

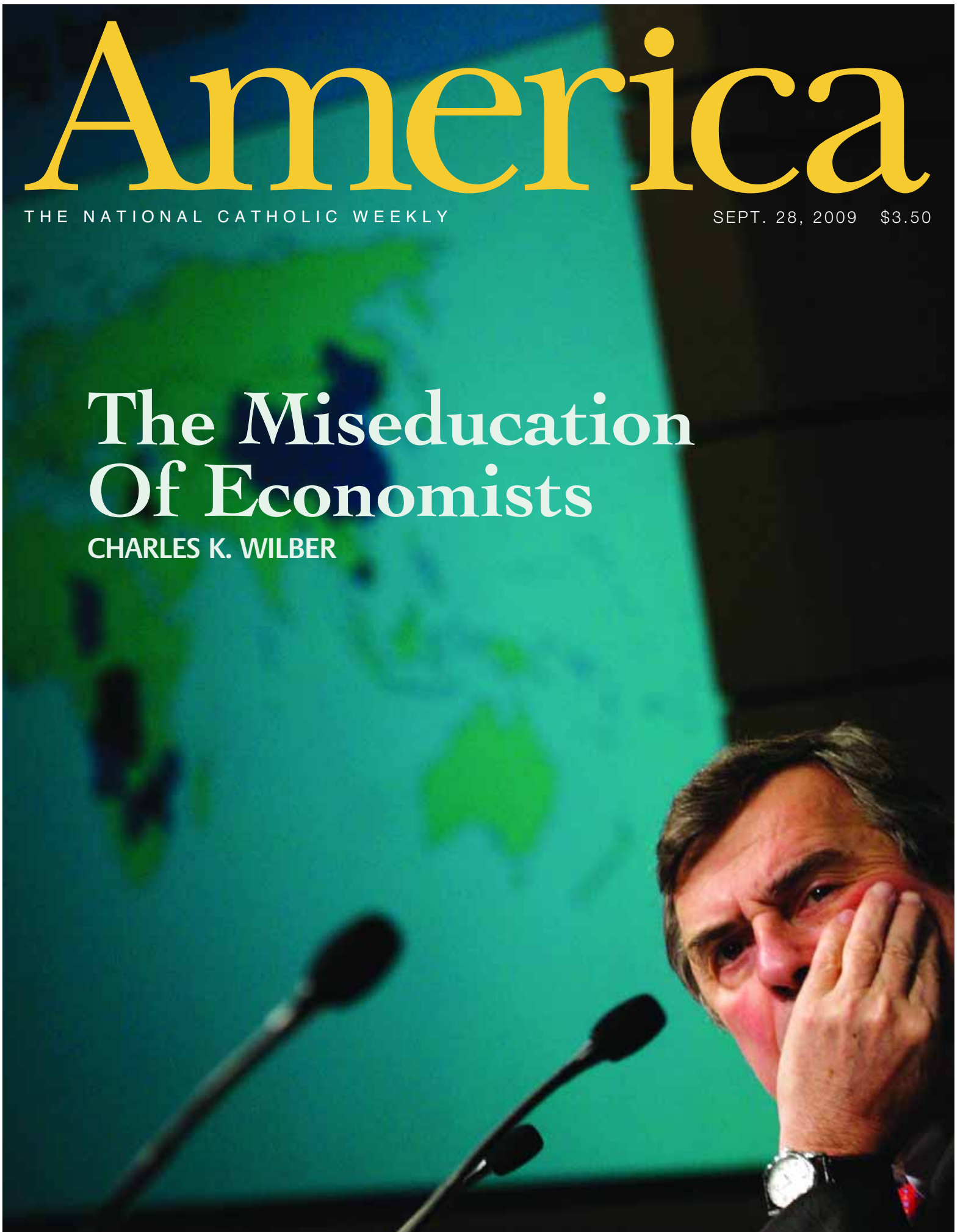
America

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The Miseducation Of Economists

CHARLES K. WILBER



OF MANY THINGS

Before work each morning President Barack Obama prayerfully reads a passage of Scripture sent him by the Rev. Joshua DuBois, the young Pentecostal preacher who is his director of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. I wonder whether on one of those mornings the president has pondered Lk 11:24-26, the parable of the evil spirit who after being expelled wanders the barren land and returns in the company of "seven spirits even worse than itself. So when it is over, that person is in worse shape than he was at the beginning."

In Luke, the passage is paired with the parable of the strong man (11:21-22), about a homeowner whose home is safe because he guards it with all his weapons. The house is plundered, however, when a stronger, better armed housebreaker defeats him. The tag line Luke uses to tie the two parables together, "Whoever is not with me is against me," may be seen by many Democratic stalwarts as needed warning for President Obama to stiffen his backbone in his current predicaments.

I appreciate, as the president does, that the American people prefer to be governed from the middle. But muddling through is unsuited to the crises the nation now faces. In a time like ours, such a management style surrenders sound policy to the forces of the status quo in a string of unreasoned compromises. It leaves the tough decisions until later and worsens the problems to be resolved in the future.

Lack of vigilance and active control results in irrational disorder. Without an assertive agenda of one's own, the political field grows chaotic; and irrational discontent, like the seven devils, comes rushing in. August's hellishly heated town hall shout-fests ought to have made clear that after the housecleaning of the 2008 elections, nihilistic forces were waiting to come back to

haunt our body politic. The president has failed to exercise the leadership necessary to control the shape of policy debate on health care. His adversaries, not the president, are setting the agenda, even after his speech to Congress on Sept. 9.

To take another example, a year after the collapse of Lehman Brothers, greed has recaptured Wall Street. The 30,000 employees of Goldman Sachs are set to earn an average of \$700,000 this year. The president's economic team of Wall Street insiders succeeded in stemming the decline of the economy, but they have done nothing until now to remedy the systemic problems underlying the collapse, beginning with the outsized compensation at Goldman: regulating nonbank financial institutions, restricting bank size, requiring transparency for financial instruments and raising lending standards.

In a third case, the national security apparatus holds tight to the practices of the last eight years. The closing of the detention camps at Guantánamo Bay has been stymied by Congressional action; and the parallel institution at the Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan has not even come under scrutiny.

The administration, moreover, has given no clear signal as to how it hopes to strike a balance between human and civil rights and protecting the nation from terrorism. One of the simplest practices to eliminate would have been the rendition of suspects to other countries for interrogation. But there are no plans to end it, despite court actions and public acts of repentance by other countries like Italy and Canada for past cooperation in U.S. abuses.

There are balances to be struck, and compromises will have to be made. But without some genuine reforms, the challenges confronting our nation, beginning with the financial crisis, will soon threaten to be worse than those we have recently faced.

DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J.

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Reuters/Yuri Gripas

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ON THE WEB

Charles K. Wilber answers readers' questions on the **economic crisis**, and John W. Donohue, S.J., assesses the legacy of **Blessed Damien of Molokai** (right). Plus, James Martin, S.J., analyzes the television show "**Mad Men**" on our podcast. All at americamagazine.org.



A Dry, Weary Land

Water is something Americans take for granted—until it's not there. Just ask the residents of Gloucester, Mass., the fishing town known to readers of *The Perfect Storm*. It recently labored under two weeks of a “boil-water” restriction, thanks to some persistent bacteria, that had local restaurants scrambling to keep their businesses alive.

In Kenya it is the people who are struggling to stay alive. Hit with the worst drought in years, even the tonier parts of Nairobi sometimes now go without water for a week. But it is typically the poor who live in the sprawling slums of the capital and in the tiny villages that dot the vast bush country who are hardest hit. Drought leads to a terrible cascade of problems: no potable water, to be sure; then no water for crops; then no crops for livestock to consume. The Daily Nation, the country's leading paper, reported two other ill effects: Eight people in the north died from cholera after drinking foul water from a well that would normally be avoided. And local poachers are slaughtering the animals on the country's game parks, not surprising in a land where the word for animal is the same as the word for meat. The United Nations estimates that because of the drought and a grain scandal, in which tons were sold to funnel money into government officials' pockets, four million Kenyans need food. The next time you turn on your faucet, remember to be grateful; the next time you open your wallet, remember to be generous.

