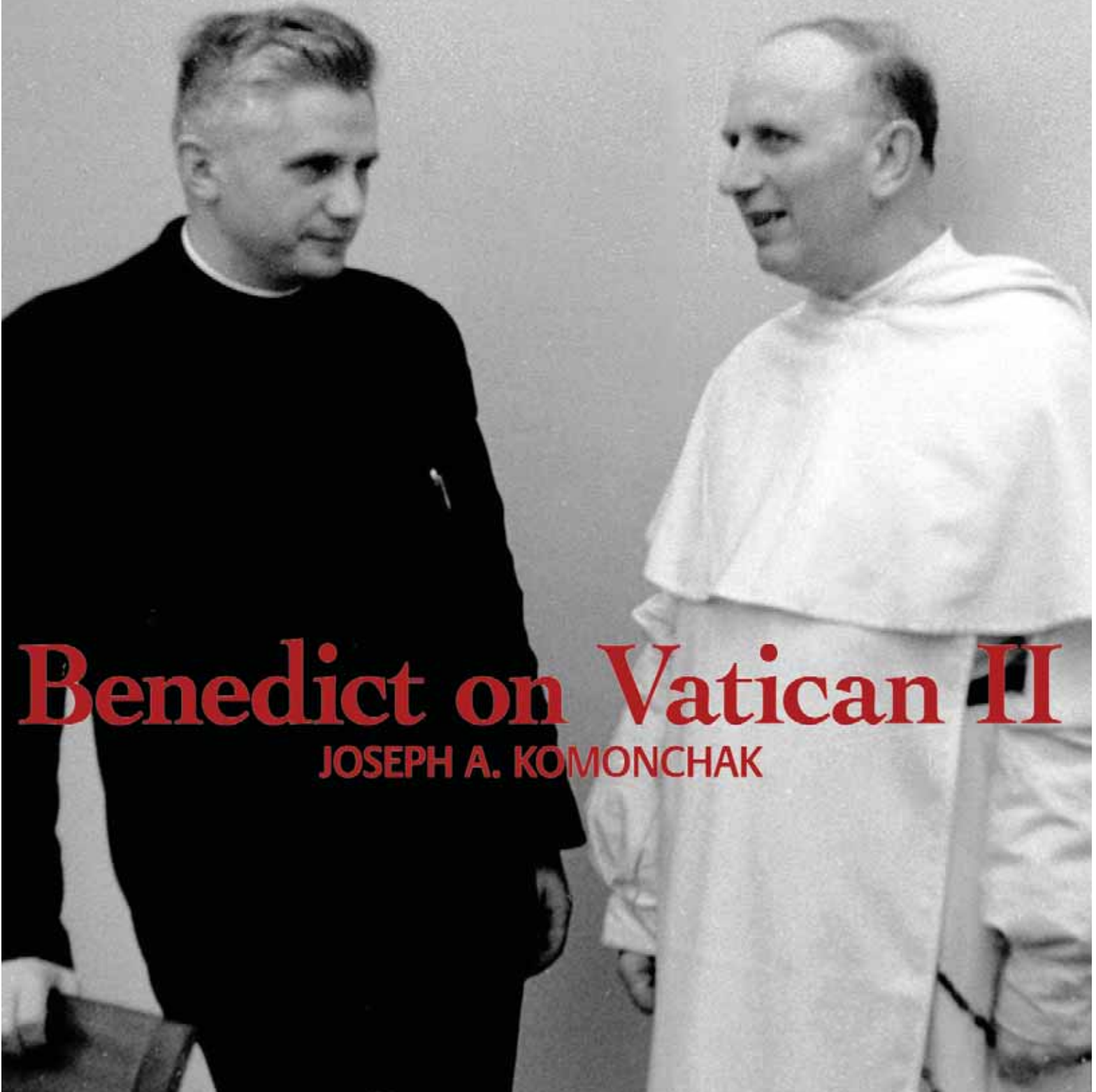


America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

FEB. 2, 2009 \$2.75

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America's
CENTURY
2009



Benedict on Vatican II

JOSEPH A. KOMONCHAK

OF MANY THINGS

The inauguration of Barack Obama as the 44th president of the United States was easily recognized by the nation's citizens as a turning point in our history. More striking, perhaps, was the change it signaled in the way the United States is perceived by the rest of the world. Even before his landslide electoral victory last November, the very fact that an African-American was nominated by his party as their presidential candidate had overturned assumptions about American society that appeared to be widely shared.

Those assumptions, as events have shown, were unfair and superficial. Still, they had a foundation in history, namely the long journey toward racial equality that plunged the nation into civil war and persisted in the decades that followed as former slaves struggled for authentic equality as new citizens with full participation in the nation's economic and educational institutions. The journey was a painful one, through the civil rights marches of the 1960s and the soaring rhetoric and martyrdom of Martin Luther King Jr.

Because of his own multiracial background, President Obama himself can be seen as a transitional figure in the journey toward a post-racial society, but one whose gifts of intellect and language have enabled him to articulate for our nation and the world the meaning of this moment in our national history.

For those of us of a certain age and background, Mr. Obama's assertion that the United States was "ready to lead once more" recalled what the Jesuit theologian John Courtney Murray half a century ago called "the American proposition," the desire to form one society out of diverse communities, *e pluribus unum*. Father Murray liked to say that the foundation of our nation will always be a promise still to be fulfilled. The pursuit of a just society,

where individuals can live out in full measure their personal dignity, will always be unfinished business, a continuing challenge. The nation's ability to influence other nations will always depend on our faithful pursuit of that founding American promise.

President Obama in his inaugural address called for renewed confidence in that promise, casting off old and exhausted ideas and programs and restoring trust in people. The challenges that our new president confronts—an uncertain national and global economy, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, simmering conflicts in the Middle East and an ill-defined network of international terrorists—demand a cautious but confident response. Mr. Obama has made it clear that in meeting these challenges he will pursue a foreign policy based on multi-lateral international collaboration. But in this collaboration, the United States is "ready to lead once more."

How will Mr. Obama's claim to a renewed role of leadership for the United States be received by other nations around the world? Our traditional allies will surely welcome it and keep whatever nervous misgivings they may have to themselves. Some nations that have been cast as adversaries in the past may welcome what they see as a change in Washington's tactics, from military intimidation to international diplomacy. But Mr. Obama's confident promise of an eventual defeat of international terrorism made it clear that the new president had a realistic understanding of the uses of military power, not only to defend the nation but also to persuade other nations of the advantages of diplomacy over military confrontation.

The prayers not only of the citizens of the United States but also of the citizens of the world support our new president, as he has promises to keep.

JOSEPH A. O'HARE

America

PUBLISHED BY JESUITS OF THE UNITED STATES

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Cover The Rev. Joseph Ratzinger, left, with the French Dominican Yves Congar in 1962, during the Second Vatican Council.

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www.americamagazine.org

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Greg Kandra talks about blogging and working in television on our podcast. Plus, Richard Leonard, S.J., on the fantasy films of 2008, and from the archives, F. X. Murphy, C.Ss.R., (right) reports from Vatican II. All at americamagazine.org.



Playing Politics With Religion?

As evidenced by his insightful books, frequent interviews and a lengthy discussion on faith with *Newsweek* in July, President Barack Obama takes his Christianity seriously. He also takes his politics seriously. When it came to the inaugural prayer last week, politics won out.

Last August, Rick Warren, the founding pastor of an evangelical megachurch in California and author of the bestseller *The Purpose Driven Life*, hosted Senator Obama and Senator John McCain at a "Civil Forum" before the election. It was an important event for Obama, who was seeking ways to reach evangelical voters. A few months later, the president-elect tapped Pastor Warren to deliver the opening prayer at his inauguration.

Was this political payback or simply an example of Mr. Obama's laudable outreach to evangelicals? Hard to say, though on a similar topic—whether he would award ambassadorships as political rewards—Mr. Obama said it was "disingenuous" to pretend otherwise. Either way, some Obamaphiles were dismayed: Warren had compared same-sex marriage to child rape, incest and polygamy. Then, a few days before the inauguration, it was announced that Bishop V. Gene Robinson, the openly gay Episcopalian bishop of New Hampshire, would lead a prayer on the Sunday night before the inaugural festivities. Robinson's ordination as bishop in 2003 was the catalyst for chaos within the worldwide Anglican Communion.

Neither choice was prudent. There are many other reasonable mainstream clerics (or laypersons) Mr. Obama could have chosen who would not have raised suspicions that he was playing politics with religion.

Failure and Success in Africa

The tragedy in Zimbabwe, once an exemplary and proud nation, deepens beyond our worst fears. Today it is the exemplar of a failed state. Can health care, the economy and political leadership get even worse? Cholera, which has already killed 2,000 people, has now spread to surrounding countries. Inflation is so extreme the government has issued a 100 trillion dollar bill. The latest effort to form a unity government following a faulty election last March has ended in failure. The horrific news from Zimbabwe may no longer make the headlines, but it is the reality the people of Zimbabwe suffer daily.

Bad news from Africa seems ubiquitous. The Lord's Resistance Army, a rebel group from Uganda, murdered over 500 people in neighboring Congo. In Darfur the

Sudanese army admitted renewed bombing attacks against rebel populations. Tribal/religious/political riots in Jos, Nigeria, resulted in 400 killed. In Guinea a military coup followed the death of the dictatorial president, Gen. Lansana Conté. In Somalia uncertainty reigns about the future after the figurehead president, Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, resigned and Ethiopian troops began a withdrawal ending a two-year intervention.

In Ghana there is a glimmer of hope. The opposition candidate, John Atta-Mills, won a close, hard-fought contest in the run-off election of Dec. 28. Mr. Akufo-Addo, the losing candidate, and the outgoing president, John Kufuor, graciously conceded defeat. It was a victory for the Ghanaian people. Ghana was the herald of African independence in 1957. We hope it will usher in a new era of democracy in Africa's troubled history.

Richard Neuhaus, 1936-2009

The Rev. Richard John Neuhaus, the founder and editor of the monthly journal *First Things*, died on the morning of Jan. 8, 2009, at the age of 72, the victim of cancer that he had fought for several years. The son of a Lutheran minister and himself a longtime Lutheran pastor, Father Neuhaus was received into the Catholic Church on Sept. 8, 1990. A year later, he was ordained a priest by the late Cardinal John O'Connor, archbishop of New York.

The author of several books, including *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America* (1984), Father Neuhaus insisted, both before and after entering the Catholic Church, on the legitimacy of including faith-based perspectives in the civic debate on public policy. Never one to shy away from controversy, his own style of commentary was sharp and pointed, not averse to occasionally caricaturing an opposing viewpoint.

In 2005, although by then many years a Catholic priest, Father Neuhaus was named one of the "25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America" by *Time* magazine. One reason for this designation was the fact that Father Neuhaus was an unofficial adviser to President George W. Bush on such questions as abortion, stem cell research, cloning and the defense of marriage amendment. Long active in ecumenical dialogue, Father Neuhaus collaborated with Charles Colson in developing common bonds between Catholics and evangelicals.

A respected though controversial public intellectual, Father Neuhaus will be remembered for his passionate Christian witness. His absence from the public square will be noted and mourned by many. R.I.P.

The Only Road to Freedom

The pantheon of history is filled with many types of leaders. The greatest envision what humanity could be at its best, and among them a special luster attaches to the few who guide others along the difficult and sparsely traveled path of nonviolence. Last month the nation entrusted itself to its first black president; and this month, Black History Month, we ought to honor the historic leadership of those African-Americans who, led by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., waged the most effective non-violent movement in our nation's history.

The civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s resulted in court victories and new laws that reversed more than 100 years of racial segregation. These began to put an end to inferior education, housing and public accommodations for African-Americans. The movement also succeeded in overcoming obstacles to voting and, more successfully than its leaders could have dreamt, to holding public office. Active nonviolence enabled the nation to achieve a massive social revolution with the loss of few lives. By appealing to the consciences of presidents and ordinary citizens alike, the leaders convinced them of the rightness of their cause.

Nonviolence was not the only option open in those decades to American blacks, long terrorized by intimidation, beatings and lynchings. Some followed the radical message of Malcolm X, and others the violent tactics of the Black Power movement led by Stokely Carmichael. Most, however, with the black clergy in the lead, chose the route of non-violent protest. King offered them a program, rich in Scripture, that blended the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr on power politics and Mahatma Gandhi on nonviolence to effect an alternative force for change. Nonviolent action, King said, requires inner strength and a willingness to suffer violence if necessary in the furtherance of legitimate goals.

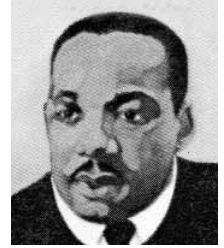
Over the years King himself was stabbed and assaulted; his house and those of other civil rights leaders were bombed. Unarmed blacks, including women and children, marched peaceably for the basic rights that others took for granted, and they were met with snarling dogs, water hoses, arrest and imprisonment. Volunteers disappeared only to be discovered later, murdered. A dynamite explosion killed children at Sunday school. But Dr. King's nonviolent protesters continued to trust in the redemptive power of unmerited suffering.

Not only King's methods but also his stated goals stand in vivid contrast to those for which many people

today fight and die. He sought to convince persons in power that his immediate objective, whether equal seating on a bus, school integration or the right to vote, would benefit them all, the persecutor as well as the victim. And though he worked to gain for all the equal rights promised in the U.S. Constitution, his vision extended to the whole family of humankind. In preaching to the congregation at Holt Street Baptist Church, King said, "The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community." He believed that agape love could inspire new social relationships and transform opponents into friends. King identified no enemies, no persons he wished to humiliate, dominate or subjugate once the movement achieved its goals, and he admonished his followers not to gloat over the victories they won. He himself neither courted violence nor designated others for martyrdom, but violence claimed his life at age 39.

Nonviolent action has been practiced in Myanmar, in South Africa, in Tiananmen Square, in Latin America, in the Philippines and in the countries of the former Soviet Union with varying degrees of success. An appeal to conscience works best, however, in confronting a nation of laws, as in Britain, the United States and South Africa. Organized nonviolence also requires a society open enough for the world to see what is taking place; it also must be coupled with other initiatives for change—laws, political parties, international public attention and institutions that promote peace and conflict resolution.

One of the Catholic contributions to peace is the church's insistence on the natural role institutions play in social life. In 1993 the U.S. bishops urged that "as a nation we promote research, education, and training in nonviolent means to resist evil." After nearly a decade of war, with no end in sight, the time has come to invest in education for and utilization of nonviolence at a national level with a U. S. Academy of Peace. As King wrote in 1966: "Violence, even in self-defense, creates more problems than it solves. Only a refusal to hate or kill can put an end to the chain of violence in the world and lead us toward a community where men can live together without fear." If nonviolence is, as King often said, "the only road to freedom," we must not allow it to become the road not taken.



