the tone confuses, as if to deflect a refraction she will not process. She seems playful, as though such individuals would offer poor counsel, but refers to artists with divine talent—among them, Billie Holiday and William Blake.

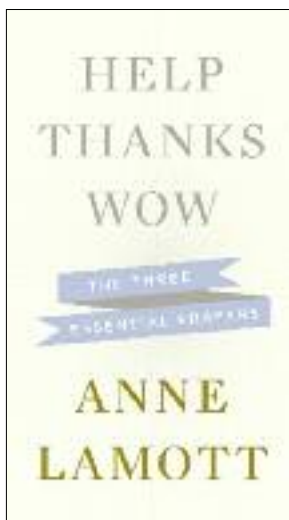
Lamott writes about communing with God in fleeting, abandoned references to mental illness, as explicitly as stating that insanity is one of the three

best conditions in which to pray. This explosive declaration could fuel an entire book, and an examination of its meaning would be a unique contribution to national discussions that currently focus not on habits of mind or on illness as a condition in which to be closer to God, but mainly, unhelpfully, as a precursor to crime or marker of evil. We never find out if Lamott uses words like “crazy” loosely,

disassociated from medical connotations, but for a writer as expert as she is, vocabulary patterns are unlikely to be coincidence.

The book encourages prayer as habit, linking consistent prayer with positive changes in our ability to lead grateful lives. Here one thinks of cognitive behavior therapy and the science of changing brain chemistry by deliberately altering responses to events and purposefully shaping ideas. This connection deepens when we move from realization to transformation, which helps us reframe negative experiences.

Mass is our most comprehensive prayer, a ritual mined for relief and restitution each time we recite its rhythms. What this book argues for is informal



prayers, expressed in any medium, to sustain us beyond formalized worship.

The theme of overcoming difficulties resonates in each transition between chapters. Lamott explains that a shift to grace happens through broken places, leading to thanks. Being in pain is an entry point for the “help, thanks, wow” cycle; the reader clamors for Lamott to share more about the symbiosis between pain and prayer. “Wow” appears mostly as wonder. Lamott’s imagery finally takes hold in her best prose; we shiver with joy, our fingertips feeling the veins of a leaf.

The word *wow* has a very different

sense in American culture—to express horror at loss and shock at pain turned violent. A close reading of this book, however, yields extremely relevant, if incomplete, news and advice. Lamott suggests that prayer is religion’s contribution to maintaining a healthy mind, and it is when we do not know how to pray that we most need to try. On the other hand, honesty, we forget, can be prerequisite, a rough draft, a look to the heavens, a shout in the dark.

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**CYNTHIA-MARIE O'BRIEN** is an assistant director of the Columbia University Writing Center whose writing appears in *Booklist*, *Publishers Weekly* and other reviews.

## CLASSIFIED

### Books

**ADULT FAITH STUDY.** Faith and reason together: [www.WordUnlimited.com](http://www.WordUnlimited.com).

*Surrender: Father Walter Ciszek: Jesuit Priest/Soviet Prisoner*, by Seamus Dockery, 56 pgs., \$15.99. Contact [Xlibris.com](http://Xlibris.com) or (888) 795-4274.

### Positions

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### Seminar

**CARMELITE SUMMER SEMINAR** at the Center for Spirituality, Saint Mary’s College, Notre Dame, IN 46556, will take place June 9-15, 2013, with the theme “Carmel at Prayer: A Surge of the Heart...A Glance toward Heaven.” Speakers at this annual seminar will be: Kevin Culligan, Keith J. Egan, Constance FitzGerald, Mary Fleig, Mary Frohlich, Leopold Glueckert, Fran Horner, Kieran Kavanaugh, Steven Payne and John Welch. For information and registration contact Ms. Kathy Guthrie at (574) 284 4636 or [kguthrie@saintmarys.edu](mailto:kguthrie@saintmarys.edu). Laity, religious and clergy of all faiths are welcome. Week includes daily Eucharist, meditation, lectures and workshops.