That Was Close!

Mortgage applications are up; jobless claims are down; housing starts are on the rise; credit markets and regional economies are unfreezing; federal banks report their fiefs are “firming up”; Wall Street is churning out bonuses for comically overpaid executives once again. Some economists are worrying that gambling revenues are down and average Joes are saving too much instead of bulking up on new flat screens at Costco.

Though the horizon is far from clear and the suffering is not over—toxic assets remain unaccounted for and new rogue waves of foreclosures still threaten—some economists are beginning to suggest that the nation has survived the Great Recession of 2007-9. What now?

Are we as a culture planning to do anything differently? Are we going to look at new finance and banking regulations (or reinstate old ones that were cravenly repealed during an era of big bank overlordism in Washington)? Is someone finally going to explain in English what a derivative is?

Are we going to address seriously our addiction to foreign oil, our weakness as a global economic and diplomatic power and our overuse of military might to deflect the same? Are we willing to sacrifice more, consume less and pay down our public and private debt? Are we willing to pay as we go with higher taxes and fees and restrained spending instead of passing debt on to our grandchildren?

Are we finally willing to invest in our crumbling infrastructure and debilitated human capital instead of the morally hazardous capacity to launch two major ground wars at the same time? Are we ready to behave like serious people coming to reasonable decisions about the future of our nation?

Or...

Are we planning to exhale deeply, emit a low whistle and exclaim, “Whew, that was a close one,” thank our stars we were not one of the unlucky ones laid off in this collapse and get back to business as usual in this credit and carry culture? Or will we change?

Praying as Family

“The closer people sit to each other [at Mass] the better they understand the meaning of Eucharist. Conversely, the farther apart people sit from each other, the less their understanding.” Such is the index suggested by Paul Bernier, S.S.S., to measure the depth of understanding people have of the Eucharist (Emmanuel magazine, September/October 2009).

Does this apply to your parish? Or to your choice of a pew or seat? The point Father Bernier is making is that during Mass we are not to focus on our own individual personal piety or devotion. Rather, we gather as God's community in public worship around the table of the Lord for a sacrificial meal. We are not scattered individuals, observers of what the priest does for us. The congregation, led by the priest, offers together the sacrifice of Christ.

In most African churches on Sundays, this matter of people sitting far apart is almost never a problem. Whether the church is a small outstation or a large cathedral, Sunday Masses are often overcrowded, with standing room only. Surely that contributes to the spirit of celebration that is so apparent and tangible. In the United States by contrast, many of our large, ornate churches have diminishing numbers of parishioners. Might not one of the functions of the ministers of hospitality be to direct people to come up front and center? Then we might begin to see the congregation not scattered throughout the church but rather sitting, kneeling and even singing close together as God's family.

No Waiting Room

They say the best place to keep an appointment with the devil is at a crossroads. We are again drawing near another political crossroads on health care. If we cannot move past our own diabolical short-sightedness and partisan tendencies this time, we will miss a historic opportunity to put our health care system on a path toward sustainability, fairness and common decency. It could be decades before the chance comes around again.

We cannot afford to wait to reform our system. It is costing us too much as individuals and as a society. The current system regularly turns medical misfortune into personal tragedy and economic ruin; it also weighs down U.S. industry, hindering American manufacturing in an increasingly competitive global marketplace. It also drains fiscal resources at the local, state and federal levels that could be better invested in preventive care, better education for our children or shoring up our crumbling infrastructure.

As people of faith we can be guided by a long tradition of Catholic social teaching that unambiguously supports public initiatives to ensure access to health care when markets alone fail to achieve universal coverage. Those who express exaggerated fears of a government takeover and bureaucratic centralization tend to portray government as somehow a threat to the people and their freedom, but Catholic social teaching consistently reminds us that public authority is the ordinary mechanism by which people undertake collective action. The principle of subsidiarity provides a check against needless centralization, but it must not be misinterpreted as an excuse to forgo truly necessary national initiatives.

Catholic social teaching offers a distinctively organic view of society that calls all parties to be open to sacrifice for the good of the whole. That common good springs from true cooperation, not merely the competitive interaction of self-interests. Reforming health care should not be reduced to a partisan issue, with the eyes of negotiators distracted by the goal of scoring political advantage. We will achieve the aims of reform—extending coverage to the uninsured, rationalizing procedures and policies and lowering costs—only if all parties check their egos and partisan interests at the door and work together.

The greatest temptation now is to despair of true reform any time soon. After all, powerful special interests have a stake in the status quo, and the major political parties clearly desire different outcomes. But the light shed by

Catholic social teaching reveals the possibility for progress, a progress that can be assured only if we recognize that health care is not just another commodity to be distributed according to people's ability to pay. Many resources within Catholic social thought—including its requirement of a preferential option for the poor—challenge us to re-imagine health care as a basic human need, no less a religious obligation than providing food for the hungry, shelter for the homeless and clothing for the naked.

The church has for more than a century stood for the civic components of our God-given human dignity, a dignity that our current system too often diminishes. We cannot now allow a handful of discordant voices to confuse what has been the church's longstanding position: that in a just society, access to effective health care is a human right, not a negotiable social privilege.

That does not mean that the church should compromise at all on its clear resistance to any deployment of federal resources for abortion services. It does not mean that any watering down of conscience clauses for Catholic health care workers should be tolerated. These are breaking points for Catholic support on health care reform, and the Obama administration appears well aware of this. Thanks no doubt to the vigorous interventions of the advisers from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, it was no accident that assurances on these two principles appeared in the president's speech before Congress on Sept. 9. The president is keenly aware that he must win over Catholics if he is to win over Congress in November.

The time has come to put aside our childish ways on health care. Other industrialized nations resolved the challenge of universal and equitable care decades ago. It is unacceptable that in a society as wealthy as the United States, which may ultimately spend as much as \$3 trillion on a war of choice in Iraq, millions are without access to reliable health services; that as many as 18,000 die each year because of poor access; and that an unknowable number die because they were denied care by the for-profit entities to which they had entrusted their lives.

In his speech the president threw down the gauntlet to the fear-mongers and the Congressional hired hands of the status quo. It is time to stop dithering and get behind the president's proposal.



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SIGNS OF THE TIMES

AFRICA

Corruption and Inaction Leave Kenya on the Brink

Nearly two years after a controversial presidential election prompted widespread violence, Kenya remains a country on the brink of crisis, as government corruption and lack of accountability threaten to immerse the country once again in political and social chaos.

Over a thousand people died, and more than 10,000 were driven from their homes, following what many regard as a stolen election in late December 2007. Members of minority ethnic groups were burned inside churches, and alarms sounded that Kenya could become “another Rwanda,” descending into the moral abyss of genocide.

The international community responded with significant steps to protect the people of Kenya. Former U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan led the effort, with support from African leaders, the United States and the European Union. The election adversaries ultimately agreed to form a “grand coalition” in the interests of national unity, with Mwai Kibaki remaining president and the opposition leader Raila Odinga becoming prime minister.

The intervention demonstrated that the international community can play a vital role in implementing the doctrine of the “responsibility to protect” (R2P). Formulated in the aftermath of the Rwanda genocide, R2P has since been ratified by the United

Nations and endorsed by Pope Benedict XVI. It affirms that a government has the primary responsibility to protect its people from genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. If a government is unable or



unwilling to offer this protection, the international community has a right and duty to step in.

Unfortunately, inaction by the Kenyan leadership has put the country on a path to conflict that could well

HEALTH CARE

Catholic Leaders Encouraged By Obama's Speech to Congress

President Barack Obama's pledge to continue the ban on the use of federal funds for abortion and to maintain conscience protections for health care workers in any health reform legislation was welcomed by officials of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the president of the Catholic Health Association.