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

WASHINGTON

Obama Era Begins With Prayers

The inauguration of President Barack Obama began and closed in the traditional way: with prayers. The Right Rev. V. Gene Robinson, Episcopal bishop of New Hampshire, delivered the invocation at the pre-inaugural celebration on Jan. 19, reminding thousands gathered at the Lincoln Memorial “that every religion’s God judges us by the way we care for the most vulnerable.” The Rev. Rick Warren, senior pastor of the evangelical Saddleback Church in Southern California, delivered the invocation at the swearing-in ceremony on Jan. 20, asking for God’s forgiveness for the times “when we fail to treat our fellow human beings and all the Earth with the respect that they deserve.” The Rev. Joseph Lowery, a minister in the United Methodist Church and leader in the American civil rights movement, delivered the benediction at the swearing-in, beginning with a partial recitation of the hymn “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” and ending with a spirited invitation to “say Amen,” which the nearly two million onlookers enthusiastically accepted.

Much was made of the uniformly Protestant, mainly evangelical character of the formal inaugural prayers. It is, of course, very difficult to include in one prayer all of the religious strands of the nation and still remain faithful to one’s own tradition. A close look at the prayer texts, however, finds them to be less narrowly Protestant than they first appear. All three prayers aimed at inclusiveness and struck strong notes of solidarity, justice and the common good, the last being a theme that individualistic Protestant theologies sometimes overlook.

Bishop Robinson’s prayer called upon “the God of our many understandings”—an allusion, by a recovering alcoholic, to the instruction in Alcoholics Anonymous to pray to God “as you understand him.” Robinson asked for the gift of tears for a world where so many are poor and the gift of anger at discrimination, at

home and abroad, including, he said, discrimination against gay people.

Rick Warren evoked the Jewish Shema, “Hear O Israel,” and he echoed the Koran, by naming God “the compassionate and merciful one.” He asked for forgiveness “when we fail to treat our fellow human beings and all the Earth with the respect they deserve” and he directed our attention—as Obama did—to the common good. Warren also reminded us that all nations and peoples will someday stand before God’s judgment, and although Warren was the one minister to mention specifically Jesus, he tempered it by personalizing the reference.

Joseph Lowery’s prayer was the best, and I found myself shouting Amen along with everyone else at its conclusion. “Lord,” he said in the cadence and style of a grand old preacher, “we ask you to help us work for that day when black will not be

asked to get in back, when brown can stick around...when yellow will be mellow...when the red man can get ahead, man; and when white will embrace what is right. Let all those who do justice and love mercy say Amen.”

The sociologist Robert Bellah has argued that alongside denominational religion, there exists a partially differentiated civil religion in the United States representing “the subordination of the nation to ethical principles that transcend it, in terms of which it should be judged.” This civil religion was clearly on display on Jan. 20. “Without an awareness that our nation stands under higher judgment,” Bellah wrote, “the tradition of civil religion would be dangerous indeed,” perhaps degenerating into a kind of national idolatry.

JOHN A. COLEMAN, S.J., a well-known sociologist of religion, is associate pastor of St. Ignatius Church in San Francisco.



The Rev. Rick Warren delivers the inaugural invocation.



ANALYSIS

Military Necessity?

In the wake of two unilateral cease-fires declared by Israel and the Palestinian militant organization Hamas in early January, some groups have called for war crime investigations and prosecutions of both parties for offenses during three weeks of combat. Such prosecutions, however, may miss the more important issue, indeed the most crucial ethical issue of our time: that killing large numbers of civilians has become the norm in fighting terrorists and insurgents.

The immorality and illegality of non-state terrorist attacks, like Hamas's shelling of Israel, is unquestionable. But the pattern of response to such attacks by national govern-

ments, as well as the new logic that justifies it, is seldom critically examined. Beginning with the U.S. destruction of civilian infrastructure in Baghdad during the first Persian Gulf war, advanced military powers have responded to asymmetrical warfare by their opponents with devastatingly powerful air and ground attacks. These disproportionate responses are justified by using the language of military necessity. Civilian deaths, these states claim, are regrettable. But they are also inevitable, they argue, because the enemy hides among the civilian population, using it as a shield, thus leaving states "no choice" but to attack civilian centers.

The Russians employed their own brutal and disjointed version of this in Chechnya in 1994-95. The U.S. Shock and Awe campaign of March 2003, its siege of Fallujah in November 2004 and the Israeli war in Lebanon in 2006 all fit the same pattern. After these wars, many critics labeled the states' actions "war



A Palestinian boy in the northern Gaza strip on Jan 20.

crimes"; but in so doing they missed the larger, more sinister, conscious thinking at work. Central to each of these campaigns against "terrorists" (or dictators, as in Iraq) is an unspoken

logic that if the civilian population has terrorists or insurgents living among them, these enemies have probably attracted numerous sympathizers and potential recruits within that community. Thus, an attack to eradicate the embedded terrorists in densely populated areas may not need to be that careful and surgical. In fact, widespread attacks, or so this thinking goes, can have added utility if they impose high costs in life and property on the sympathizers.

According to this thinking, in wars against terrorists or insurgents, local people should pay some price for their unwillingness to purge the terrorists or insurgents on their own. In this sense, neither "collateral damage" nor "innocent" civilians exist. Rather, each citizen who is not a terrorist is nonetheless still a citizen who failed to take action against them, thus forfeiting his or her immunity from attack.

In light of this logic and the actions it justifies, the once critical concepts of proportionality, civilian immunity and

even military necessity itself have all lost their meaning. Standard ethical language and logic are simply inadequate to address the normative anarchy of this new killing paradigm. A sustained and scrupulous dialogue among ethicists, military professionals and international lawyers is desperately needed

to dissect this new paradigm and offer reasonable—and moral—alternatives.

GEORGE A. LOPEZ holds the Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C., Chair in Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame.

Pope Congratulates New U.S. President

Pope Benedict XVI, congratulating Barack Obama on his inauguration as U.S. president, prayed that he would remain steadfast in his dedication to promote understanding, cooperation and peace in the world. In his message to Obama, Pope Benedict said he prayed, under the new president's leadership, that "the American people continue to find in their impressive religious and political heritage the spiritual values and ethical principles needed to cooperate in the building of a truly just and free society." The pope added that he hoped the future of the United States would be "marked by respect for the dignity, equality and rights of each of its members, especially the poor, the outcast and those who have no voice."

Vatican Embassy Attacked in Venezuela

The Vatican Embassy in Caracas was attacked with tear-gas bombs amid rising tensions over a vote to amend the Venezuelan constitution, Catholic officials said. The six bombs, thrown at 5:30 a.m. on Jan. 19, caused no injuries but generated an angry protest from Archbishop Roberto Luckert Leon of Coro, vice president of the Venezuelan bishops' conference, who called the act "an abuse." Those who threw the tear-gas bombs left leaflets from a pro-Chávez activist group also accused of attacking a television station and the home of a journalist critical of the government. On Feb. 15 Venezuelans will vote on a government-proposed constitutional amendment that would remove term limits for all elected officials, including Mr. Chávez. Catholic Church leaders, who have long accused

NEWS BRIEFS

Two-thirds of Americans see religion as having a declining influence on U.S. society, according to a new survey by Gallup.

• The retired Belgian archbishop, **Jean Jadot**, former apostolic delegate in the United States, died Jan. 21 at his home in Brussels. He was 99 years old.

• Cardinal **Pio Laghi**, a former Vatican nuncio to the United States, died Jan. 10 at the age of 86.

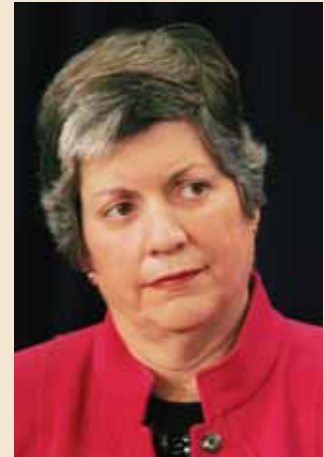
• Msgr. Edward J. Burns, rector of St. Paul's Seminary in Pittsburgh, Pa., has been named **bishop of Juneau, Alaska**.

• The Vatican and the United States quietly marked **25 years of formal diplomatic relations** in mid-January.

• The annual **March for Life** was scheduled to begin on Thursday, Jan. 22, in Washington, D.C., the 36th anniversary of Roe v. Wade.

• The incoming homeland security secretary, Janet Napolitano, and the new C.I.A. director, Leon Panetta, are both graduates of **Santa Clara University**, in California.

• Washington Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl read a prayer for the nation and Washington Auxiliary Bishop Francisco Gonzalez read a selection from the Letter to the Romans at the **National Prayer Service** marking Barack Obama's first full day as president, Jan. 21, in Washington, D.C.



Janet Napolitano

Chávez of concentrating too much power in the presidency, have criticized the proposed amendment.

Investigation Ordered Into 1989 Killings

A Spanish judge has decided to open an investigation into the case of 14 members of the Salvadoran army accused of involvement in killing six Jesuit priests and two of their employees in 1989 during El Salvador's civil war. High Court Judge Eloy Velasco also decided not to try former Salvadoran President Alfredo Cristiani, accused of concealment of the crime, because of insufficient evidence. Last November, the Spanish Association for Human Rights and the

San Francisco-based Center for Justice and Accountability filed a lawsuit against the military officers and Cristiani based on the Spanish legal principle of universal jurisdiction for crimes against humanity. Velasco's decision was announced on Jan. 13, nearly 20 years after the massacre at the University of Central America in San Salvador on Nov. 16, 1989. The Jesuit priests killed were the Spanish priests Ignacio Ellacuría, rector of the university, Ignacio Martín-Baró, Segundo Montes, Juan Moreno and Amando López and the Salvadoran Joaquin López y López. Also killed were the Jesuits' housekeeper, Elba Ramos, and her teenage daughter, Celina.

From CNS and other sources. CNS photos.



The Gift of Goodwill

Once upon a time there was a small, beautiful, but very troubled planet. It happened that the time came for one of the planet's most powerful tribes to choose a new leader. The wise elders called together the three aspiring candidates and gave them a challenge: "Go out," they said to each of them, "and bring back whatever you find on your journey that you believe will be most needful to our people in the future."

The first journeyed out into the surrounding plain. Eventually he noticed something glinting in the rock. Scraping at the soil, he discovered seams of gold. Rushing back to the tribal homelands he reported. "I have discovered a source of wealth that will keep our people in luxury for many years to come."

The second journeyed along the river. Eventually his sharp gaze picked up traces of something lying among the rocks. He scraped at the soil and unearthed flintstone. He rushed back home. "See," he said, "With this flintstone we can make powerful weapons and defend ourselves against all attack. We can even take over other tribal lands and extend our territory."

The third and youngest candidate was gone a long, long time, returning home at last—empty-handed. "Wise ones," he said, "I have travelled far—right over to that distant mountain. As I journeyed I noticed things that might be helpful to us, like gold and flintstone, but something made me keep

on walking. When I reached the summit I knew I had found what I was searching for, but it was not something I could pick up and bring back to you. When I reached the mountaintop, I saw a vision of possibilities that lie beyond our narrow view here in this valley. I knew that this was where I would want to lead our people. So this is what I bring back—a vision of what could be. You may say that this is just a dream. But is it not the case that our tribe and all its story is built on a dream?"

The wise elders smiled, and were well pleased. "You shall become the new leader," they said, "because you have rightly understood that what our people need more than anything else is vision."

And so the new leader prepared to take up his office. He was a man of faith, and he looked to God for guidance, and a story came to his mind from long ago about an itinerant teacher. One day a great multitude had gathered on a hillside to hear this teacher speak. The hours passed. It was getting late. Eventually the rumblings of discontent were becoming audible. People were hungry. It was too late to buy food. The people began squabbling with one another. Just one person, it seemed, had come prepared for the long haul—a little boy who was so inspired by what the teacher had said that he offered his own pack of bread and fish, to be shared among the thousands. The teacher took the little boy's lunch pack and started to hand it around. And it passed from one per-

son to the next, until everyone had had enough to eat, and there were even scraps left over after the great feast. "A miracle," they all said. And, for sure, it was a miracle.

The new leader shivered with apprehension. "Now they are looking to me for a miracle," he pondered, "and what can I do to right the many wrongs of this planet? Can vision ever really turn into reality? How far will one dream go among so many troubles?"

But when he was sworn in as the new tribal chief, the angels gathered round him to bring him their gift for the task ahead. They debated long and hard about which gift to give him. Some said: "We should give him our protection, for he is young and vulnerable." Others said: "We should give him strength and courage to face all that lies ahead."

But at last the angels chose a very special gift that had rarely been given to a new leader before. They gave him the goodwill of almost every person on the planet and almost every leader of every tribe. "This gift of universal goodwill," they said, "will enable him to inspire and influence all the other people of the planet, so that they will start to share what they have and work together for new beginnings. Goodwill is the seed of the miracle they long for."

This is my prayer for the people of United States, for their new leader and for all the human family at this historic new beginning.

'I saw a vision of possibilities that lie beyond our narrow view here.'

MARGARET SILF lives in Staffordshire, England. Her latest books are *Companions of Christ: Ignatian Spirituality for Everyday Living* and *The Gift of Prayer*.

Cardinal Francis Spellman, right, and other cardinals during the Second Vatican Council.