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## LETTERS

### Concealed Beliefs

As Catholic lawyers who have filed dozens of civil rights cases, including some under the Voting Rights Act in Texas, we were disappointed in *Of Many Things*, by Matt Malone, S.J. (2/25), especially given Justice Antonin Scalia’s comments two days later in the Shelby County, Ala., case. During oral argument, Justice Scalia presumed, without evidence, that the 98-to-0 vote to reauthorize the Voting Rights Act in the Senate should be construed not as strong support for the continued need for the V.R.A., but to mean that no Senator would vote against the “perpetuation of a racial entitlement.”

After Americans gave their lives to achieve racial equity in voting, the V.R.A. was undeniably passed to stop generations-long officially sanctioned racial discrimination. As such, Justice Scalia’s “racial entitlement” comment can only be construed as derisive, racially charged and based on skewed logic.

In the debate between “original meaning” and “living Constitution” constitutional analyses, Father Malone injudiciously argues, “If Mr. Scalia really wanted to impose his own views, the more subjective ‘living Constitution’ method would be the way to go.” However, given Justice Scalia’s recent comments from the bench, it appears more accurate to assert that “original meaning” is merely a too-clever term meant to conceal the insertion of Justice Scalia’s personal beliefs.

Should Justice Scalia rule that Section 5 of the V.R.A. is unconstitutional, he will have clearly tipped his hand as a judicial activist—regardless of the title of his method of analysis.

GARY BLEDSOE  
ROBERT S. NOTZON  
Austin, Tex.

### Interpreting the Text

I was somewhat surprised to see Father Malone’s defense of Justice

Scalia's "original meaning" interpretation of the Constitution. I am no legal authority, but it seems to me that hermeneutics plays a larger role than Father Malone gives it credit for.

We have only the words of the Constitution to go on, and thus interpretation is necessarily involved in our attempt to understand it. A central tenet of hermeneutics holds that one's *Sitz im Leben* inevitably affects one's interpretation. We can't know how the Constitution would have been understood by its original readers any more than we can know how Shakespeare or the parables of Jesus were received by

their original listeners. But we can attempt to understand it.

Father Malone could have followed the familiar appeal to Scripture and Tradition, the twin bulwarks of church teaching. Scripture says X, Tradition says Y, and both form part of the "teaching" of the church. The courts' role is to interpret the law (Scripture); and their interpretations, in turn, become part of the law (tradition). Both, then, inform the code by which a democratic society chooses to govern its activities. But like tradition, the history of interpretation, the "code," can change as the people who

read (and thus interpret) the texts in their own life situation inevitably change over time.

EDWARD J. DUPUY  
San Antonio, Tex.

### New Ethical Focus

Congratulations to Kevin Clarke on an excellent and timely article, "Job Insecurity" (2/18), about the serious difficulties faced by low-paid workers at Walmart and similar companies. Capitalism in the United States has become more and more defined by huge profits for the lucky few and by all kinds of rationalizations by people—like Walmart's Kory Lundberg—about why it is O.K. for the men and women doing the grunt work to be paid salaries that keep them living below the poverty level.

Various studies show that the middle class in America is gradually collapsing. Just 6.6 percent of workers in private industry are protected by a union, and the era of charismatic union leaders like Cesar Chavez and Mike Quill seem over. Companies put shareholder concerns and executive remuneration ahead of the mass of unrepresented employees, many of whom subsist on wages of less than \$10 an hour.

Church members, especially priests and those further up the ecclesiastical ladder, should provide ethical leadership in this vital area of social justice. Here is a modest proposal to the hierarchy: Leave all sexual prescriptions aside for one year and concentrate on the serious moral imperative of an employee's right to be paid a just and living wage. Put "Humanae Vitae" on the shelf and open up "Mater et Magistra"!

GERRY O'SHEA  
Yonkers, N.Y.