Speaking after President Obama delivered his address on health care reform to a joint session of Congress on Sept. 9, Kathy Saile, director of

domestic social development in the U.S.C.C.B. Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development, said the president's address offered an encouraging sign that the administration has been listening to concerns raised by the bishops and pro-life organizations about abortion funding in any reform legislation. Citing the bishops' long-standing belief that all Americans must have access to quality, affordable health care, Saile said the president's speech must be followed by the appropriate changes in

legislation currently pending in both houses of Congress. “Serious significant details need to be ironed out,” Saile said.

As currently written, the leading piece of legislation in the House of Representatives, America's Affordable Health Choices Act of 2009, known as H.R. 3200, allows for some federal funding of abortion. Richard Doerflinger, associate director of the bishops' Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, said on Sept. 16 that the Senate Finance Committee legislation made public that day by Senator Max Baucus, Democrat of Montana, has “the same unacceptable language on abortion” as H.R. 3200.

Sister Carol Keehan, a member of

Residents displaced by postelection violence leave Nairobi, Kenya, in 2008.



include the human rights abuses R2P seeks to prevent. The government has almost no accountability to its citizens. For more than a decade, it has been conducting fruitless talks about the creation of more adequate constitu-

tional structures, and has performed poorly amid a recent drought.

Meanwhile, an investigation into the 2007 post-election violence has stalled. The compromise mediated by Annan called for the president and the prime minister to establish a tribunal to probe the forces behind the violence. Yet plans for the tribunal were rejected by the Kenyan parliament in March, and by the cabinet in July. But key members of the cabinet proposed that the investigation should be turned over to a Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission, clearly a move to reinforce the impunity that has long allowed criminals to retain political power in Kenya.

Even more cynically, President Kibaki recently reappointed Aaron Ringera as head of the Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission. Ringera has been at best incompetent in this position, and at worst protects or collaborates with corrupt individuals in the government. Many now believe that a full-fledged investigation by the

International Criminal Court in The Hague is necessary. Indeed, the I.C.C. prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, has indicated that he is preparing to move unless Kenya takes serious judicial steps very soon. Meanwhile, the United States has threatened sanctions if the Kenyan government does not act.

As Kenya moves to another election in 2012, international action remains crucial to prevent further violence. If the government of Kenya cannot be persuaded to exercise its responsibility to protect its own citizens, more direct action may be called for. Yet given the historical record of international tolerance for grave human rights abuses, as in Darfur today, forceful international intervention seems unlikely. In order to ensure the security of the people of Kenya, finding preventive steps short of intervention must remain an international priority.

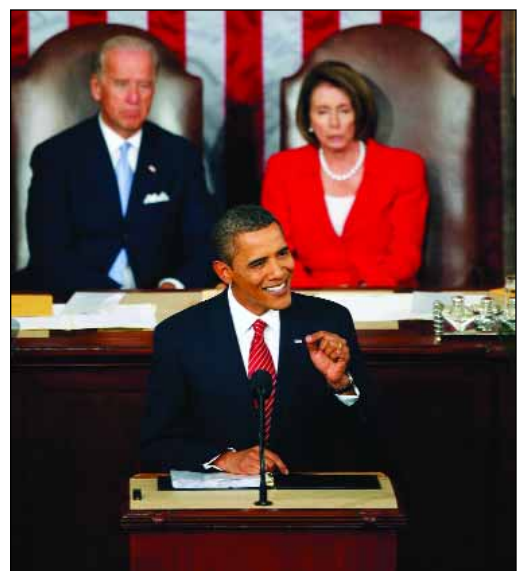
DAVID HOLLENBACH, S.J., *who holds the University Chair in Human Rights and International Justice at Boston College, is teaching this fall at Hekima College in Nairobi.*

the Daughters of Charity who is president and chief executive officer of the Catholic Health Association, said that while much work remains on amending the legislation, she was pleased by Obama's speech. "There are too many people...who need this kind of [health care] assistance," she said. "We believe it is long overdue. It is a moral and economic imperative and we were pleased to hear him put it in those terms."

A group of pro-life legislators and organizations, led by Representative Chris Smith, Republican of New Jersey, have challenged the president's position that health care reform legislation would not include abortion funding. Joining Smith at a press con-

ference on Capitol Hill on Sept. 10 was Representative Joe Pitts, Republican of Pennsylvania, one of the authors of a House amendment that would have ensured that the federal ban on abortion funding would remain in place. The amendment was defeated in committee.

"Such an explicit exclusion is missing from this bill," Pitts said, pledging to reintroduce his amendment when the bill comes up for debate in the House. "This is not about the legality or the illegality of abortion. It is about keeping the government out of the business of promoting abortion as health care."



President Obama speaks on health care as Vice President Joseph Biden and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi look on.

Nigerian Bishops Fault Government

The bishops of Nigeria blame government inaction for the death of more than 2,000 people during a recent uprising by an extremist Islamic group. “We have no democracy worth the name if government cannot protect life and property of the citizen,” the bishops said in a statement. The uprising began in late July after the arrest of some members of the Boko Haram sect, which opposes Western education and insists on the imposition of Shariah, or Islamic law. In their statement the bishops also criticized the “culture of violence that prevails in Nigeria” and condemned the Islamic group for using religion to justify its actions: “We wish to note that those who claim that they love God while hating their fellow human beings, even to the extent of killing them, are liars.”

Vatican Official Criticizes Drug Industry

A top Vatican official lamented that producing urgently needed medicines is no longer driven by traditional medical ethics, but by money. The lack of basic, life-saving medicines means the world risks “a humanitarian and global health care disaster,” said Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski, president of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Ministry, at a gathering of the International Congress of Catholic Pharmacists in Poznan, Poland. “Often, for economic reasons, common diseases in developing countries are neglected because...they do not constitute a lucrative enough market,” the archbishop said in remarks aired on Vatican Radio on Sept. 13. Archbishop Zimowski also highlight-

NEWS BRIEFS

Pro-life leaders condemned the **Sept. 11 murder** of a Michigan man who was protesting against abortion outside a public high school in Owosso, Mich. + Members of a U.S. Catholic bishops’ delegation visiting **southern Africa** said they were impressed with the church-run programs that care for AIDS orphans and those infected with H.I.V. + As part of its longterm clean-energy initiatives, the Vatican has installed **high-tech solar collectors** to help heat and cool its buildings. + The **Catholic Task Force on Africa** has launched a new Web site (www.yesafricamatters.org) to report on conditions in Africa in anticipation of the Second African Synod of Bishops to be held from Oct. 4 to 25. + The Canons Regular of the Order of the Holy Cross, also known as **the Crosiers**, launched its 800th anniversary year with a Mass on Sept. 13 in St. Cloud, Minn. + At a prayer service on the eve of the opening of the **64th General Assembly**, Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan of New York said the United Nations should embrace the notion of “the human person as the heart of all institutions, laws and works of society.”



Ban Ki-moon, Celestino Migliore and Timothy M. Dolan

ed the problem of counterfeit antibiotics and vaccines, which can result in prolonged illness or death or the development of drug-resistant bacteria. According to the World Health Organization, such drugs account for as much as 30 percent to 50 percent of the market in developing countries.

Chinese Church Launches Training

For the first time in the history of the church in China, a Catholic seminary on the mainland is offering a master’s degree to train pastoral workers and catechists. The three-year pastoral and catechetical master’s program will start on Oct. 5 at a seminary in Beijing. Most of the six applicants—a mix of

priests, nuns and lay people—are from dioceses in northern China. The Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium is helping to organize the program. Michel Marcil, S.J., executive director of the U.S. Catholic China Bureau in South Orange, N.J., called the initiative “a breakthrough.” The “devout faithful in Chinese parishes” have been helping prepare candidates for baptism every year, Marcil said, but they have been following a question-and-answer format based on studying the catechism. The new course of study would guide them in a form of catechesis more in line with the teachings of the Second Vatican Council.