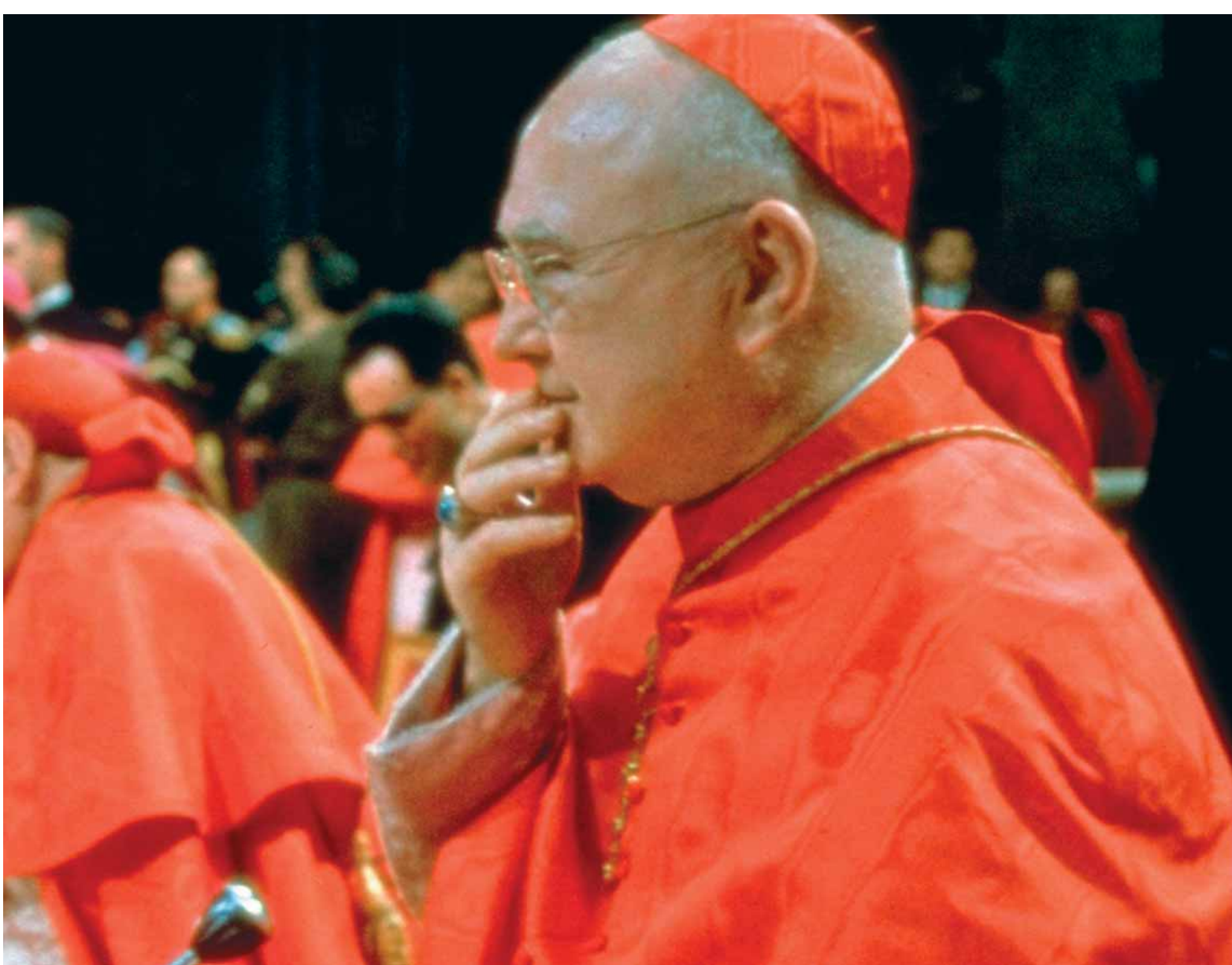


POPE BENEDICT'S INTERPRETATION OF VATICAN II Novelty in Continuity

BY JOSEPH A. KOMONCHAK

It is now 50 years since Pope John XXIII surprised the world by announcing his intention to convoke an ecumenical council. Those of us old enough to remember it will recall the excitement the announcement generated among Catholics and in the larger world. That an ecumenical council would take place was extraordinary; as Catholics count, there have been only 20 of them. Pope John gradually made his intentions for the council

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clear: the spiritual renewal of the church, pastoral updating (*aggiornamento*) and the promotion of an eventual reunion of Christians. For any of these goals to be achieved would require change in the church: spiritual renewal would demand repentance; updating would mean abandoning attitudes, habits and institutions no longer relevant and introducing ones more appropriate to the last third of the 20th century; and promoting Christian unity would mean working to overcome alienations with centuries of inertial force behind them. Something new and different appeared on the horizon. Pope John composed a prayer that the council might be “a new Pentecost!”

From the day it was announced (Jan. 25, 1959) to the day it ended (Dec. 8, 1965), the Second Vatican Council proved to be a particularly dramatic event, as a number of us can attest from personal experience and observation. Sixteen documents represent what that encounter of some 2,500 bishops meeting under two popes, John XXIII and Paul VI, wished to say to the church and to the world.

Those texts did not drop down from heaven, but resulted from a process of conversation, confrontation, compromise and conciliation. Knowledge of this legislative history is necessary in order fully to understand and appreciate what the council wished to say—and chose not to say—in its final texts. In other words, history and hermeneutics (interpretation) go together. How they go together, however, is a key question.

Discontinuity or Reform?

On Dec. 22, 2005, the year in which he was elected, Pope Benedict XVI, on the occasion of the traditional year-end talk to the Roman Curia, included in his review of the previous months’ events the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the close of Vatican II. The pope set out his thoughts on a correct interpretation of the council.

Before Pope Benedict’s speech, a few Italian prelates had expressed reservations about the five-volume *History of Vatican II*, of which Giuseppe Alberigo was the general edi-

PHOTO: CARLO BAVAGNOLI/TIME LIFE PICTURES/GETTY IMAGES

tor and whose English edition I edited. They promoted as a counterweight to it a collection of very critical reviews entitled *Il Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II: Contrapunto per la Sua Storia*. When it became known that Pope Benedict was going to address the interpretation of Vatican II, these critics anticipated that he would repudiate the view of the council thought to have guided the editors and authors of those five volumes. This is also how they interpreted the pope's speech.

There are, however, reasons for questioning their interpretation of Pope Benedict's remarks. There are even reasons to think that these critics have greatly oversimplified his position and the underlying issue in the interpretation of the council, which Pope John Paul II called on various occasions "an event of the utmost importance in the almost two thousand-year history of the church," a "providential event," "the beginning of a new era in the life of the church."

Pope Benedict began by contrasting two ways of interpreting the council. (I take it that he did this for rhetorical reasons; there are, of course, more than two contesting interpretations of Vatican II.) The first he called the "hermeneutics of discontinuity." In two short paragraphs he describes this approach as running the risk of positing a rupture between the preconciliar and the postconciliar church, thus ignoring the fact that the church is a single historical subject. This hermeneutic disparages the texts of the council as the result of unfortunate compromises and favors instead the elements of novelty in the documents. It may see the council along the lines of a constitutional convention that can do away with an old constitution and construct a new one, when, by contrast, the church has received an unalterable constitution from Christ himself. That is the entirety of the pope's treatment of the "hermeneutics of discontinuity."

One might have expected Pope Benedict to call the position he favors the "hermeneutics of continuity," and careless commentators have used that term to describe his view. Instead, he calls it the "hermeneutics of reform." He devotes the greater part of his talk (85 percent by word-count) to explaining what he means by the phrase. And the greater part of this explanation sets out why at the time of the council there was need for a certain measure of discontinuity. After all, if there is no discontinuity, one can hardly speak of reform.

Keys to Interpretation

To illustrate his interpretative matrix Pope Benedict appeals to the two popes of the council. From John XXIII's speech

opening the council, Benedict quotes the passage that, on the one hand, gives as one purpose of the council to transmit doctrine purely and integrally and, on the other, requires that doctrine be studied and presented in a way that meets the needs of the day. Distinguishing between the substance and the expression of the faith, Pope Benedict affirmed, required both fidelity and dynamism. He then alluded to a passage in Paul VI's closing speech that could provide some basis for proposing a hermeneutic of discontinuity, since it spoke of the alienation between church and world that had marked recent centuries. It is this consideration that guides the rest of Pope Benedict's talk to the Curia; somewhat surprisingly in a former professor of dogmatic theology, specific doctrinal debates do not concern him in this talk.

A very rapid survey illustrates the estrangement of the church and the modern era—from the Galileo case through the Enlightenment, from the French Revolution and rise of radical liberalism to the claims of the natural sciences to be able to do without the God-hypothesis. Pope Benedict describes the church's reaction to this under Pius IX as one of "bitter and radical condemnations" met with equally drastic rejection by representatives of the modern era. There seemed no possibility of "positive and fruitful understanding."

Since those days, however, things have changed. In a comment that John Courtney Murray, S.J., would have appreciated, the pope says that the American political experiment demonstrated a different model than the one that emerged from the French Revolution. The natural sciences were becoming more modest in their pretensions. After the Second World War, "Catholic statesmen demonstrated that a modern secular state could exist that was not neutral regarding values but draws its life from the great ethical sources opened by Christianity," and Catholic social doctrine offered an alternative to radical liberal and Marxist theories.

On the eve of the council, then, three "circles of questions" had formed, all of which required new thinking and definition: the relationships between faith and modern science, between the church and the modern state, and between Christianity and other religions, Judaism in particular. In each area, Pope Benedict said, "some kind of discontinuity might emerge and in fact did emerge," a discontinuity that did not require the abandonment of traditional principles.

The pope also describes the interpretative key he thinks

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should be applied to Vatican II: "It is precisely in this combination of continuity and discontinuity at different levels that the very nature of true reform consists." In explanation of this "novelty in continuity" he says that the church's response on contingent matters must itself be contingent, even when based upon enduring principles. The principles can remain even when changes are made in the way in which they are applied. Pope Benedict's chief example was the council's "Declaration on Religious Freedom," which "at once recognized and made its own an essential principle of the modern state and recovered the deepest patrimony of the church," in full harmony with Jesus' teaching and the church of martyrs of all ages.

If these new definitions of the relationship between the faith and "certain basic elements of modern thought" required the council to rethink and even correct earlier historical decisions, it did so to preserve and deepen the church's inmost nature and identity.

What the pope calls "this fundamental 'yes' to the modern era" did not mean the end of all tensions, nor did it eliminate all dangers, and there are important respects in which the church must remain "a sign that will be contradicted" (Lk 2: 34). What the council wished to do was to "set aside oppositions that derived from error or had become superfluous in order to present to our world the demands of the Gospel in its full greatness and purity." This was the council's way of dealing with a difficulty in the relationship between faith and reason, stated biblically in the requirement that Christians be ready to give an answer (*apologia*) to anyone who asked them for the *logos*, the reason for their hope (1 Pet 3:15). This led the church into a conversation with Greek culture. And in the Middle Ages, when it appeared that faith and reason were in danger of becoming irreconcilably contradictory, it brought St. Thomas Aquinas to mediate "the new encounter between faith and Aristotelian philosophy and so put faith into a positive relationship with the form of rational argument that prevailed at the time." It is telling that from the ensuing centuries Pope Benedict offers no examples of a similarly positive and successful achievement in what he calls "the wearying dispute between modern reason and the Christian faith."

In the end, the clear disjunction between the two rival hermeneutical orientations with which the pope began his remarks has become rather blurred in the course of his argument. The reform Benedict sees as the heart of the council's achievement is itself a matter of novelty in continuity, of fidelity and dynamism. It involves important elements of discontinuity. It is, of course, possible to contrast two approaches by saying of one: "You stress only continuity!" and of the other: "You stress only discontinuity!" But these positions are abstractions, and it would be difficult to find

anyone who maintains either position. Perhaps the pope's counterpoised hermeneutics represents what sociologists call "ideal types," possibly useful tools for setting out the important questions, but not to be taken as literal descriptions of positions actually held by anyone. A hermeneutics of discontinuity need not see rupture everywhere; and a hermeneutics of reform, it turns out, acknowledges some important discontinuities.

Persuading the Traditionalists

It has puzzled some observers that in order to illustrate his hermeneutics of reform, the pope used the council's new approach to the modern age and illustrated it by the treatment of religious freedom. I think it is an indication that the pope was not addressing himself primarily, and certainly not exclusively, to the editors and authors of the *History of Vatican II*. When Giuseppe Alberigo wrote of the council as representing "una svolta epochale" (an epochal turning-point) he was referring in particular to the kinds of new relationships with the world that, Pope Benedict argues, the council needed to forge.

I think it is more plausible that the pope sought to persuade a different group of people, traditionalists whose rejection of the council derives in no small part from their belief that its teachings on church and state and on religious freedom represent a revolutionary discontinuity in official



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church doctrine. Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, for example, had severely criticized the statement of then-Cardinal Ratzinger that *Gaudium et Spes, Dignitatis Humanae* and *Nostra Aetate* represented “a revision of the Syllabus, a kind of counter-syllabus...an attempt at an official reconciliation with the new age inaugurated in 1789.” These texts, Ratzinger said, rightly left behind the one-sided and obsolete stances adopted under Pius IX and Pius X; it was time for the church to “relinquish many of the things that have hitherto spelled security for her and that she has taken for granted. She must demolish long-standing bastions and trust solely to the shield of faith.”

Archbishop Lefebvre regarded these comments as “liberal banalities,” indifferent to or even scorning the support the church received from the Catholic confessional state and its institutions. Union of church and state, Lefebvre argued, “is a principle of Catholic doctrine as immutable as the doctrine itself.” Lefebvre’s successor, Bernard Fellay, invoked these paragraphs of Ratzinger in a letter in 2002 as an illustration of the points of serious disagreement that remain between Rome and Ecône. His group could never accept “any heterogeneous development of doctrine,” like what the council taught about religious freedom.

Pope Benedict’s talk on the interpretation of Vatican II could be read, then, as an effort at persuading traditionalists that a distinction is legitimately made between the level of doctrine or principle and the level of concrete application and response to situations. His talk could be seen as on a par with others of his actions directed toward traditionalists, such as his clarification that the Catholic Church at the council did not surrender the claim to be the one true

church and his permission to make use of the unreformed liturgy. So far, it would appear that Fellay’s group has not been persuaded. Alluding to the pope’s remarks about interpreting Vatican II, Fellay said that the council needs more than a correct hermeneutic; its teaching

must be revised and corrected.

ON THE WEB

From the archives, F. X. Murphy reports from the Second Vatican Council.
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On Continuity

The question of continuity can be put from at least three different standpoints. Doctrinally, there is clear continuity: Vatican II did not discard any dogma of the church and it did not promulgate any new dogma. The council, however, did recover important doctrines that had been relatively neglected in recent centuries, like the collegiality of bishops, the priesthood of all the baptized, the theology of the local church and the importance of Scripture. Reasserting such



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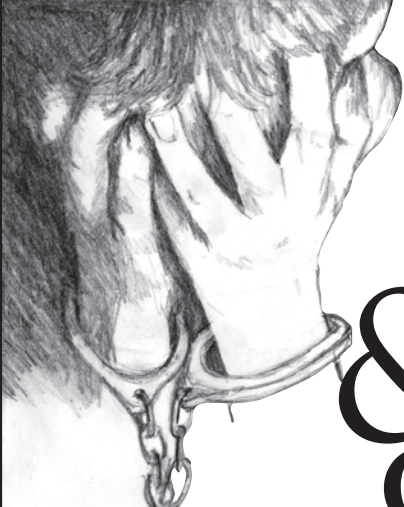
things meant placing other doctrines in broader and richer contexts than before. Finally, the council departed from the normal method and language of ecumenical councils like Trent and Vatican I, not least of all by following Pope John's injunction that it offer a positive and widely accessible vision of the faith, and by abstaining from the anathemas that punctuated previous ecumenical councils.

Theologically, the council was the fruit of 20th-century movements for renewal: in biblical, patristic and medieval studies; in liturgical theology; in ecumenical conversation; in new, more positive encounters with modern philosophy; in rethinking the church-world relation; and in rethinking the role of lay people in the church. Many of these movements had fallen under some degree of official suspicion or disapproval in the decades prior to the council, an attitude reflected in the official texts prepared for Vatican II. There was real drama in the first session of the council (1962) when those texts were severely criticized for falling short of the theological and pastoral renewal already underway. The rejection of the prepared texts itself brought discontinuity into the very unfolding of the council. Much of the drama of the rest of the council revealed the difficulty of determining what sorts of texts should take the place of those spurned, of recovering "the deepest patrimony of the church," to use Pope Benedict's words, and of finding a language in which to express it. In all this there was considerable discontinuity.