### Meaning of 'Theory'

Re "Getting to Work," by Patricia Ranft (2/18): I was taken aback by the know-nothingist reference to Darwinian evolution as "just a theory." The apparently willful refusal to



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acknowledge that the word “theory,” when used in a scientific context, means something very different (a major conceptual summary) from what it means in ordinary speech (questionably supported speculation) seemed to me to be a gratuitous slap at a topic (Darwinian evolution) that did not bear on the thesis of Professor Ranft’s article.

Does she also disrespect the theory of electromagnetism or the theory of relativity? Does she somehow fail to join the rest of us in living her physical life in conformity with Newton’s (superseded) theories of time, space, matter and gravity, as all the rest of us, who live in a human-scale regime, perforce do? Her lumping-in of evolution with Marxism and Freudianism was a major detraction from her otherwise excellent article.

If you begin to publish regularly articles with such a patent yet pointless anti-intellectual bias, I suggest that you start prefixing them with a warning label.

BILL SALVATORE  
Waters Landing, Md.

### Need All Three

Re “The Noble Enterprise,” by Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl (2/4): The apparent thrust of Cardinal Wuerl’s work is to portray the magisterium as the exclusive work of the episcopacy. The conflict between the episcopal function guaranteeing the validity of doctrine derived and the work of theologians to strengthen the confession of faith strikes me as a conflict regarding power, not authority.

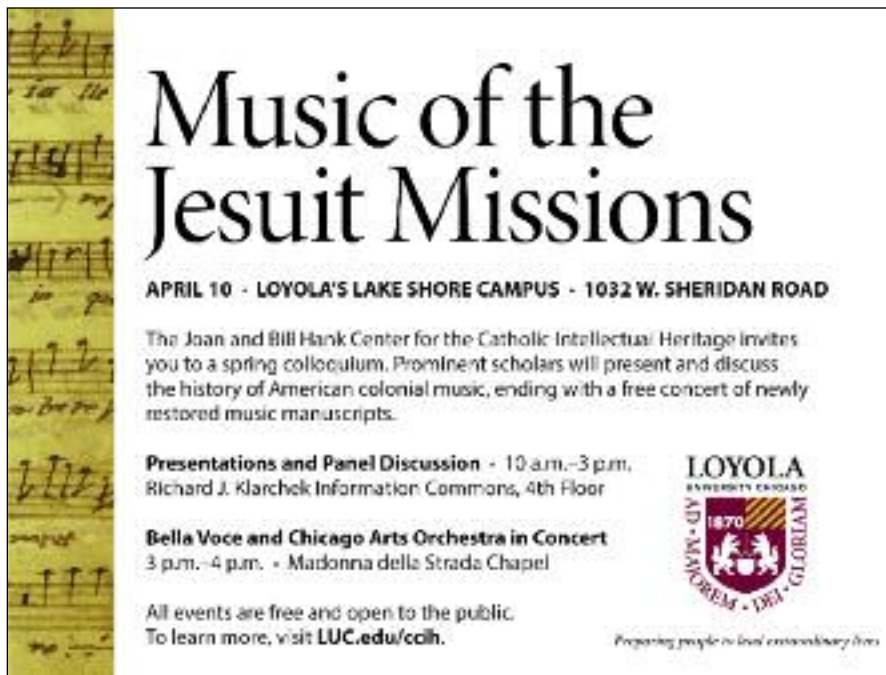
In reality, the argument lacks an essential element: the faith thrives and grows only in the lived experience of the people of God, in which both the

episcopacy and theologians share. The church would be better served were we to understand the magisterium as a three-legged stool. The third leg, most often overlooked in the hubris of the other two legs, is the lived faith of the people of God as they listen to the living word and practice its living tradition. Believers act under the influence of the Spirit for the transformation of the world through the events and efforts of their daily lives. This is called

the *sensus fidelium*.

Were Cardinal Wuerl’s article focused on establishing an effective dialogue among the three legs, it would have opened a productive channel for the new evangelization. As it stands, it is reminiscent of a feudal culture, in which the lord of the castle stands on the wall hurling epithets and anathemas at barbarians invading his domain.

DENNIS KELLER  
Garner, N.C.