From CNS and other sources.

JOHN J. DIJULIO JR.



Reality Check on Poverty

In Chapter Two of the encyclical *Charity in Truth* (*Caritas in Veritate*), published in June, Pope Benedict XVI observes that the “world’s wealth is growing in absolute terms, but inequalities are on the increase” as hunger persists alongside new forms of poverty.

Nobody doubts that poverty afflicts less developed nations in Africa and Asia, but is poverty a serious problem in the United States today?

It would seem so. The 2009 “poverty guidelines” followed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services start at \$10,830 a year for one person and rise to \$29,530 a year for a family of six. By those standards, about one in eight Americans, one in five Hispanics and one in four African-Americans live below the poverty line.

But Nicholas Eberstadt, a fine scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, believes that the official poverty rate exaggerates the actual extent of poverty in America today by measuring income rather than consumption. In his 2008 book, *The Poverty of “The Poverty Rate”* (A.E.I. Press), he cites data indicating that most families who live below the poverty line own cars; over 40 percent have central air conditioning; a third have dishwashers; and a quarter have personal computers.

In another 2008 volume, *Prices, Poverty, and Inequality* (A.E.I. Press), Christian Broda and David E. Weinstein, economics professors,

stress that today’s “poor” enjoy better and cheaper goods like air bags, cellular phones and computers. They estimate that the real wages of the officially poor have actually risen by 30 percent since the late 1970s and that “the actual poverty rate” has fallen by 60 percent since 1970.

These good analysts make good points, and I am all for refining how Washington measures material want.

But this is no mere academic matter, and there is no perfect way to measure as complex and multifaceted a condition as poverty. To even begin to imply that poverty in America is a myth is to make a huge empirical error and an even worse moral mistake.

Start with “food insecurity,” defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a household without “enough food” for all members due to “insufficient money and other resources for food.”

Over 20 million American adults and over 10 million American children live in food-insecure households. In 2008 a record 28 million Americans were in the U.S.D.A.’s Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program. In economically hard hit Michigan, one in eight citizens needed food stamps. Just ask people who run faith-based food pantries in Detroit and other cities from coast to coast if the U.S.D.A. data exaggerate the hunger problem in America today.

In my hometown of Philadelphia, half of all households have annual incomes less than \$35,000. The city’s official poverty rate is nearly 20 per-

cent. Most of the more than 325,000 Philadelphians below the poverty line are African-American or Hispanic. In 2008, one in eight Philadelphians had no health insurance.

So even if the “actual” poverty rate in Philadelphia and nationally is only half the official rate, brotherly love dictates doing better: more private charity; redoubled faith-based services; and increased public cash benefits, medical

assistance and subsidies for child care and energy bills.

I have often heard certain politically conservative professors and pundits who ought to know better assert in one breath that America’s “poor” are not really poor because those on “welfare” now get so many government benefits and

then, in the very next breath, that the “war on poverty” has long since failed.

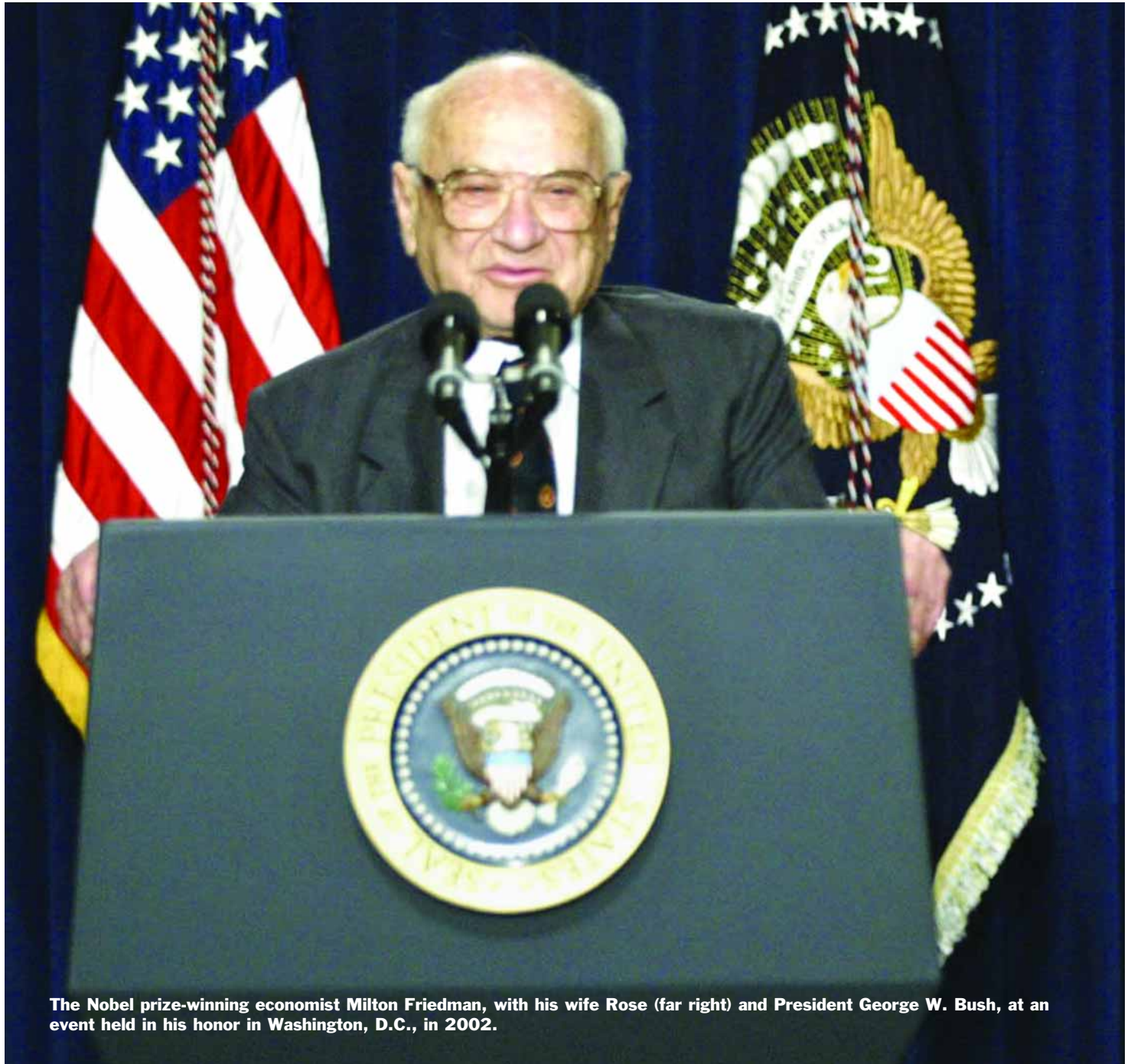
Actually, the biggest post-1965 dips in the U.S. poverty rate occurred in those years when government antipoverty programs expanded the fastest, and the single biggest post-1965 dip in poverty occurred in the group that got more government benefits per capita than any other—namely, the elderly.

Today about 46 million people in the United States have no health insurance. Not surprisingly, the uninsured poor get less (and lower quality) medical care than the rest of us.

The lowest national poverty rate on record was 11.1 percent in 1973. Alas, sinful inequalities persist in the United States today, and charity in truth must begin at home.

There is
no perfect
way to
measure as
complex a
condition as
poverty.

JOHN J. DIJULIO JR. is the author of *Godly Republic: A Centrist Blueprint for America’s Faith-Based Future* (Univ. of California Press, 2007).



The Nobel prize-winning economist Milton Friedman, with his wife Rose (far right) and President George W. Bush, at an event held in his honor in Washington, D.C., in 2002.