From the standpoints of sociology and of history, one

looks at the council against a broader backdrop, and one cannot limit oneself to the intentions of the popes and bishops or to the final texts. One now studies the impact of the council as experienced, as observed and as implemented. It is hard from these standpoints not to stress the discontinuity, the experience of an event that broke with routine. This is the common language used by participants and by observers at the time. The young Joseph Ratzinger's own reflections after each session, published in English as *Theological Highlights of Vatican II*, are a good example. It is from this perspective that James Hitchcock calls Vatican II "the most important event within the church in the past four hundred years," and the French historian/sociologist, Émile Poulat, points out that the Catholic Church changed more in the 10 years after Vatican II than it did in the previous 100 years. Similar positions are held by people along the whole length of the ideological spectrum. Whether they regard what happened as good or as bad, they all agree that "something happened."

It would be helpful if such distinctions of standpoint were kept in mind. They could help scholars to identify precisely where differences in the interpretation of Vatican II really lie, and to assess whether they are really in conflict with one another. Pope Benedict's own performance in this speech is one example of a serious effort at discernment and, were his nuanced effort imitated more widely, the debate about the council would be greatly elevated. **A**



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Brain Death and Organ Donation

Some pro-life groups are questioning the criteria for organ transplants. Pope John Paul II would have disagreed.

BY JAMES M. DuBOIS

Few medical procedures have proven to be as effective in saving lives as organ transplantation. Patients on the verge of death from organ failure often live a decade or longer after receiving a transplant. The Catholic Church, and the late Pope John Paul II in particular, have been enthusiastic proponents of this extraordinary medical procedure. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “organ donation after death is a noble and meritorious act and is to be encouraged as an expression of generous solidarity” (No. 2296). Yet despite the church’s longstanding support for organ donation, some Catholic pro-life groups challenge practices essential to it.

The latest challenge pertains to so-called brain-death criteria, which are used to declare death in over 90 percent of all cases of organ donation in the United States. In a front-page article in *L’Osservatore Romano* (9/2/08), Lucetta Scaraffia, a professor of history at La Sapienza University in Rome and a frequent contributor to the Vatican newspaper, argued that the Catholic Church must revisit the question of brain death because it rests on an understanding of human life that is contrary to Catholic teaching. While Federico Lombardi, S.J., director of the Vatican press office, quickly stated that Scaraffia spoke for herself and not for the magisterium, her article shows there is disagreement within the church on the question of organ donation.

Earlier this year, Paul Byrne, M.D., a former president of the Catholic Medical Association and a long-time opponent of brain-death criteria, published a letter on the Web site *Renew America* arguing that God’s law and the natural law preclude “the



PHOTO: REUTERS/FABRIZIO BENSCH

transplantation of unpaired vital organs, an act which causes the death of the ‘donor’ and violates the fifth commandment of the divine Decalogue, ‘Thou shalt not kill’ (Dt. 5:17).” The letter was signed by over 400 individuals, including at least three Catholic bishops and many pro-life program directors.

JAMES M. DuBOIS is the Hubert Mäder Professor and department chair of health care ethics at Saint Louis University.

'A Genuine Act of Love'

In 1985 and 1989 the Pontifical Academy of Science studied the question of brain death and concluded that neurological criteria are the most appropriate criteria for determining the death of a human being. In the academy's view, one really should not speak of "brain death"—as if only the brain had died—but rather of the death of the human being, which may be determined neurologically.

In 2000 Pope John Paul II expressed support for organ donation and the use of neurological criteria. He wrote: "The criterion adopted in more recent times for ascertaining the fact of death, namely the complete and irreversible cessation of all brain activity, if rigorously applied, does not seem to conflict

with the essential elements of a sound anthropology." He concluded that "a health worker professionally responsible for ascertaining death can use

these criteria..." Moreover, he strongly reasserted his support for organ donation, calling it a "genuine act of love" and noting that he had earlier called it a "way of nurturing a genuine culture of life."

To be fair, the Pontifical Academy of Science has no moral teaching authority, and a papal allocution is not the same as a papal encyclical or conciliar teaching. Still, it is ironic that many of the same people who continue to question brain-death criteria after John Paul II's allocution argue that the same pope's allocution on artificial nutrition and hydration for patients in a permanent vegetative state has decisively settled that matter.

For many people, concerns about brain death arise from a simple misunderstanding of the facts. I have spent years studying how the general public and health professionals understand death and organ donation. People in focus groups and surveys often confuse brain death with P.V.S. Yet P.V.S. patients breathe spontaneously and have sleep-wake cycles. Brain-dead bodies depend upon artificial ventilation; without it there would be no respiration and no heartbeat. Moreover, many think it is possible to recover from brain death, just as patients sometimes recover from deep coma. Yet there is no documented case of a patient recovering from brain death, despite some popular reports of misdiagnosed brain death. An organ that has been

Previous page: Surgeons in a Berlin hospital pack a kidney after an operation in which the liver and kidneys were extracted from a brain-dead woman for transplantation.

deprived of oxygen sufficiently long will die, and it is medically impossible to change dead brain cells to living brain cells. Finally, about half of Americans do not know that brain death criteria are used legally in all 50 states to pronounce patients dead. They are also used in nearly all Catholic hospitals in the United States.

Three Objections

While these factual misunderstandings are common among the general public, they are not the source of the concerns expressed by Catholic pro-life groups. Their objections to brain-death criteria tend to be more philosophical. In a recent article in *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly*,

I have tried to address some of these concerns. Here I will summarize three key points.

Human development. Lucetta Scaraffia and others have voiced concern

About half of Americans do not know that brain death criteria are used legally in all 50 states to pronounce patients dead. They are also used in nearly all Catholic hospitals in the United States.

that if we decide a human being is dead because he or she lacks a functioning brain, then we will deny that embryos are human until they form a brain. However, we are developmental creatures: in our earliest days of development in the uterus, we do not depend upon a brain to live. Yet as we grow, we come to depend upon a functioning brain; and when it dies, we die. To argue that support for brain death criteria calls into question the status of early human life is to misunderstand basic human biology.

The unity of the human being. According to some Catholic pro-life advocates, the brain death criteria accepted by the larger medical community rest on a "dualistic" view of the human being that assumes the human soul is radically distinct from the human body. They argue that if the soul is the life principle of the body and if an artificially maintained brain-dead body shows some signs of life, like a beating heart, then the soul must be present. Like many members of the Catholic medical community, I do not dispute the Catholic understanding of life and death; we take seriously the fact that the soul and its proper functions are intimately bound with the body. Yet a mature human body that is functionally decapitated is no longer a living human being.

Ken Iserson, M.D., a professor of emergency medicine at the University of Arizona, cites the Talmud when describing brain death: "The death throes of a decapitated man are not signs of life any more than is the twitching of a lizard's amputated tail." If one rejects the notion that a

decapitated body is a dead body, then one is left with a conclusion repugnant to common sense and good metaphysics: a severed head and a decapitated body would both have to be considered living human beings if separately maintained alive (a view held by at least one opponent of brain death criteria). In fact, to be wholly consistent, one would need to hold that each is independently the same living human being that existed prior to the decapitation—a view that flatly contradicts the unity required to be human.

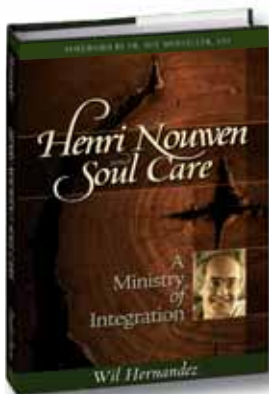
Strange case reports. Following brain death, most bodies spontaneously lose circulation within days, even when they are artificially ventilated and provided with aggressive critical care. But there have been exceptional case reports of prolonged “survival” of the ventilated body. These are not misdiagnoses. In some cases, the entire brain liquefies and extremities begin to turn black. Despite continued circulation, there is no room for speculation that such bodies are any more conscious than a corpse that has been buried, and the likelihood of recovery is the same. Professor Scaraffia has noted that there have also been cases of pregnant women who were pronounced brain dead; yet with artificial ventilation and aggressive support their bodies sustained pregnancies until viability. But the fact that many parts of the body may survive and function for a time is wholly compatible with death of the human being. This is precisely what makes organ transplantation possible. The human

heart may beat outside of the human body in a bucket of ice, and may even be transplanted and made to function again inside another human being. That the placenta and womb may survive and function in a body maintained artificially is similarly amazing, but it does not indicate that the womb belongs to a living human being. Importantly, none of these cases present “new data” that became available only after John Paul II’s allocution, and thus they do not merit a re-examination of church teaching. They are well known, even if strange and rare, phenomena.

Human Bodies, Not Objects

In the end, I think these philosophical disputes about brain death are actually motivated by a much deeper, more fundamental opposition to organ donation. This is illustrated by the resistance pro-life groups have offered to other kinds of organ donation, including donation after cardiac death. This opposition ultimately is driven by two deeper concerns that often go unarticulated.

First, organ donation risks treating human beings or their deceased bodies as “objects.” In John Paul II’s 2000 allocution on organ donation and brain death, he stated that “any procedure which tends to commercialize human organs or to consider them as items of exchange or trade must be considered morally unacceptable, because to use the body as an ‘object’ is to violate the dignity of the human



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person." He also noted that organ donation requires the informed consent of the patient or the patient's family. Yet the continual shortage of organs leads some policymakers to consider payments for organs and even organ procurement without expressed consent. Overly hasty pronouncements of brain death—which are rare but have received considerable attention in recent years—also reinforce suspicions that a concern for organ donation is trumping care for patients.

The ethical question at hand is how we should deal with the risk of treating persons as objects or commodities. It is worth recalling that Hans Jonas, one of the more famous opponents of brain-death criteria, also expressed deep reservations about medical research in general, which has yielded numerous treatments, vaccines and cures. Jonas feared that such research tends by its very nature to treat human subjects as "objects" or things. But the Catholic Church does not view medical research as intrinsically wrong for that reason; rather, it suggests how research may be conducted respectfully. It is the same with organ donation.


A second obstacle to organ donation within some Catholic circles rests on a misunderstanding of the so-called precautionary principle. This principle has been used in Catholic social teaching and basically urges caution in the face of uncertainty regarding grave risks of harm (for example, the possible harm from genetic modification).

Paul Byrne, M.D., and colleagues seem to seek an absolute certainty that death has occurred, one marked by the destruction of all major organ systems. This is why Dr. Byrne opposes not only brain death, but also deceased-organ donation; by the time he would consider a body dead, no organs would be healthy enough to transplant. Yet this desire for absolute certainty conflicts with what Pope John Paul II wrote on the subject. He stated that "a health worker professionally responsible for ascertaining death can use these [neurological] criteria in each individual case as the basis for arriving at that degree of assurance in ethical judgment which moral teaching describes as 'moral certainty.'" He added that this "moral certainty is considered the necessary and sufficient basis for an ethically correct course of action."

Determining death in the context of organ donation is challenging and will likely remain controversial for the simple reason that death must be determined quickly lest all transplantable organs die with the human being. Nevertheless, the decision to reject organ donation in the name of precaution is not without cost. Patients in need of an organ transplant will die years earlier than necessary, and families who often find organ donation consoling will be bereft of the opportunity to find some meaning in their loss. We may not do evil that good may come of it, but neither should we bury our talents out of fear. **A**



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When a Little Unbelief Is Not a Bad Thing

BY DANIEL F. POLISH

There has been no shortage of books lately denouncing religion, including Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion* and Christopher Hitchens's *God is Not Great: How Religion*

Poisons Everything (how's that for a temperate title?). Yet none of them rises to the level of vituperation shown by H. L. Mencken, a "despiser of religion" in the early 20th century, who wrote: "I believe that religion, generally speaking, has been a curse to mankind—that its modest and greatly overestimated services on the ethical side have been more than overcome by the damage it has done to clear and honest thinking. I believe that no discovery of fact, however trivial, can be wholly useless to the race, and that no trumpeting of falsehood, however virtuous in intent, can be anything but vicious."

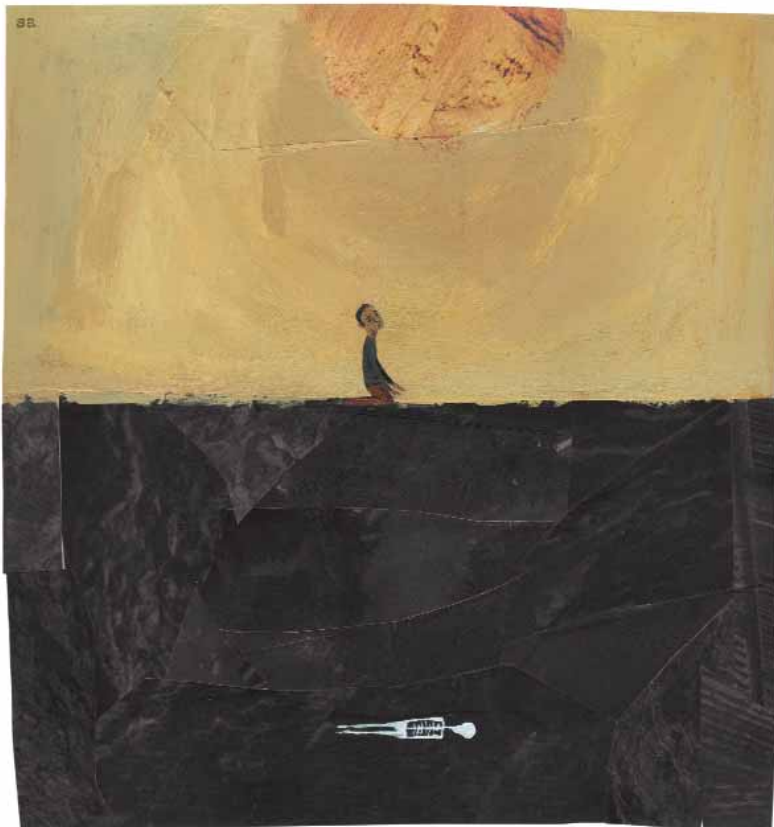
For many of us, a knee-jerk reaction to such attacks is to rush to the defense of the beleaguered institution of religion. But before we do, perhaps we could take a detour and consider the valuable service disbelief can render.

RABBI DANIEL F. POLISH, former director of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, is the spiritual leader of Congregation Shir Chadash of the Hudson Valley in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. He is the author of *Bringing the Psalms to Life* and *Faith With the Psalms (Jewish Lights)* and *Talking About God: Exploring the Meaning of Religious Life With Kierkegaard, Buber, Tillich and Heschel (SkyLight Paths, 2008)*.