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# A Shocking Love

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER (C), APRIL 7, 2013

Readings: Acts 5:12–16; Ps 118: 2–24; Rv 1:9–19; Jn 20:19–31

*“Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed” (Jn 20:29)*

One of the most difficult things for Western Christians to grasp is the reality of the miraculous, which infuses the whole of the New Testament. We labor, more than we know, under the assumptions of a world that is a closed, empirical system from which God is absent. Rudolf Bultmann, the great 20th-century biblical scholar, stated it clearly: “We cannot use electric lights and radios and, in the event of illness, avail ourselves of modern medical and clinical means and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament.”

Claims like this are believed widely today, even by Catholics, but it raises serious issues—primarily, what ought we to do with all the miracles in the New Testament? And if the miraculous is excised from the New Testament, what do we affirm as Christians?

Ben F. Meyer raised a different point in his book *The Aims of Jesus* (1979), asking whether “persons testifying to miracles are by that very fact shown to be incompetent or dishonest or self-deceived, and this without reference to their credentials or to the particulars of the case but by ineluctable a priori law.” This is an important point, for the first Christians who experienced and professed Jesus’ resurrection, who were observers and performers of miracles, did not bear witness to these events as

everyday occurrences but precisely as something out of the ordinary. These acts were understood as signs of God’s divine act of salvation through Jesus Christ, not as party tricks. “If the salvific context is overlooked, the concrete possibility of miracle evaporates,” wrote Meyer. But when we keep in mind the salvific context in which God acted through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have the context in which normal boundaries of human life were shattered on behalf of all humanity. The divine world is opened to us and the miraculous makes a claim on us.

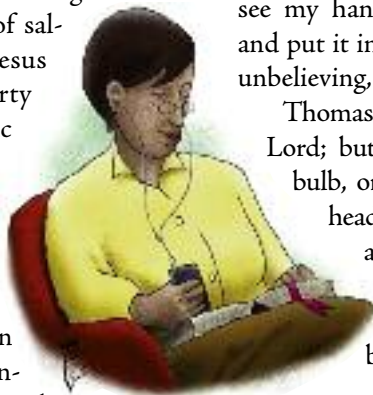
Bultmann’s claim is false, not just because today many people have made their peace with light bulbs and miracles, robotic surgery and Peter’s shadow healing the sick, but because it is false even in the ancient context.

The apostle Thomas’s technology, oil lamps and papyrus, was superior to that which came before, but less advanced than what Bultmann knew and what we have today. It was not Thomas’s technology, better than that of the Bronze Age, that kept him from believing Jesus had been raised from the dead; it was his unwillingness to believe that God would act in such a way to bring about salvation. Technology is a red herring for a world closed off from the divine presence.

Even in the first century, Thomas wanted empirical proof: “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nailmarks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.”

Jesus appeared to him and to the others, passing through locked doors and otherwise breaking down the barriers between spirit and matter, saying to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe.”

Thomas did not touch the risen Lord; but upon seeing him a light bulb, or oil lamp, went off in his head and he said, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus had not broken through the technology of his day, but through the boundaries



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- What challenges me when I try to understand miracles?
- Are there things that I find hard to believe?
- When do I sense the presence of the divine in my life?

Thomas had placed on God’s saving actions.

The very point of the Incarnation is that something new has broken in on humanity, that a world we are tempted to see as closed, with God absent or indifferent, has been shocked open by God’s love for us. Miracles are not intended to titillate or amuse us; they are signs to demonstrate God’s care for us. Those who witnessed them passed them on so that we might believe, even though, or especially because, we have not seen the empirical proofs.

JOHN W. MARTENS

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APRIL 14-19

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Bishop Paride Taban—Founder,  
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#### APRIL 18

##### WWJD ON FACEBOOK?

Jana Bennett—Author, *Aquinas  
on the Web? Doing Theology in  
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YouTube, Wii Play: Theological  
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#### APRIL 19

##### "I WAS IN PRISON & YOU VISITED ME:" SPIRITUALITY & SOCIAL JUSTICE

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