Economists, for the most part, failed to foresee the current financial and economic crisis—the worst since the 1930s. Now they cannot reach a consensus on how to resolve it. A few—such as Nouriel Roubini and Robert Schiller—saw what was coming but were ignored. James Galbraith, an economist at the University of Texas, said: “It’s an enor-

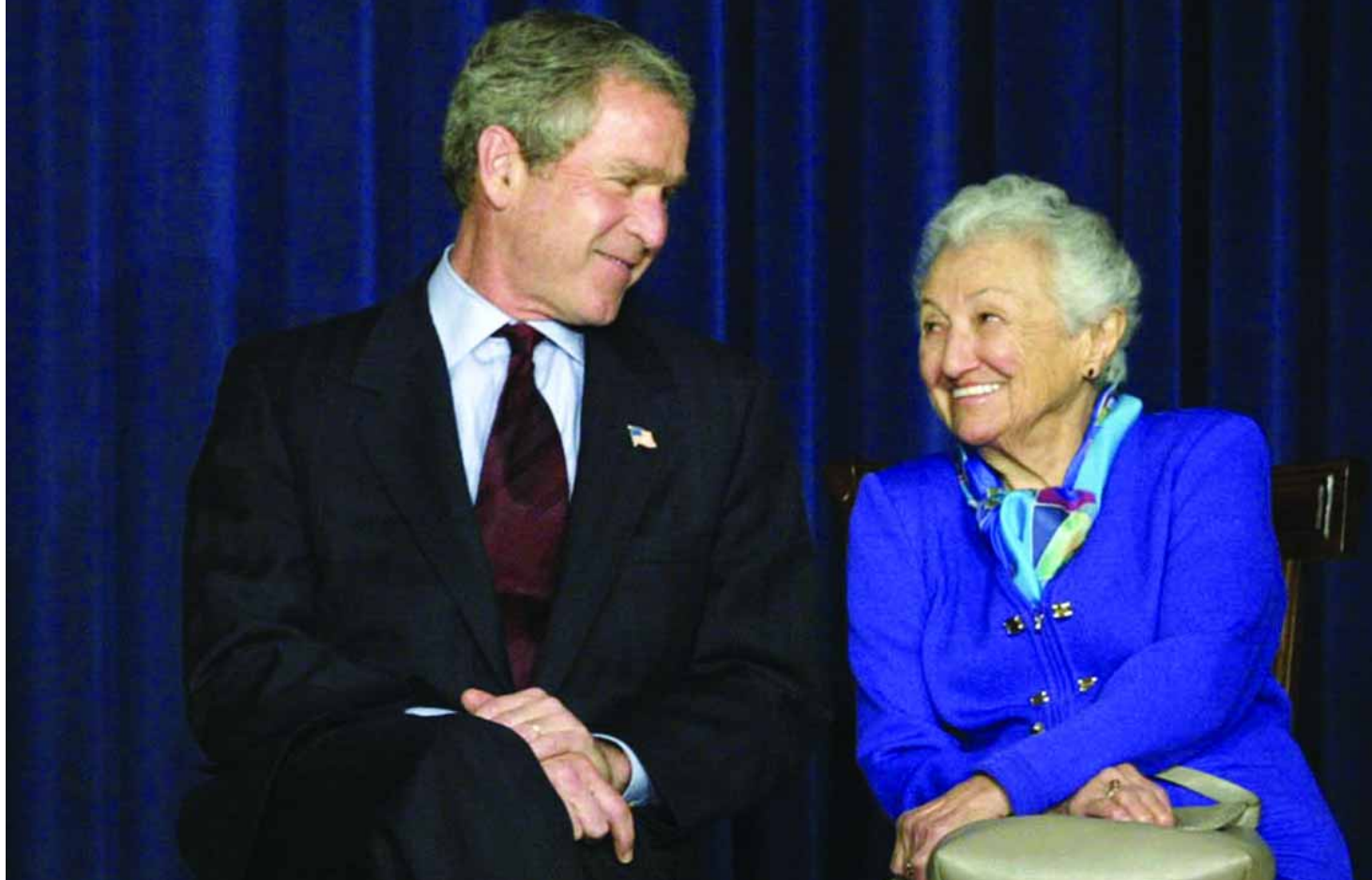
mous blot on the reputation of the profession. There are thousands of economists. Most of them teach. And most of them teach a theoretical framework that has been shown to be fundamentally useless.” When Judge Richard Posner, a leading theorist of law and economics, was asked why the warnings about a looming crisis were ignored rather than investigated, he responded, “Many economists and political leaders are heavily invested in a free market ideology which teaches that markets are robust and self-regulating.” A reasonable question might be: Why listen to economists?

CHARLES K. WILBER is emeritus professor of economics and a fellow at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana.

HOW U.S. ECONOMISTS MISSED THE GREAT RECESSION

Misleading Indicators

BY CHARLES K. WILBER



How Economics Works

Economics is a lot like theology, despite the former's claim to be a science. Theology uses self-evident first principles from revelation or natural law and then, through the use of intermediate principles and judgments, evaluates real world issues. Economics uses an abstract model constructed from similarly axiomatic assumptions about how the world works, such as the principles that people are motivated by self-interest, that wants exceed resources or that resources are mobile and fungible. From these principles, economists then develop economic policies, with appro-

priate regard for real world exceptions to their models.

The problem for both theologians and economists lies in going from the general to the specific. I cannot speak for theologians, but economists are seldom trained in the specifics of how the real world works. Instead, a graduate student in economics spends all of his or her time learning mathematics, statistics and general theory. These tools are then used to develop policy by finding a data set somewhere and applying the given tools to yield an answer. Economic theory says, for example, that interpersonal wage differences are the result of different amounts of human capital embodied in workers.

Yet how is human capital to be measured? Since no such actual thing exists, a proxy for human capital has to be used, a measurable datum, like years of schooling for a worker. Yet the result of this method is that the theory being tested is rendered self-fulfilling. If a statistical test appears to falsify the theory being tested, the test is rejected and the economist tries different proxies until the test comes out the way he or she expects. The data will be massaged and the test redone until the results “prove” the theory. Why? Because economists believe the tenets of microeconomic theory the way theologians believe the core tenets of their faith.

Becoming an Economist

How do people become economists? David Colander writes in his delightful book, *The Making of an Economist, Redux*:

Were an undergraduate student to ask an economist how to become an economist, he would tell her to go to graduate school. She might demur, asking, “Wouldn’t it make more sense to go to Wall Street and learn how markets work?” Getting firsthand experience may sound like a good idea to her, but most economists would briskly dismiss the suggestion. “Well, maybe I should get a job in a real business—say, turning out automobiles.” The answer will be “no” again: “That’s not how you learn economics.” She might try one more time. “Well, how about if I read all the top economists of the past—John Stuart Mill, David Ricardo, Adam Smith?” Most economists would say, “It wouldn’t hurt, but it probably won’t help.” Instead, he would most likely tell her, “To become an economist who is considered an economist by other economists, you have to go to graduate school in economics.” So the reality is that, to economists, an economist is someone who has a graduate degree (doctorates strongly preferred) in economics. This means that what defines an economist is what he or she learns in graduate school.

Over the past 30 years or so the graduate economics curriculum has become more and more like a program in applied mathematics with a corresponding de-emphasis of economic history, history of economic thought, industry studies and industrial relations. This narrowing of focus gets reinforced as the student finishes the Ph.D. and gets a job in the academy. The greatest rewards go to those who make advances in theory and publish in the half dozen top academic journals. Few articles will be accepted by these journals that do not start with the standard abstract model and then derive some new “interesting” result. Publishing in public policy journals, by contrast, is considered much less prestigious and can even count against an aspiring academic by

showing that one is not a serious economist. And of course, after receiving tenure this is what one knows how to do.