The Dangers of Certainty

I suppose it is a systemic hazard of religion to engender a spirit of absolute certitude in many believers. There have always been those who claim to have complete certainty

about what is on God's mind. The rabbis of the Jewish tradition cautioned against this certitude by asserting that prophecy was lost to Israel after the destruction of the Temple "with the exception of children and idiots." Still, the voices of religious certainty continue to be shrill and vexing even in our day. We hear words of certainty about the "will of God" preached in mosques all around the world and on the lips of suicide bombers. When these words come from afar they frighten us, but they should be no less disconcerting when uttered within



our midst. Have we become inured to hearing such sentiments espoused close to home? It may be the media preachers claiming that God sent the World Trade Center attacks or Hurricane Katrina. It may be Pastor John Hagee saying that God intended the Holocaust for one purpose or another. This past year a religious party member of Israel's Knesset asserted that God had sent an earthquake, which mildly disturbed the country, as a punishment for the attorney general's having granted gay and lesbian couples the right to adopt children. If faith involves such certainty about the will and purposes of God, perhaps a dose of atheism

ART: STEFANIE AUGUSTINE

would do us all some good.

A candidate for national office in the recent U.S. election once described certain government actions—including the pursuit of the war in Iraq—as divine will. What a tragic devolution from the majestic pronouncements of Abraham Lincoln in his second inaugural address! In that speech Lincoln acknowledged religious uncertainty as he reminded his hearers that even as the North and South continued in their terrible conflict, “Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God’s assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men’s faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes.” Indeed, Lincoln had the spiritual heroism to begin his peroration with the clause, “Yet, if God wills....” This is a level of spiritual humility in tragically short supply among today’s theo-political seers. From the religious certainty of so many who would be our leaders, atheism seems almost a welcome alternative.

Demands of True Faith

I do not believe in a God whose will or motives are crystal clear to me. And as a person of faith, I find myself deeply

suspicious of those who claim such insight. My faith carries within it a healthy dose of skepticism. Paul Tillich cautioned in *Dynamics of Faith* that “literalism deprives God of his ultimacy and, religiously speaking, of his majesty. It draws him down to the level of that which is not ultimate, the finite.... Faith, if it takes its symbols literally, becomes idolatrous! It calls something ultimate which is less than ultimate. Faith, conscious of the symbolic character of its symbols, gives God the honor which is due him.” This same perspective was expressed by Abraham Joshua Heschel in *Man Is Not Alone* (we can safely add “will of God” to what he says of God): “God cannot be distilled to a well-defined idea. All concepts fade when applied to His essence. To the pious man knowledge of God is not a thought within his grasp....” Or perhaps Martin Buber put it most succinctly: people “draw caricatures and write ‘God’ underneath.” Perhaps all three are telling us that in the face of the symbolic literalism of the “well-defined idea” or the caricature, true faith demands of us a certain measure of pious atheism.

There is one more face of atheism that I can embrace wholeheartedly. It is embodied in a story about the revered leader of European Jewish Orthodoxy at the beginning of the 20th century, Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radun, popularly known as the Chofetz Chaim. It was his wont to teach that

there was a purpose for everything in God’s creation. Once one of his students challenged him, “What can be the purpose of atheism?” The Chafetz Chayim replied, “so that when you see a person who is in need, you shouldn’t pass them by, believing that God will take care of them.” In other words, act as if there were no God: take care of them yourself. That is an atheism that is life-affirming. Would that the religious world were populated by more atheists like that.

Of course there are religious alternatives to either the false certainty of so many or the atheism of total rejection, which is why I can give “two cheers for atheism,” but cannot bring myself to offer up that third cheer.

Biblical Doubts

I believe a healthy measure of skepticism was encoded in biblical faith. We can hear it in the prayer of King Solomon at the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem. Even as he inaugurated the use of that place on which had been lavished so much effort and wealth, even as

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he established his "House of the Lord" as the center of Israelite worship, he asked: "But will God really dwell on earth? Even the heavens to their utmost reaches cannot contain You, how much less this house I have built!" (1 Kgs 8:27). Solomon, to whom Scripture ascribes exceeding wisdom, understood the dialectical movement of seeking God in the Temple he had built and yet understanding that no finite edifice could contain God. No doubt we can acknowledge that our intellectual edifices are no more capable of containing the fullness of the Infinite One.

Such a dialectical sensitivity seems to have been present from the time of the canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures. We have records of rabbinical debates about the inclusion of the Book of Esther or the Song of Songs, but no record of objection to the inclusion of the Book of Job. Yet that book raises the most profound issues of faith. Job is described as a perfectly righteous person, but all kinds of horrible things happen to him. His friends come to comfort him by repeating the accepted religious formula of that time, one that is enunciated earlier in Scripture itself: "Now you know bad things happen when you have behaved badly. Why not tell us what it is you have done? You will feel a lot better." But Job continues to assert his absolute innocence, and we readers know that Job has done absolutely nothing wrong. So we are entitled to be as confused as he is about why these terrible things have happened to him.

When God appears to Job and his friends "out of the whirlwind," God does not even address the friends, who are, after all, attempting to defend God's justice in the terms of the ideology of the moment. God speaks directly to Job, who had been challenging God and doubting the working of God's ways. God essentially tells Job: "Your friends are wrong. They 'add ignorance to confusion.'" God goes on to say, in effect, "Don't think you can explain Me. Don't imagine that you can understand Me. Don't try to reduce my actions to some simple formula. I am just too much for your limited understanding." In its own revolutionary way, the Book of Job contradicts earlier teachings in the Bible that sought to explain God in terms of simple cause-and-effect relations. It is those old formulas that the Book of Job dismisses, leaving us with a God whom we worship but know we will never comprehend.

Spiritual Humility

Jewish tradition also enshrines this faithful skepticism in its liturgy. Every Jewish service ends with a doxology called the Kaddish. Customarily thought of as a mourners' prayer, it never refers to death at all; rather it is devoted exclusively to extolling God. Yet in the midst of its effusive exaltation, we find embedded the idea that God is not easy to grasp. At the brink of the service's completion, as worshipers prepare to walk out the door, the liturgy reminds us that God is

"beyond all the praises, songs and adorations that we are able to utter in this world," reminding us not to leave the service feeling smug, as if we had said everything about God that could be said. We can only approximate God and acknowledge the paucity of our effort.

This is a most challenging kind of faith: to live with a God we cannot fully understand, whose actions we explain at our own peril. This God is at the center of our lives. This may be a rockier path to walk than that of either simplistic absolutism or of atheism, but it is the faith of honest men and women, a faith defined by spiritual humility. We can hope such a path leads to the destination promised in the Book of Psalms: "This is the Gate of the Lord, the righteous do enter it." **A**

Listening to Beethoven

Lord, let me be the least violin,
the last atomic glimmer in the comet's
wake; let me be dumb and eloquent
in the untongued grammar of awe.

Amid the first passions, Lord,
was I there in that exploding star
filling the universe in endless
crescendo; spun, galaxy by

galaxy, in the vast, dear
mystery of your waiting? Waiting,
I ask, how is there such beauty
in your stillness, such wisdom

in your silences? I pray that
violins like these shall some day
usher me out of death and into
the music of your eyes.

JOHN SAVANT

JOHN SAVANT is emeritus professor of English at Dominican College, San Rafael, Calif.

A Virtual Church

Give us this day our daily blog....

BY GREG KANDRA

After my ordination as a deacon for the Diocese of Brooklyn in May 2007, with my head still swimming from the incense and my ears still ringing with the Litany of Saints, I clicked on my computer and, in an act of either madness or inspiration (I'm still not sure which), did something that would mysteriously and permanently change my life.

I started a blog.

For the less Web-savvy, a blog is a "Web log," a kind of online journal for posting ideas, opinions, news, videos, songs—almost anything. I am hardly a pioneer. Blogs have been around for a decade or so, and one of the most engaging Catholic sites is maintained by Boston's Cardinal Seán O'Malley. But I did not know of many deacons who were blogging. I picked a name that I hoped would sum up what it was all about: "The Deacon's Bench: Where a Roman Catholic Deacon Ponders the World."

Into the Blogosphere

The months that followed were a revelation. I saw firsthand both the promise and the peril of the Internet. And I found myself rubbing elbows with readers from around the world who, to quote a friend of mine, may have been Catholic but sometimes forgot they were Christian.

At first I had intended to use my

GREG KANDRA is a deacon for the Diocese of Brooklyn, where he is news director for the diocesan cable channel, NET. He also writes the blog "The Deacon's Bench" (www.deachench.blogspot.com).

little corner of the Internet to dump my Sunday homilies and post news items about deacons and vocations, but I soon decided to broaden my scope. Anything Catholic was fair game. I started trolling Catholic Web sites, diocesan newspapers, anything my Google search turned up.

I also started dropping by other Catholic blogs. Many were staunchly conservative and fiercely partisan regarding politics. Others devoted considerable time and energy to reporting the latest news about schismatic traditionalist Catholic groups or the Tridentine Mass. None of this appealed to me much. Instead I wanted to stake out territory that was home to most American Catholics, or at least those I encountered in my ministry: the observant and thoughtful churchgoing people who were curious about the faith, showed up every Sunday for Mass with their envelopes and sleepy children, and did not cling to extremes of either the right or the left. I was looking to capture the middle ground. But how could I get people to read this stuff?

I turned to an old friend of mine, Elizabeth Scalia (the blogger known as the Anchoress) for advice. She rec-

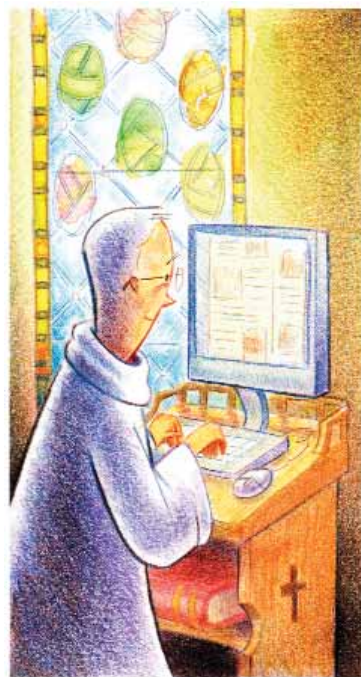
ommended, among other things, lots of links. In a show of bloggerly solidarity, she started making reference to my little site regularly on her own blog. Others took notice. The Catholic writer Amy Welborn mentioned the site on her blog and added "The Deacon's Bench" as a permanent link. Traffic began to pick up.

I added a "site meter" to my page, which tracked how many people were reading it and where they were coming from. At first, it was a few hundred readers a week. A huge number of them, I was amused to discover, were do-it-yourselfers—carpenters or furniture makers who ended up at my blog after doing a Google search for

information about how to build a deacon's bench.

The Perils of Popularity

Over time, more established bloggers began linking to "The Deacon's Bench," most notably Rocco Palmo, whose "Whispers in the Loggia" blog has evidently become required reading in every chancery in America. "New Advent," another site, began listing some of my writings in its daily list of notable blog posts.



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—James Joyce

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Readers began to leave encouraging comments. I was pleasantly surprised when the site meter showed readers from Manila, London, South Africa and even Rome. Someone from Dreamworks Studios in Hollywood was reading it. I saw Web addresses for chanceries in Chicago, Los Angeles, Atlanta and Brooklyn. Even people from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington were reading me. So were Catholics of every stripe, who were not shy about sharing their opinions.

At times, it seemed as if people were quietly measuring me and my blog to see if I was “Catholic enough.” Soon after the site launched, I found a YouTube clip from “The Simpsons” showing what Marge imagined “Catholic heaven” was like: brawling drunken Irishmen and piñata-whapping Hispanics. I thought it was a riot, and posted a link to it on Father’s Day. One reader commented: “Twenty centuries filled with examples of heroic Catholic fatherhood and we get the Simpsons??? D’oh!”

Another time, when I posted a link to one of my essays in *America*, a commenter sniffed, “I look forward to the day your work will appear in a Catholic publication.”

Political Controversy

Nothing sparks debate (or fuels outrage) like politics. A news item I posted in summer 2008 unexpectedly landed like a live grenade. Barack Obama had invited an 86-year-old Sister of St. Joseph, Sister Catherine Pinkerton, to offer a prayer at the Democratic National Convention. I posted the story without comment under the headline from the original news story: “Nun to Offer Prayer at Democratic Convention.”

The reaction was swift. First, I was excoriated for calling her a “nun”—nuns live in a cloister, I was scolded, and this woman does not even wear a habit. Then there was the problem

that she appeared to be forming an alliance with a political party that favors abortion rights. One reader said that if this woman lived in his diocese, she would be denied Communion. (I was not aware that praying at a convention without endorsing any candidate was a canonically punishable offense. Someone should notify Cardinal Roger Mahony, who offered the prayer at the Democratic National Convention in 2000.)

A notable absence from the convention did not fail to draw readers' notice either: Denver's Archbishop Charles Chaput. "How come the sanctimonious Democrats choose to offend all U.S. Catholics by snubbing him?" a reader wrote. "It's utterly disgraceful. No Catholic, regardless of canonical state, should in any way, shape or form support B. H. Obama for President."

Another reader, after visiting the Web site for the Sisters of St. Joseph, noted: "I wonder how many vocations her order had this year? Hopefully they'll fade away soon."

Those were some of the kinder comments. Confronting this sort of frat house sensibility, with all its belching and braying and foot stomping, I began to despair. Was this what 21st-century communication had come to?

Fortunately, no.

Reaching Out Through Cyberspace

Last year I noticed an upturn in readership around the time of Pope Benedict's visit to America. Men who were interested in the diaconate were reading the blog and writing in, eager for more information. A woman whose niece was undergoing a sex-change operation wrote me, wondering how she should deal with it. (I directed her to the U.S. bishops' pastoral letter *Always Our Children*.) A 17-year-old boy from Portugal who was struggling with his faith wrote in to ask for prayers. A deacon from Australia invited me to submit an essay for the vocations fair during

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World Youth Day. People were finding their way to "The Bench." I was pleased.

Then, one night in August, on the eve of the Feast of the Assumption, I decided to check my e-mail before going to bed. There was an item in my inbox titled, "I lost one of my students today." I sat down and took a deep breath. It was from a Catholic teacher in Newark, N.J. One of his pupils, a 15-year-old boy, had been shot and killed that morning while sleeping in his own bedroom. News reports said a neighbor downstairs had been handling a rifle that had gone off accidentally.

The teacher was devastated. He told me that he wrote because he just needed to get it off his chest. "I am stricken with grief at a time when my heart would otherwise be elated—but I know my young student, my child, celebrates this feast in the arms of the Blessed Mother," he wrote, and asked for prayers for himself, his stu-

dents and the boy who had been killed.