Laissez-faire Meets Keynes

The microeconomic model that forms the core of economic theory is a beautiful mathematical construct. Based on the assumptions of self-interested economic actors, perfect mobility of resources, perfect competition, no externalities and so on, the model yields a Pareto optimal outcome—that is, one in which no one can be made better off without making someone else worse off. Since economists rule out interpersonal comparisons of utility, there is nothing more to be said. The result is that economists learn to believe that this is the way the world works, and students drawn to study economics are frequently those who already believe this. In addition, behavioral economics research indicates that as undergraduate students study economics, they themselves demonstrate ever more self-interested behavior.

Until the mid-1930s, most economists believed a “free-market” economy would solve whatever problems arose. If goods and services and inputs into production were bought and sold in markets, they believed, the economy would function optimally. The result was a hands-off policy of laissez-faire economics; government would not interfere with the market.

With the breakdown of the economy in the 1930s, however, laissez-faire economics seemed discredited. In its place came the activist policies of Keynesian economics, which dominated until the stagflation of the late 1970s. One of the cornerstones of Keynes’s thought was his theory of investment. He argued forcefully that investment decisions were closely linked with what he called “animal spirits,” the emotional affect that governs human behavior. The term suggested fragility and instability in markets, even when the term was, in large measure, narrowed to refer to profit expectations or business optimism.

Keynes had ample evidence for his theory in the Great Depression, for even though investment was sorely needed then and the interest rates had fallen below 1 percent, there was still minimal investment. No sane businessperson would invest, regardless of the interest rate, if he or she was convinced that the project would incur losses in the future. Thus the psychological basis of profit expectations makes economics more of an art than a science.

In addition, Keynes rejected the neoclassical notion that wage reductions would restore full employment by leading employers to hire more workers because of lower costs. Instead, he argued that wages were more than simply a cost of production, but formed a part of aggregate demand. If wages fall, he argued, aggregate demand for goods and services and sales will fall. If sales fall, profits will decline and firms will require fewer workers. The experience of the

Great Depression seemed convincing to all who were not wedded to classical or neoclassical economics.

A small band of economists, however, never accepted the Keynesian notion that government could play an important role in stabilizing the economy or that markets were not self-regulating. Almost from the beginning there were efforts to reinterpret Keynes to make his macroeconomics compatible with neoclassical microeconomics. Eventually this work produced the idea of “microfoundations,” the method in which any macroeconomics was built on individual behavior that was rational and informed. In this theory of rational expectations, in which the economic actors have perfect knowledge, they act in such a way that any governmental policy will not work unless it is a complete surprise. Thus Keynesian policy is seen as ineffective at best and most probably harmful.

This revised version of laissez-faire economics reigned in the 1980s after the election of Ronald Reagan. At the heart of the theory is a belief that markets are self-correcting. Financial economists developed this into the “efficient market hypothesis,” which argued that markets quickly and correctly incorporate all publicly available information into prices. Under the strong version of this theory, the only reason prices of assets like stocks change is that new information becomes available; thus financial markets could not consistently misprice assets and therefore needed little regulation.

Between their narrow technical training and their bias toward free markets, most economists failed to see the coming perfect storm of economic recession and financial crisis. In fact they paved the way for it by urging the deregulation of financial markets, which in turn allowed the creation of all kinds of dubious new debt instruments, wildly increasing the leverage of bank capital, and even allowing huge Ponzi schemes to go undetected. When the extremely low interest rates set by the Federal Reserve were added to this, the “bubble” created in the housing industry was a natural outcome, and the spread to the financial sector was catastrophic.

Admitting Failure?

The most astonishing admission of failure of the free market model was that of former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan in autumn 2008, when he admitted that the Fed’s monetary management regime had been based on a “flaw.” The “whole intellectual edifice,” he said, “collapsed in the summer of last year.”

Robert Schiller, an economist at Yale, thinks the failure to foresee the financial collapse is the result of fearing to deviate from the consensus of the profession. And he does not think that economists have learned the lesson: “The rational expectations models will be tweaked to account for the current crisis. The basic curriculum will not change.” Dani Rodrick, an

economist at Harvard University said, referring to the free-market model, “We have fixated on one of the possible hundreds of models and elevated that above the others.” John Kay, a financial columnist for *The Financial Times*, wrote:

Max Planck, the physicist, said he had eschewed economics because it was too difficult. Planck, Keynes observed, could have mastered the corpus of mathematical economics in a few days—it might now have taken him a few weeks. Keynes went on to explain that economic understanding required an amalgam of logic and intuition and a wide knowledge of facts, most of which are not precise: “a requirement overwhelmingly difficult for those whose gift mainly consists in the power to imagine and pursue to their furthest points the implications and prior conditions of comparatively simple facts which are known with a high degree of precision.” On this, as on much else, Keynes was right.

Encouraging Signs

I must not end without saying some positive things about economics and economists. There is much new work, even though still seldom included in the core curriculum, that is exciting and holds out varying degrees of hope for a regeneration of economics. Behavioral economics, evolutionary economics, happiness economics, economics of social capital and social norms, and the economics of asymmetric information all hold out hope of breaking through the twin constraints of methodological formalism and competitive equilibrium. Also, behavioral finance theory should provide a sounder basis than does the efficient-market hypothesis for future analyses of financial markets.

Even more encouraging is a growing recognition that economies require ethical behavior in addition to self-interest. Modern economics has selectively adopted Adam Smith’s metaphor of the invisible hand, focusing on the economically wondrous effects of the butcher and baker trading out of their self-interest and ignoring Smith’s prior description of the same deistic hand’s propelling the creation of a virtuous society. Virtue serves as “the fine polish to the wheels of society,” while vice is “like the vile rust, which makes them jar and grate upon one another.” As Jerry Evensky, an economist at Syracuse University, argues, for Smith “ethics is the hero—not self-interest or greed—for it is ethics that defends the social intercourse from the Hobbesian chaos.” Indeed, Smith sought to distance his thesis from the notion that individual greed could be the basis for social good. His understanding that virtue is a prerequisite for a desirable market society remains an important lesson. **A**

ON THE WEB

Charles K. Wilber
answers readers’ questions.
americamagazine.org/qa

A Sturdy Framework

A defense of the bishops' new high school catechesis

BY ALFRED McBRIDE

William J. O'Malley, S.J., raised a number of pertinent questions in "Faulty Guidance" (*Am.*, 9/14), a critique of a recent document published by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops: *Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*. Father O'Malley has been teaching "in the trenches," as he put it, for 43 years, and I found much to agree with in what he wrote. Nonetheless, I see a need for this *Framework*, however, and wish to offer a further reflection on its value.

My first experience of teaching religion to young people in high school took place when I volunteered to teach a survey of the Bible to freshmen at our abbey school. Over five years I learned how to teach, and since then I have spent a lifetime in religious education. My doctoral dissertation discussed the philosophy of Rabbi Abraham Heschel and its value for catechesis. Many people admired Heschel for his support of the civil rights movement and of peace in Vietnam, for his profound faith in God and for his poetic way of witnessing to faith. Heschel became a favorite on the Catholic lecture circuit; he told stories to illustrate his teachings. One of his stories fits the theme of this article:

A rabbi once asked his students how they could tell when the night had ended and the day was on its way back. "Could it be," asked one student, "when you could see an animal in the distance and tell whether it is a sheep or a dog?" "No," answered the teacher. "Could it be," asked another, "when you can look at a tree in the distance and tell whether it is a fig tree or a peach tree?" "No," answered the teacher. "Well then, what is it?" the pupils demanded. "It is when you look at the face of any man and woman and see that she or he is your sister and brother, because, if you cannot do this, then no matter what time it is, it is still night."

A good story is a masterful teaching tool for a religious educator. Its success depends on coming in under the radar of

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your students or, in more spiritual terms, touching their hearts. A story temporarily subverts logic-chopping and communicates the peaceful meaning of divine truth.