I did not know what to say. I wrote back to him, offering a few words of consolation, and told him I would pray for him. But something, I felt, had changed.

The flickering words on a computer screen spoke of something greater, and deeper, and sadder than anything else I had encountered in my months of blogging. In the middle of all the bickering in the blogosphere, I had encountered a moment of unexpected grief and profound grace—beautiful, heartbreaking, soul-wrenching grace.

A World of Grace


If nothing else, the Internet makes us acutely aware of this: the world is bigger than we realize and smaller than we expect. We are bound

together in ways we cannot even imagine. I have learned a lot since I began blogging, but the greatest lesson may be that we are catholic, which means we are universal, and that we are everything and everyone, for better or for worse.

It just might be that of all the forms of communication, the Internet is the most catholic; the Web is truly universal. Blogs, chat rooms and online forums have become our confessionals, our pulpits, our sanctuaries. My friend the anchoress has even experimented with posting morning and evening prayer on her site, complete with chants, creating something like a monastic cyber-choir for countless anonymous souls seeking spiritual refreshment. (Behold: you can now sanctify the day with a keyboard and mouse.)

Of course, no computer screen or comment box can replace the sense of community found in a gathering of like-minded souls, huddled in a hushed and darkened temple, surrounded by lit candles and smoldering incense, raising their hearts and voices to God. To be church, you need more than a screen name and an e-mail address. Yet I cannot help but think this technology offers wondrous possibilities. Here is a new way to evangelize, to learn, to teach, to build community. Who knows? Maybe the era of fish fries and soup suppers and pancake breakfasts will eventually give way to online chats every Friday during Lent.

In the meantime, I go on blogging. At last count, "The Deacon's Bench" was averaging about 50,000 visitors a month. Whenever I start to feel cocky about that, I just check my site meter for what they were searching for, and I am quickly brought back to earth.

A lot of them are still looking for advice about furniture. 

ON THE WEB

Greg Kandra talks about blogging and working in television. americamagazines.org/podcast

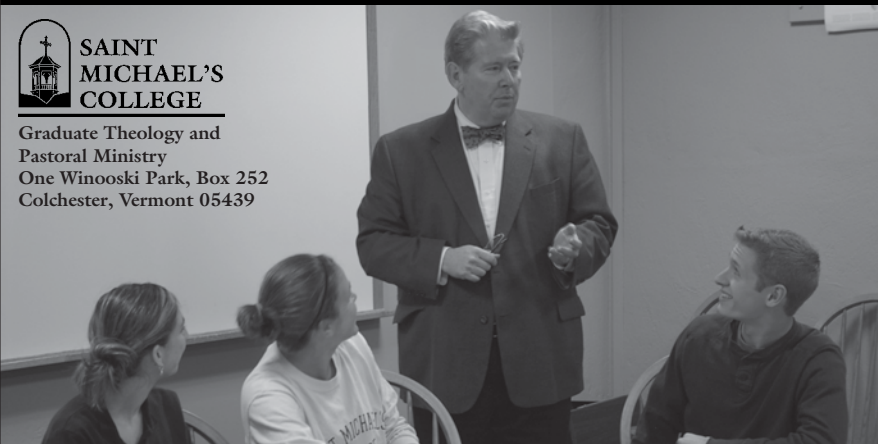
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BOOKS & CULTURE

FILM | RICHARD LEONARD

DOWN UNDER, OVER THE TOP

Baz Luhrmann's 'Australia'

Baz Luhrmann's film *Australia* has received mixed reviews around the world. One of the most insightful comments, however, comes from Peter Sheehan, of Australia's Catholic Office for Film and Broadcasting, who wrote, "This film is not 'Gone with the Wind,' but it is the closest thing to it that this country has ever produced."

The most important information the audience can have about this movie is that "Australia," as the poster says, is a "Baz Luhrmann Film." Mark Anthony Luhrmann, known as Baz, is the man who strutted onto the world's

screens in 1992 with "Strictly Ballroom," followed it up with "Romeo + Juliet" in 1996 and then directed "Moulin Rouge" five years later. In just four films over 16 years, his work has become progressively longer and more complex. His subjects have moved from a home in the suburbs to, now, the smallest continent and the largest island in the world.

Luhrmann's style is hyper-real. That's why Sheehan's comment is on the money. "Australia" is in every sense an epic.

Lady Sarah Ashley (Nicole Kidman) is convinced that her hus-

band is cheating on her, so the headstrong Sarah journeys from London to the remote tropical outpost of Darwin, Australia, to confront him. Her reluctant guide through the vast, unforgiving terrain of the Northern Territory is the Drover (Hugh Jackman), a rough-hewn cattleman as rugged as Sarah is refined. Their profound mutual dislike is tempered by tragedy when Sarah suddenly finds herself caring for a sensitive young orphan called Nullah (Brandon Walters), a half-Aboriginal, half-Caucasian boy adrift in a segregated society that treats him as an outcast.

Meanwhile, Faraway Downs, her husband's cattle ranch, is on the edge of ruin; and the scheming station manager Neil Fletcher (David Wenham) is plotting with the cattle baron King Carney (Bryan Brown) to hasten its



PHOTO: CNS/FOX

Hugh Jackman and Nicole Kidman in a scene from the movie "Australia"

demise and take over the property himself.

To save Faraway Downs, Sarah must join forces with the Drover and drive 1,500 head of cattle across Australia's breathtaking yet brutal landscape. Along with Nullah, they are joined by a misfit band of ranch hands and homesteaders, including the alcoholic accountant Kipling Flynn (Jack Thompson), the Drover's trusted Aboriginal stockmen Magarri (David Ngoombujarra) and Goolaj (Angus Pilakui) and a mysterious tribal magic man known as King George (David Gulpilil). Transformed by the power and beauty of the land and by her bond with Nullah, Sarah falls in love with the Drover.

But when the sinister effects of World War II reach the shores of Australia, Sarah and her unlikely new family are torn apart. For the first time, Sarah has something to fight for—and it takes passion, courage and determination as great as the mysteries

of the ancient continent to protect the people she loves.

"Australia" is spectacularly shot and wonderfully edited. Some of the performances, especially from the Aboriginal cast, are very affecting indeed. Jackman and Kidman are allowed to be over the top because the film is over the top. Luhrmann does not believe that less is more. But this film has a deeply moving moral center.

I doubt many people beyond the shores of Australia can appreciate the intensity of the debate surrounding the culpability contemporary white Australians bear in regard to the forced removal of children of mixed race from their Aboriginal families for nearly 100 years. As well-meaning as the policy and practice may have been at the time, they are now seen as a shameful story, akin to the stain of slavery for other nations. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd gave an official apology to the "Stolen Generations"

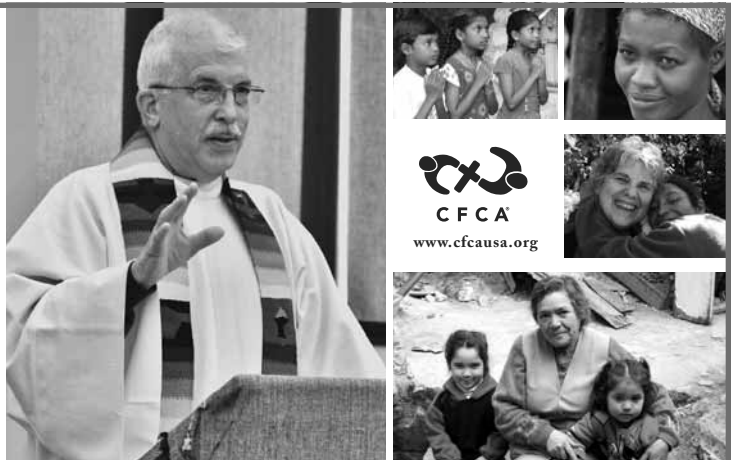
only in February of last year.

But Luhrmann is smarter than to leave a happily-ever-after ending for Nullah, Lady Sarah and her Drover. King George beckons Nullah back to his tribal roots and ways: "You have been on a journey; now we are heading home." In doing this Luhrmann is articulating one side of a lively debate about how Australian indigenous people might reclaim their own heritage and dignity. The report of the Royal Commission on the Stolen Generation was entitled *Bringing Them Home*. It is not by accident that "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" is this film's unofficial theme song.

Apart from the agreeable romance between the leads and the explicit homage to the American western genre in the cattle driving scenes, "Australia" also has a particularly strong mystical resonance.

In *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia*, the Jungian psychoanalyst David Tacey observed that

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... and we need priests to tell folks about it



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within the Australian canon of literature and legend, the outback appears as a motif of “descent, decline and regeneration.”

It is also true of Australian cinema, in which we have romantically portrayed the outback as a place of natural beauty, of divine creation or as a challenge worthy of human endeavor (“The Man from Snowy River”). In our outback stories we meet eccentric characters (“Priscilla, Queen of the Desert”), humor and satire (“Crocodile Dundee”) around narratives of friendship (“Gallipoli”), and the triumph of a rugged individual over the geography (“The Man from Snowy River II”) is always at hand. The desert has been for us the locale for stories of violence (think of the “Mad Max” films), hard work (“The Sundowners”) and most especially mysticism, Aboriginal mysticism in particular (“The Chant of Jimmy Blacksmith,” “Jedda,” “Walkabout” and “Picnic at Hanging Rock”).

Extending this Jungian reading, Luhrmann marries the Australian canon with an epic style and a mystical quest narrative. Here the wounded

heroes (Lady Sarah and the Drover), who are in flight from their external worlds (both characters are grieving), are led by the symbolic mystical child into a lonely place (figuratively and physically), where the reality of the other worlds are taken as seriously as is the importance of living close to the earth.

Within this context, our heroes undergo inner battles, purifications and rites of passage within which the split between their conscious and unconscious worlds is healed. The *anima* (a very feminine Kidman) and the *animus* (an equally rugged Jackman) are reconciled as one.

This quest, however, comes at a cost. As

much as our wounded, epic heroes want to hold on to the child who has been the source and inspiration for their illumination, they have to let him go so he can sing other songs in lands beyond their sight. With that they are left to live out their transformed lives, because the boy is “gone with the wind.”

ON THE WEB

Richard Leonard, S.J. discusses “Australia” and other films from 2008. americamagazine.org/podcast

RICHARD LEONARD, S.J., is the director of the Australian Catholic Office for Film and Broadcasting and the author of *Movies That Matter*.

a lot going on in those deep and sometimes murky waters that does not reach the eyes of journalists and that does not always seem to have heard the words of bishops. For a recent example, compare the agonized reaction to the election of Barack Obama on the part of the U.S. Catholic Bishops Conference with the generally enthusiastic reception by many Catholics. Obama increased his share of the Catholic vote even as he apparently offended many bishops.

Bernard Lonergan, S.J., famously advised the virtues of attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness and, in *Method in Theology*, promoted the quality of being loving and open to change. Everything must follow from attentiveness, and Jerome Baggett’s new book on how American Catholics live their faith is a marvelous example of how participant-observer sociology can shed light on the life of the church beneath the public face of the Catholic Church. Baggett and his student assistants conducted extensive interviews with about 150 Bay Area Catholics who are active in one of six parishes. The parishes are named, not the individuals. The interview schedule (printed as Appendix B) includes questions on the parishioners’ level of activism within church and society, their sense of their Catholic identity and the extent of their agreement with church authority.

Baggett, an associate professor of religion and society at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley, also asked them to reflect on some Scripture passages and to respond to a few hot-button issues (poverty, abortion, women’s ordination, the Iraq War and the scandal of sexual abuse) and how if at all these had affected the respondents’ faith. Calling on the bishops to pay attention to the way active Catholics express their faith, Baggett makes the significant point that bishops should be aware that even the most committed of Catholics “negotiate

BOOKS | PAUL LAKELAND

COMMUNITY NARRATIVES

SENSE OF THE FAITHFUL

How American Catholics Live Their Faith

By Jerome P. Baggett
Oxford Univ. Press. 320p \$29.95
ISBN 978-0195326956

Much of what the general public makes of the shape and fortunes of Catholicism in the United States today is taken either from the well-publicized pronouncements of church

leaders or the perspective of journalists. The consequence is that the figure Catholicism cuts in society is of a rule-bound and often seemingly negative community struggling from one crisis to another. Yet American Catholics and their leaders know that this public face is just the one-tenth of the iceberg that is visible above the water line. Under the surface, Catholicism is much more pluralistic, complex and sometimes internally divided. There is

ate with their faith tradition, experience real uncertainties about it, and look askance at many of its more institutionalized features.” Whether the bishops would consider this phenomenon, as Baggett does, to be “bracing” is an entirely different question.

Baggett owes something of his approach and many of his questions to the book *American Catholics Today* (2007), in which Bill D’Antonio, Jim Davidson, Mary Gauthier and the late Dean Hoge displayed the results of their fourth survey of Catholic opinion. Unlike them, however, Baggett focused on active Catholics rather than those who merely identified themselves as Catholic, and his interviews went into much greater depth. As a result, his findings complement those of the earlier work. As one might expect, more active Catholics are more commonly at church and less likely to contemplate leaving the church than their less involved counterparts. But

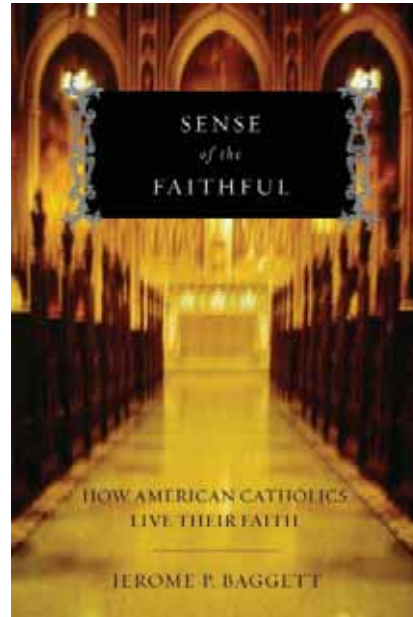
with the exception of the one highly conservative community Baggett included in his survey, they seem to be largely open to the ordination of women, an end to mandatory celibacy or a better place for homosexuals in the church. But what makes this book so enlightening is not so much the comparative statistics, interesting as they are, as the inclusion of personal stories that put some flesh on the bones of the bare data. When Baggett lets us eavesdrop on real conversations, the complexity of how we Catholics construct our faith identities is quite apparent and quite fascinating.

In the very first interview one of the respondents “eagerly embraces the pejoratively intended moniker ‘cafeteria Catholic’ as a testament to his own religious agency and capacity for discernment.”

This kind of *Annales* approach to Catholicism reveals much fascinating data but, as the author recognizes, leaves many questions. It establishes beyond dispute that American Catholics are an

independent and somewhat messy lot, not always agreeing with their bishops and only infrequently conforming when they either do not understand episcopal teaching or do not accept it.