Giving Structure to a Love Story

I include stories in this article to illustrate that stories are powerful carriers of faith. The bishops' *Framework* has no stories in it, yet it is based on the grandest narrative in all of history. Divine revelation, on which the *Framework* is constructed, is one long, great "love story" from the creation to God's triumph over sin and death in the Book of Revelation. Every year the liturgy re-presents this love story, which will always have a catechetical focus. For its part, the *Framework* gives coherence, order and structure to this love story. Bernard Lonergan, S.J., in *The Road to Nicea*, claimed that the human mind moves from undifferentiated consciousness to differentiated consciousness. The *Framework* is an example of that process. The *Framework* takes the divine love story of revelation and expresses it in an orderly, systematic fashion, which the human mind demands. It provides our God-given intelligence with the tools to communicate and defend the faith.

A few summers ago, as part of a seminar at Oxford on the writings of Cardinal John Henry Newman, we took a field trip to Littlemore, where Newman lived with a group of friends just after he left the Church of England. Today Littlemore is a museum that preserves memories of Newman. It is a prayerful world presided over by the Sisters of Work. The most touching room is Newman's study. Bookcases line the walls, as do pictures from his childhood and family life. In the months just before Newman's reception into the church, he stood at a writing desk and composed his masterpiece, *The Development of Doctrine*.

One of the sisters told us that on a dark and stormy night someone knocked on his door. It was his friend, the Passionist priest Dominic Barbieri, who told Newman, "I have come to receive you into the Catholic Church." The ceremony took place the following morning. It concluded with Mass celebrated on the writing desk, which flattened out into a makeshift altar. Newman's majestic words about the development of doctrine, which he disentangled into a coherent classic of faith, were penned on the same desk-

table where he made his first Communion as a Catholic. That masterpiece has led some scholars to call Newman the invisible father of Vatican II.

I revive that story because the *Framework*, which is resolutely and correctly doctrinal, owes its existence to the hard work of doctrinal study by some of the brightest and saintliest teachers in history. To note that it is a product of hard work is an understatement. I agree and sympathize with those contemporary teachers who look at the *Framework* and wonder what they are supposed to do with it. I comfort teachers with a quote from the Introduction: "Since this is a framework, the doctrines and topics designated are not necessarily defined or completely developed. Such details will be present in the catechetical texts and materials that will be developed on the basis of the framework."

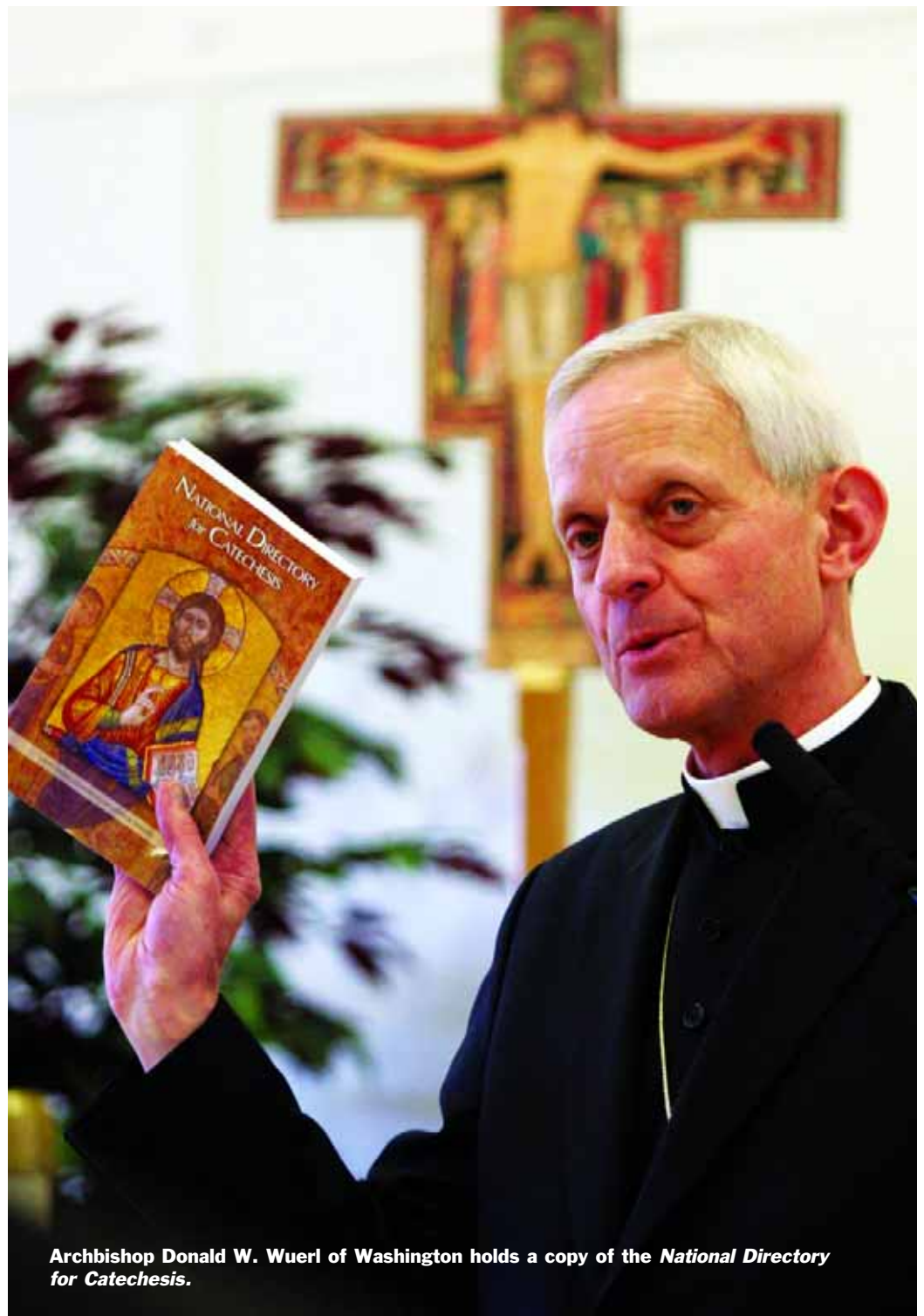
The Rigors of Learning

We should never consider the teaching of religion to high school youth an easy matter for teachers or students. Real learning is tough. Genuine education is rigorous. We accept that fact for math, English, physics, computer science, but some educators become "soft" in teaching the faith. The old adage "knowledge maketh a bloody entrance" is still true. We should be no less demanding in our expectations for students studying their faith than we are when they study other subject areas. Faith will give their future lives purpose and focus. It must be taught in a way that is rationally secure and builds a strong foundation to equip them for life in a secularist and pluralist culture.

In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell writes that the secret of people who achieve success is spending "ten thousand hours" on the project before ever making a breakthrough. Why repeat in the four years of high school the review of the grand narrative of divine salvation? Why not? Has anyone, student or teacher, yet spent the requisite

10,000 hours to pierce the wall of love and mystery that is the divine desire to be with us?

Father O'Malley correctly notes the absence of method in the *Framework*, but I see no reason for opposing the *Framework* because it says little about the methods of teaching doctrine. I concede that is its limit, but that is also its strength. Clarity of doctrine is essential for students today. They have a need and a right to know the teachings of Christ and the church. Catechesis is not an either-or matter. It deals with the what, the how and the why of our courses.



Archbishop Donald W. Wuerl of Washington holds a copy of the *National Directory for Catechesis*.

PHOTO: CNS/GREGORY A. SHERMITZ

The what is the content for which the *Framework* provides an outline. The how is the rich variety of methods that help communicate the content. The why is the goal of salvation from sin, the gift of participating in the divine nature and the promise of eternal life. The intention of the *Framework*, as stated in the Introduction, calls on publishers to develop the appropriate methods and the proper implementation.

Facts About the *Framework*

On November 14, 2007, the U.S.C.C.B. approved a *Framework* for catechetical curriculum for young people of high school age. The vote was 221-0. The document was produced by the Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, whose members included bishops and consultants, of whom I was one. Drafts had been sent to bishops, diocesan leaders, teachers and religious communities for consultation.