But what is to be made of all of this? Baggett is appropriately nonjudgmental in representing his conclusions and wonders how much the bishops will attend to this kind of information as a resource for their pastoral outlook. Catholics, he suggests, are neither simply the “seekers” that many non-churched Americans seem to be, nor are they the “dwellers” of an earlier age. Instead they are “indwelt seekers,” people with fierce loyalty to the church but who demand that their tradition must resonate with their experience. This is an accurate observation, though it does not move us very far in the direction of knowing how to channel this kind of conviction within the life of the faith-community. Perhaps the author comes closest to offering a way forward in the important distinction he makes between the subjective and objective dimensions of the “sense of the faithful.” In fact, Vatican II distinguished the *sensus fidelium*, that



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body of beliefs that all share and which partakes of Spirit-guaranteed infallibility, and the *sensus fidei*, the constantly growing, changing, forming and reforming subjective intuition of the faithful about what is right and true. The universal agreement of the former and the supernatural sense of the latter have to work together.

Baggett's book is an important account of just such a work in progress. One can see the picture he paints as either threatening or full of

hope, depending upon how much attention we pay to the dynamic element in the church. But the first-person narratives he offers us and the conclusions he draws ought to go a long way toward taking the fear out of the process.

PAUL LAKELAND is the Aloysius P. Kelley S.J. Professor of Catholic Studies and Director of the Center for Catholic Studies at Fairfield University in Fairfield, Conn. His most recent book is *Catholicism at the Crossroads: How the Laity Can Save the Church* (Continuum).

BEN TERRALL

A GIVER AND A DOER

ON THAT DAY, EVERYBODY ATE

One Woman's Story of Hope and Possibility in Haiti

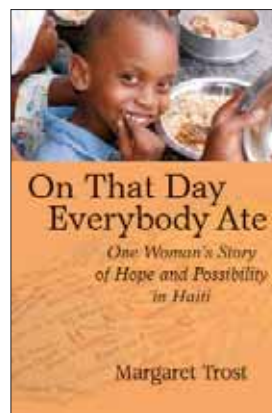
By Margaret Trost

Koa Books. 168p \$15 (paperback)
ISBN 9780977333899

Margaret Trost was a well-to-do American, successful in business, happily married, with a healthy son. Then, in the late 1990s, her husband died suddenly and unexpectedly. In her grief she decided on impulse to go to Haiti with a group of faith-based social justice activists: "I was invited to go to Haiti in the spring of 1999, and my response took less than a second. It was one of those times when my heart spoke before my mind had time to catch up." *On That Day, Everybody Ate* is Ms. Trost's account of how she was changed by her experiences in the Western Hemisphere's poorest country and what she was able to accomplish with the help of connections she made in Haiti and friends and family in the United States.

Scrambling for insights into the country she was visiting, Trost read *The Uses of Haiti*, the essential primer

by Paul Farmer, M.D., which helped her understand the country's long legacy of colonial subjugation. It also placed the island nation in the context of U.S. imperial foreign power, given the well-documented manipulation and suppression of Haitian sovereignty by Washington, D.C. As Farmer's book forcefully shows, ever since Haitians won the world's only successful slave revolution in 1804, they have been subjected to unceasing hostility from the United States. Haiti's status as the first nation to ban slavery and to declare itself a haven for runaway slaves did nothing to endear it to Washington. Both Democratic and Republican presidents have repeatedly sided with a small number of wealthy right-wing Haitian elites at the expense of the extremely poor majority. France, the former colonial power, further added to Haiti's misery by extracting payment of blood money (calculated to be a staggering \$21 billion in today's dollars) for the "loss" of its former slaves.



Trost returned from her first visit to Haiti as disturbed by the misery she saw as many others who make the trip. But instead of putting aside her memories of wide-scale suffering upon returning to her relatively privileged life in the United States, she committed herself to helping the Haitian poor. Soon she was working to realize a feeding program proposed to her by the Rev. Gérard Jean-Juste, a charismatic social justice priest in the liberation theology tradition. (Jean-Juste remains a close ally of popularly-elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was forced from office in a 2004 coup backed by the Bush administration.)

Unlike many U.S. citizens who visit Haiti intending to do good works, Margaret Trost was introspective and humble enough to realize that she could learn as much from her allies on

the ground in Port-au-Prince as they learned from her. Over time, those Haitian partners became a second family.

Trost describes learning to shift from her multitasking, ultra-driven stateside approach to a more natural rhythm that incorporates time for family, friends and laughter

(frequently while working on community projects that benefit everyone). In the course of helping develop the feeding project, she came to appreciate deeply how Haitians savor what moments of pleasure they can extract from their hard-scrabble days, and their communal approach to daunting day-to-day struggles.

Trost's book is well written, concise and powerful. The narrative is filled with evocative, tactile descriptions, details that define her experiences in Haiti. About getting her fundraising off the ground back in the United States, she writes, "Each time I

received a check, I multiplied the amount by two and wrote the donor letting them know how many meals they had just made possible. Ten dollars fed twenty children. One hundred dollars fed 200 children. At 50 cents a meal, every check made a difference.”

During a trip to Haiti in late August of 2008 I met numerous people who told me that the price of rice had doubled since the April 2008 food riots. One activist with whom I spoke said bitterly that it had gotten to the point where food was a “luxury.” I had earlier interviewed Mark Schuller, a specialist on Haiti who teaches at Vassar, who explained:

Haiti’s ability to feed itself with domestic rice production was wiped out by Washington-subsidized imports that U.S. agribusiness has profited from. At Ronald Reagan’s behest, Haiti initiated a series of neo-liberal measures in the 1980s, including trade liberalization, privatization and decreasing

investment in agriculture, that led to the disappearance of Haiti’s cotton and sugar export industries. During the 1990s, the U.S. conditioned its food aid—sent to alleviate a hunger crisis—with demands that Haiti lower its tariffs and open its markets to U.S. imports. This subsidized U.S. rice was much cheaper than Haitian rice, forcing local farmers out of business.

Meanwhile, in response to the U.S. financial crisis, billions are being thrown at greedy bankers on Wall Street. And in the coming year the Pentagon will spend \$607 billion on “normal” military costs, as well as an additional \$100 billion for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is stunning to think what a small chunk of that money could do for millions of impoverished Haitians.

BEN TERRALL, a San Francisco-based freelance writer, has contributed to the *National Catholic Reporter*, the *San Francisco Chronicle* and other publications.

PETER HEINEGG

WOMEN ON THE MOVE

FACTORY GIRLS

From Village to City in a Changing China

By Leslie T. Chang
Spiegel & Grau. 432p \$26
ISBN 9780385520171

The largest migration in human history has nothing to do with barbarian tribes, the slave trade or Ellis Island. It is the movement of 130 million Chinese who, starting in the late 1970s, have poured out of rural China into the cities. No one person could adequately analyze or summarize this tremendous, ongoing socio-cultural transformation; but by close-

ly studying the lives of some of its young female participants, the former Wall Street Journal Beijing correspondent Leslie Chang has given outsiders an illuminating picture of something very much like terra incognita. Born in the United States but fluent in Mandarin, Chang inevitably wound up exploring her own roots as she recorded the experiences of Lu Qingmin, Wu Chunming and others who were drawn or driven to *chuqu*, “go out,” from tiny traditional villages to seek their fortune in sprawling, soulless agglomerations like Dongguan.

Dongguan, in the Pearl River Delta

north of Hong Kong, has anywhere from seven to ten million inhabitants, 70 percent of whom are women. For a minimum wage of \$50 to \$80 a month (though many get less) the “factory girls” toil 10 to 13 hours a day, six days (sometimes seven) a week, making clothing, toys, shoes and electronic products, eating in the company cafeteria and sleeping in jammed rooms with a dozen or more co-workers. As with previous generations from Manchester, England, to Lowell, Mass., the willingness of these women to endure such hardships—wretched, possibly poisonous working conditions, no health insurance, loneliness, mistreatment by predatory males—provides a powerful measure of just how intolerable they found life down on the farm.

If nothing else, places like Dongguan offer job mobility. Though they may have to sacrifice their compulsory deposit of the first two months’ salary as the price of escaping, the girls can jump to and from making or selling industrial molds, paint, computer parts, Coach bags, sneakers, plastic Christmas trees or anything else in the cut-rate cornucopia destined for the shelves of Wal-Mart. With luck they can save some money, acquire new skills, impress the boss, learn a little English, meet a reliable boyfriend (almost no one talks about love or romance) and, in the best American-dream fashion, enjoy more freedom and affluence than their parents ever knew.

All of which naturally comes at a cost. The basic rule for survival on the factory floor in Dongguan (or nearby Guangzhou or Shenzhen) is: Trust no one but yourself. Friends are rare, colleagues come and go. Since everyone’s address is constantly changing, your only long-term link with people is your cell phone. Lose that or have it stolen, and you are incommunicado. As for male companions, the ideal but hard to find candidates are unattached

go-getters who have their own apartments and are 5'7" or taller. Personality and looks are a plus. The girls will eventually marry, but no time soon. Meanwhile they have constant hassles with their parents, who want sons-in-law from nearby towns, lest they be separated from their daughters—who traditionally would move in with the family of the groom.

But that was then, before the urban explosion and the overturning of the Confucian apple cart. Once doubly inferior, as young and female, the factory girls now typically earn far more than their

parents, to whom they mail home substantial chunks of their wages and thus gain higher status than their elders. Along with Confucius, John Stuart Mill, who loved to cite China as the supreme example of the "despotism of Custom," would be spinning in his grave.

Culturally and intellectually speaking, Chang's girls are impoverished. Their education has been beyond shoddy. They have no politics or sense of history. They read, if anything, Chinese knock-offs of American self-help manuals. (Of course, before Communism they would have been illiterate.) They are materialistic and banally pragmatic to a fault. They have exchanged Buddhism for self-boosting.

But while Chang will gently laugh at them, she is still on their side. Exhausting and deprived as it is, their world looks more humane than the decades-long nightmare of Mao & Co.—a subject on which Chang is especially eloquent. Her grandfather studied engineering for eight years in the United States before returning to help his people, only to be bayoneted to death by Communist guards in 1946 while tending to the country's

largest coal mine. Another relative was harassed into committing suicide during the Cultural Revolution; and yet others, defamed as "Rightists," lost their jobs and were condemned to years of meaningless drudgery in the remote countryside.

Chang goes on pilgrimage to various sites of her family's suffering and speaks and compares notes with the few remaining survivors. Inevitably she sees a parallel between her parents, who escaped to the United States via Taiwan, and the factory girls who have embarked on similar, if less perilous and

promising, journeys. Among other things, they all share an extraordinary toughness, resiliency, openness and hunger for opportunity.

Given this impossibly vast canvas, Chang has had to leave a number of spaces blank. The ubiquity of syphilis and gonorrhea clinics in Dongguan suggests a huge, grim underworld of sex slavery; but she only shows us one

upscale brothel (the Silverworld "Hotel"), where the prostitutes are far better paid and cared for than their oppressed proletarian sisters. As Chang's many vivid snapshots of the factory girls' trials and adventures provide little sense of their earlier and later lives, this book cries out for a follow-up. And, speaking of snapshots, alas, we have no photos of Chang's spunky informants or their gritty, grungy, sardine-can environment. Next time around, Chang might want to contact a good undercover documentary filmmaker.

In any event, her report is a brilliant one: sharp-eyed, sensitive, independent, alert to the parade of ironies and absurdities around her (who knew that Dale Carnegie was a philosopher king in today's China? That some factories have Hula Hoop clubs for their employees? That "information exchange" is Chinese for "speed-dating"?). Chang was uniquely equipped to tell this crucial story; and she has nailed it.

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



BOOK BRIEFS

GENOCIDE UNCOVERED; IGNATIAN INSIGHTS; AVIAN AWARENESS

THE HOLOCAUST BY BULLETS

A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews

By Father Patrick Desbois
Palgrave/Macmillan. 272p \$26.95

Not a book for the fainthearted, this is nonetheless a noteworthy and needed addition to Holocaust literature.

Desbois is secretary to the French Conference of Bishops for relations with Judaism; in 2004 he founded an organization called Yahad-in Unum that investigates the mass killings of Eastern European Jews by the Nazis from 1941 to 1945. Traveling with a team to Ukraine in 2007, he visited numerous locations and interviewed surviving witnesses (many of whom had been conscripted by the Germans

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to “dig”) to the humiliation and calculated murder of more than a million unsuspecting Jews. With the assistance of an interpreter, a ballistics expert, a photographer and an archival researcher, the author recounts in vivid, unflinching detail the methodical torture, shooting and burial of Jews (some still alive) in huge open pits throughout various small towns and villages. These were not isolated sites, but in full view of local villagers of all ages, the victims’ non-Jewish neighbors and even friends. A chilling refrain underlying all the testimony presented is that “the earth moved for three days.” History is indebted to Father Desbois and his team for uncovering the truth and bringing to light a dark, almost forgotten chapter in the story of Nazi atrocities.

P. A. K.

A FRIENDSHIP LIKE NO OTHER

William A. Barry, S.J.
Loyola Books. 203p \$14.95

WHAT IS IGNATIAN SPIRITUALITY?

David L. Fleming, S.J.
Loyola Books. 113p \$12.95

One of my favorite kinds of books is the short book written by an expert in the field. Why take hundreds of pages to get to the point? Two fine new examples of this genre, in the spiritual vein, are *A Friendship Like No Other*, by William A. Barry, S.J., and *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* by David L. Fleming, S.J. Both books, models of clarity, are superb. Barry’s book deepens a theme that the author, a veteran spiritual director and writer well known to *America* readers, has been pondering for years: God desires our friendship. Through the artful use of passages from the Old and New Testaments, examples



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from his own life and his capacious reading of literature, Barry invites us to return that friendship to both God and his Son. In one his most provocative passages, he meditates on the “parent-child” model of relating to God. It is a useful image, albeit one that can encourage believers to think of themselves as little children. Barry suggests another model for adult believers: “I propose that the relationship between an adult child and his or her parents is a better image of the relationship God wants with us as adults.” You could spend days—an eight-day retreat!—meditating on that insight, one that is characteristic of this warm and wise book.

What Is Ignatian Spirituality? covers slightly different territory; it is also one of the shortest introductions to Ignatian spirituality I have ever read. The editor of Review for Religious and an experienced spiritual director, Fleming offers bite-size chapters on love, pilgrimage, prayer, work, discernment and sin, each highlighting an aspect of the spirituality of St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. Fleming expertly weaves into his book, as through a tapestry, stories from the life of Ignatius and examples from his classic text, the *Spiritual Exercises*. Like Barry, much of Fleming’s writing not only explains but reveals: “Imaginative prayer makes Jesus of the Gospels our Jesus.” This is one of those statements, common to both books, that makes you think at once, “I’ve never thought of that!” and “That’s exactly right!” Fleming’s is the perfect book to give to someone who asks his title question. How lucky we are to have these two experienced guides offering to lead us along the way of Ignatius, and how lucky we are that they have followed the lead of the homiletics professor who gave his class excellent advice for giving a good homily: “Be clear, be brief and be gone!” J.M.

OF PARROTS AND PEOPLE


The Sometimes Funny, Always Fascinating, and Often Catastrophic Collision of Two Intelligent Species

By Mira Tweti
Viking, \$25.95

First of all, do not laugh at the author’s surname if this is your first encounter. She is an award-winning journalist and documentary filmmaker, whose previous book (for children) was hailed by Jane Goodall as “a masterpiece.” The famed African grey parrot named Alex (also the subject of a new book), who was the subject of a years-long research project, showed humans how smart parrots really are. Tweti’s book is both fascinating and shocking. In addition to exploring human emotional connection with these long-lived avian species, as well as their intelligence, it serves as an exposé of widespread violations of

animal rights, mistreatment of birds in captivity and threats to many endangered parrot species in the wild. There is a huge market for these so-called “exotic” pets and big money in illegal trapping and trade; but, as the author also notes, there is “a growing epidemic of unwanted [domestic] parrots.” She first reported her research in a story for The Los Angeles Times Magazine (“Plenty to Squawk About”), which won a special award from the Humane Society for outstanding investigative journalism. An insert of black-and white photos tells the story as clearly and vividly as Tweti’s text. The concluding chapter sounds a wake-up call, raising public eco-consciousness about the results of unchecked deforestation on parrots’ habitats. This book deserves a wide readership. P.A.K.

Book Briefs is written by Patricia A. Kossmann, literary editor, and James Martin, S.J., culture editor, of America.



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Further information about this position and application is available on St. Xavier's Web site, or contact Michael McGraw, Succession Committee Chair (msmcgraw@rgmcgrawinsurance.com). Review of applications will begin Feb. 1. All applications are due by Feb. 15.

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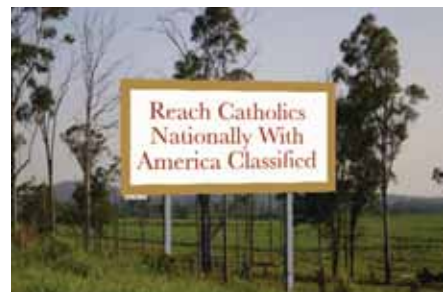
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LETTERS

Fruits of Our Faith

My fervent prayer is that more parish priests will have the courage to preach Sunday sermons like the recent reflection by Barbara Reid, O.P., on the Holy Family (The Word, 12/22). Sister Reid used biblical scholarship to contrast the theology of retribution found in the wisdom literature of the Old Testament against the teachings of the Gospels and, I might add, the teachings of real life. She was also unafraid to address the patriarchal context of the readings without sacrificing their deeper, applicable messages.

Everyday Catholics need to be trusted with and educated in the fruits of our own rich biblical scholarship, and not just presented with the watered-down versions that seem to tiptoe along the edge in so many Sunday homilies. We should preach the word realistically and compassionately, as our Master did.

MARY L. PIKER
San Antonio, Tex.

Personal Dignity

I read with great interest the reflections by Drew Christiansen, S.J., on the recent Vatican document *Dignitas Personae* ("Science, Technology and the Human Future," 12/22). I am currently serving as an active duty military physician and as the biomedical ethics chair at an Army medical center in Texas, and frequently work in and around the intensive care unit. I can personally attest to many wide and varied clinical cases where ethics committee consultation was requested. These were situations involving challenging ethical and moral dilemmas.

The Catholic Church has been a beacon of light in providing guidance and moral authority on many of the critical biomedical ethical issues surrounding end of life care. I continue to pray that all those who seek the truth and work in the broad field of medicine will thoughtfully and prayer-

fully consider the recommendations given in this timely document.

CHRISTOPHER POWERS, M.D.
El Paso, Tex.

The Laborers Are Many

Re David Gibson's reflections on Catholic biblical literacy and Bible study in "A Literate Church" (12/8): While the quality of Bible study resources has grown significantly over the years, I would also highlight another essential (if sometimes overlooked) aspect of ongoing biblical literacy: volunteer leaders. The willingness of parish volunteer leaders of Bible study cannot be neglected as one of the great movements of the Spirit in our parishes.

(REV.) DAVID LOFTUS
Los Angeles, Calif.

Out of Silence

I was interested to see the article on Pius XII by Gerald P. Fogarty, S.J. ("A Pope in Wartime," 12/15). Ultimately, however, I found the article frustrating. I recognize that the article sets out to show that the pope's silence was not born from indifference toward the plight of Jews and other victims of World War II. Nevertheless, the pope's very silence is precisely the difficulty that many—Jews, Catholics and others—have with Pius XII and his legacy. The issue at stake is not whether the pope's silence was pro-Nazi or not, but the very fact that he was silent at all. Pius XII's silence is particularly troubling given that others within the church were speaking out against Hitler and even dying for their beliefs.

Fogarty concludes that Pius XII was not silent out of indifference toward the plight of the Jews; but if that assertion is true, is it really to the pontiff's credit that he remained so?

HOLLY J. GRIECO
Loudonville, N.Y.

Who's to Blame?

Contrary to Peter Quinn's assertion that "ruinous deregulation" is the cause of our financial crisis ("Mister

President," 1/19), the crisis was caused by Congress's decision to ignore regulators who warned that "Ninja" loans ("no income, no job, no assets") were not only contrary to banking rules and all sound economic principles, but that they would inevitably lead to large-scale defaults in the mortgage industry. It was the government's unwise interference with the mortgage industry at the insistence of Congressional oversight committees in order to satisfy a policy of insuring mortgages for the disadvantaged (a noble goal that also ensured that not-so-disadvantaged borrowers could be granted mortgages with little or no money down) that led to the financial collapse.

Of course, the lack of enforcement of existing regulations governing the sale of these equities exacerbated the problem. As Bob Finocchio Jr. notes in the same article, more regulation is not the answer. Rather, it is the proper

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enforcement of existing rules that is called for.

PAUL LOUISELL
Detroit, Mich.

A Few More Requests

Re the requests made of the new president in “Mister President” (1/19): Mr. Obama, can you please put Bob Finocchio Jr. on the Board of Trustees of my alma mater, send Daniel Callahan’s wardrobe of hair shirts to the dry cleaner and please pick up a textbook on molecular biology so that learning when life begins is no longer “above your pay grade.”

JACK WALTON
Millburn, N.J.

Neo-Marxist Analysis

In “The Roots of Terrorism” (Editorial, 1/19), you call for “greater international cooperation on sustainable development” and “a renegotiation of lopsided trade agreements.” I would respectfully submit that this borders on a non sequitur in response to terrorist violence. The same states that have spawned terrorists do not need development aid: many are awash in oil revenue, and are frequently in a favorable trade relationship with the West.

Your neo-Marxist analysis of the terrorist challenge is so intent on pinning the rose on economic explanations that it consistently neglects or minimizes the extent to which terror leaps from the members of one religious group, Islam, and is frequently directed against those of the Judeo-Christian heritage (the United States, Great Britain and Israel). This characteristic of the conflict risks over-explanation at times, but it is not irrelevant.

WILLIAM BARTO
Fairfax, Va.

Sign of a New Reality

Bishop Joseph W. Estabrook’s commentary regarding the proposed “civilianization” of military chaplains

("State of the Question," 1/19) was well stated and compelling. But why would a civilian chaplain be any less influential in the circumstances Estabrook cites? It is illogical to think that a civilian chaplain would not be assigned to a war zone just for being a civilian—note the existence of civilian journalists embedded among troops in conflict.

Also, although it is true that learning the local language and culture is essential for the preaching of the Gospel, missionaries like myself do not assume the disvalues of local cultures, however traditional they may be. Civilian chaplains, standing as a sign of the new reality coming into our history by God's hand, would consistently remind military personnel and their families of the finality of a Christian perspective, beyond armed strife, just as celibacy and simplicity of life point beyond current disvalues of hedonism and consumerism.

(REV.) BOB MOSHER
Santiago, Chile

Not for the Squeamish

The visual elements of the Sacred Heart devotion of which David M. Knight writes ("Heart of the Matter," 11/10) do not draw me closer to God. Setting aside the spiritual symbolism involved, the sight of a human heart in paintings or medical graphics can be aesthetically off-putting. Mawkish statues of Jesus baring his heart in gory red also do little to inspire me spiritually. For this reason alone, I am not surprised that the devotion has fallen out of favor among practicing Catholics.

One wonders how Father Knight can write that the Sacred Heart devo-

tion is "the fundamental center of all Catholic spirituality." Surely the many other rich devotions that are popular among the faithful are at least of equal if not greater importance?

BRIAN MCCARTHY
San Diego, Calif.

Person to Person

The questions John F. Kavanaugh, S.J., addresses to pro-lifers and pro-choicers ("Abortion Absolutists," 12/15) are invaluable. But he does not quite hit the central issue, which is the definition of personhood, not merely "human life" or "individuation." Biological evidence now shows that the fetus is obviously human and is obviously alive, and "individuation" emphasizes unity and quantity, but neither notion addresses the more basic concept of personhood.

The parallel at the other extreme is the chronically comatose patient. He or she is quite obviously an individual human who is alive, but the definition or quality of his or her personhood is the object of concern.

The philosophical, theological and legal debates on the beginning and ending of human life should focus on what constitutes personhood at any stage of existence.

HARVEY BOLlich
Austin, Tex.

A Walking Saint

I commend Carolyn Whitney-Brown for her article on Jean Vanier ("Jean Vanier's Gift for Living," 12/22). I lived with Vanier at Trosly-Breuil in France for about six months in 1969. He should be a candidate not just for the Nobel Peace Prize. If there were a similar prize for "walking sainthood," Jean Vanier would top my list of those who would be worthy. Whitney-Brown's article brought back many wonderful memories of an extraordinary human being. It was refreshing to recall, in such troubled times, that God still calls women and men to respond to his prophetic call to witness his will.

DONALD B. SHARP, S.J.
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CARTOON BY HARLEY SCHWADRON

America (ISSN 0002-7049) is published weekly (except for 12 combined issues: Jan. 5-12, 19-26, March 30-April 6, May 25-June 1, June 8-15, 22-29, July 6-13, 20-27, Aug. 3-10, 17-24, Aug. 31-Sept. 7, Dec. 21-28) by America Press, Inc., 106 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019. Periodicals postage is paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. Business Manager: Lisa Pope; Circulation: Judith Palmer, (212) 581-4640. Subscriptions: United States, \$48 per year; add U.S. \$22 postage and GST (#131870719) for Canada; or add U.S. \$32 per year for overseas surface postage. For overseas airmail delivery, please call for rates. Postmaster: Send address changes to: America, 106 West 56th St. New York, NY 10019. Printed in the U.S.A.

On Fire With the Good News

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B) FEB. 8, 2009

Readings: Job 7:1–4, 6–7; Ps 147:1–6; 1 Cor 9:16–19, 22–23; Mk 1:29–39

“The fever left her and she began to minister to them” (Mk 1:31)

What often makes the difference between experiencing life as endless drudgery and utter misery and being alive with energy and joy is our state of health—physical, emotional or spiritual. Illness and other profound losses color the whole of our perception. When an illness persists, whether one’s own or a loved one’s, one can empathize with Job’s feeling of utter weariness. It sounds familiar. A sense of helplessness, of not being in control makes one feel like a slave, who has to answer to another. One longs for relief but has no respite day or night. It seems as if a breath of wind could carry away forever the fragile self; there is no hope of happiness ever again (Jb 7:1-4).

From such a place of pain we believers, like Job, pour out our hearts to God, knowing that God never sends or wants suffering for anyone. Whether or not the healing we desire comes in the form we want, God is always with us, binding up our wounds and mending our broken-heartedness (Ps 147:3). In the Gospels, it is Jesus who embodies the power to repair shattered minds, bodies and spirits. Regardless of what stands in the way of our being able to receive and share the good news, Jesus binds up or casts out, thus releasing the power within us to experience

and pass on God’s love.

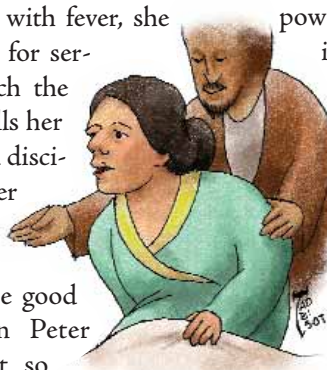
That is what happens with Simon’s mother-in-law. Ablaze with fever, she lacks her usual energy for service to others. In much the same way that Jesus calls her son-in-law to become a disciple, Jesus approaches her and frees her from all that impedes her from responding to the good news. Just as Simon Peter leaves behind his net so that he can “fish for people” (Mk 1:17), so his mother-in-law, holding on to Jesus’ hand as the fever leaves her, takes up her own ministry.

The verb *diēkonei*, usually translated as “served” or “waited on” (Mk 1:31), not only refers to serving dinner, but also to a wide range of ministries, including ministries of the word and of the table (Acts 6:1-6), and service that is apostolic (Acts 1:25), financial (Lk 8:3; Acts 1:29) and administrative (Rom 16:1). Although this Scripture passage does not tell us in what forms of service she engaged, the early believers remembered not only how Jesus extinguished the fiery fever of Simon’s mother-in-law, but also how from her love ablaze she ministered to and with them.

When Jesus heals people, he does not simply restore them to a former state of well-being. Rather, physical healings are outer signs of a deeper transformation of body, mind and spirit. As many people who have had

a near-death experience attest, nothing is ever the same afterward. Similarly, Simon’s mother-in-law experiences a “resurrection.” The verb *geiren*, “lifted up” (Mk 1:31), is the same word used for Jesus’ resurrection. A new life has been given her, but not for her only. As with all disciples, it is a transformed life that is to be shared in service.

Jesus’ purpose includes not only healing, but also preaching (Mk 1:38-39). He frees people from whatever binds them so that they can join him in proclaiming the transforming power of God’s love. His preaching encompasses not only a personal release from illness, but also the systemic evils from which people must be set free. Paul says that there is not really any choice in the matter. When one has experienced God’s gracious heal-



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- How has God transformed you with healing love in times when you felt hopeless?
- In what ways do you help others experience divine mercy?
- How are both personal healing and preaching of social justice needed to bring about the reign of God?

ing love, one is obliged to tell of it. In whatever circumstances we find ourselves, we are to preach God’s love. We do this according to our own gifts and calling.

Paul also speaks of how important it is for preachers to adopt the language, images and symbols of the people to and with whom they are ministering. A person on fire with the good news does not use abstract concepts, but tells how divine mercy raises us from the depths of misery, already transforming our sufferings, and leads us forward to the day of complete joy in God’s everlasting embrace.

BARBARA E. REID

ART: TAD A. DUNNE

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