The purpose? The bishops want to foster in our high school students a deeper personal relationship with Christ. They hope that a Christ-centered *Framework* that is systematic and comprehensive will serve this goal. The *Framework* is a service to our young people, helping them know and love Christ and live according to his truth. In this way high school age students are enabled to participate more deeply in the life of the church and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to reach eternal life with God in heaven. It

is a very high ideal; but teenagers are well suited to idealism, and their personal development is related to human and faith-based challenges.

The bishops offer the *Framework* to publishers as an outline for developing their textbooks. For years publishers have provided books and resources for our elementary age students. Their materials have been improved by conformity to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in a manner that engages young people with the faith. The bishops hope they will use the *Framework* as a guide for the development of high school age curricula.

According to the Introduction, "In addition to aiding those creating catechetical texts and materials, this *Framework* will also serve to aid those responsible for overseeing catechetical instruction within dioceses as well as those responsible for curriculum development or the development of assessment instruments designed to complement texts, programs or curricula."


I agree with Father O'Malley that in both content and method the catechist is an evangelizing teacher. Through teaching the truths of faith and using effective methods, the catechist calls students to conversion to Christ and a lifetime commitment to him and his body, the church.

Pope John Paul II, a master of evangelization, wrote in *On Catechesis (Catechesi Tradendae)* that the first goal of catechesis is conversion to the person of Jesus Christ. Without conversion all else is useless. The pope stressed that the language, tone and method must serve the evangelistic purpose (Nos. 18-19). The *Framework* fully supports this catechetical goal and builds upon it.

In his first trip to the United States in 1979, Pope John Paul celebrated Mass at Boston Common. As rain soaked a half million people he challenged the youth, "My dear young people, I offer you the option for love. I offer you the option for Christ." Almost always he would add, "Do not be afraid." The pope did not force people to accept Christ; he invited them with love. He did not impose the faith; he proposed it.

I am led by Pope John Paul II to say: Don't be afraid of the *Framework*. Realize there are many good and faithful people preparing materials that make the teachings of Christ and the church accessible to teachers and students alike. It may take time to make all of it sufficiently available. This gift will be a support for your admirable dedication to teaching and witnessing our faith.

I commend Father O'Malley for raising many important questions, especially the need for a prologue to the *Framework*, a proposal I support. His concluding recommendations are the testimony of a veteran catechist; thousands of students owe him thanks for respecting their need for knowing and loving the God of the grand love narrative and the church. **A**



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Escape From Alcatraz

Father Damien held up by America's most wanted **BY DANIEL J. DEMERS**

On a dreary, wintry afternoon in San Francisco, the army transport ship Republic arrived from Honolulu at Fort Mason, just inside the entrance to the bay. The ship passed under the Golden Gate Bridge, which was still being built; it would be opened to traffic the following year. In the ship's hold that day, Feb. 11, 1936, was the body of Joseph Damien de Veuster, known as Father Damien, the Leper Priest. At the request of King Leopold III, Damien's remains were being taken back to his native Belgium. Pope Pius XI had notified the king that Damien was to be considered for sainthood in the church. The king had contacted President Franklin D. Roosevelt, asking for his assistance in the move. Roosevelt, in turn, had the body lifted from its grave on the island of Molokai in what was then the U.S. Territory of Hawaii and,

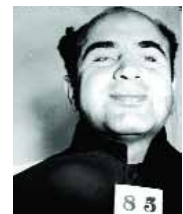
according to reports, "promptly ordered the troop ship to prepare to transport the body." No one was thinking of Alcatraz.

The events that followed were chronicled, almost day by day, in the San Francisco newspapers.

Apostle to the Lepers

Damien was born in Tremeloo, Belgium, in 1840. While the Civil War raged in the United States, he arrived in the Kingdom of Hawaii as a 24-year-old missionary priest. In 1868, four years after Damien's arrival, the King of Hawaii ordered all leprosy victims quarantined and expelled them to an isolated 800-acre tract on Molokai known as Kalaupapa. As was widely known within the island kingdom, the settlement had fallen into civil disarray because of a shortage of supplies, food and medical treatment. Yet in 1873, Father Damien volunteered to spiritually serve the leprosy patients at the colony. He is credited with organiz-

DANIEL J. DEMERS, a semi-retired businessman who resides in the San Francisco Bay area, writes about historic 20th-century events.



Above: Blessed Damien de Veuster with youngsters at the settlement on Molokai for those with leprosy. Right, from top to bottom: Scarface Capone, Machine Gun Kelly, Dutch Schmidt and Fox Whitaker

PHOTO OF FATHER DAMIEN: CNS. PHOTO OF CAPONE: WARDEN'S NOTEBOOK PAGES/NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION. OTHER PORTRAITS: PRISONER IDENTIFICATION PHOTOGRAPHS ("MUG SHOTS"), 1934-1963/NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION.

ing the populace into a community—overseeing and participating in the construction of houses, a hospital and a church. He publicized the terrible plight of the victims torn from their homes and families, and his efforts received worldwide recognition. As a result, he garnered large donations of money and supplies, which enhanced the living conditions at the colony. Father Damien ministered to the lepers for 12 years before he contracted and, four years later, succumbed to the disease. He died at the Kalaupapa settlement in 1889 at the age of 49.

Nearly half a century later, at Fort Mason, the remains of the holy man were taken from the ship in a procession of a size appropriate for a deceased ambassador. The cortege that wound its way through San Francisco was composed of thousands of Catholic clergymen; the Belgian consul general and U.S. federal, state and city officials; Belgian World War I veterans living in San Francisco; ordinary citizens; and a full military honor guard. Damien's body lay in state at St. Mary's Cathedral under a 24-hour military guard provided at Roosevelt's direction. The public was invited to pay their respects to the hero-priest in a series of religious rites performed during Damien's five-day stay in the city, including Masses and eulogies by the local archbishop, John J. Mitty, and other high-ranking members of the clergy.

Rioting on Alcatraz

With the ship safely docked and its precious cargo unloaded, the crew went on shore leave. As was the custom, the ship's laundry was taken to the nearest federal prison to be cleaned—Alcatraz. But there was a hitch: the prison was in lockdown mode. A riot had erupted there a few days earlier, caused by a flubbed surgery that had left a prisoner dead.

That prisoner, Jack Allen, was known to prison medical authorities as a “faker.” He often “appeared in sick lines when he apparently was not ill.” On Feb. 7 Allen reported to the hospital complaining of painful stomach symptoms. The physician on duty, Dr. Jess Jacobsen, aware of Allen's history of hypochondria, initially ignored his complaints. When Jacobsen finally performed an operation, however, he discovered that a stomach ulcer had ruptured. Subsequently, Allen died.

According to news reports, the physician became “the target of catcalls” by the inmates. The catcalls led to a prison riot, which the local press sensationalized. One report called the incident the “Mad Mutiny” and another the “Revolt on the Rock.” The melee forced the warden to order a lockdown. Compounding the seething unrest were the extraordinary precautions taken to protect Al (Scarface) Capone and George (Machine Gun) Kelly, both of them prisoners who had refused to participate in the riot. The mutineers had “branded them as ‘rats’ for their refusal to join in the uprising.”

The leaders of the uprising were Ludwig (Dutch) Schmidt and Norman (the Fox) Whitaker. Schmidt was a notorious mail-truck robber, whom federal authorities had transferred to Alcatraz after he had escaped from a federal prison in Atlanta. In one internal report, the Federal Bureau of Investigation noted Schmidt was “a leader and dangerous criminal and a dangerous influence” on other prisoners. Whitaker was an international chess master and notorious thief who had been implicated in the Charles Lindbergh kidnapping case and was serving a 15-year sentence. Schmidt and Whitaker were being held “in solitary confinement in the prison dungeon,” when 65 other prisoners, who had participated in the riot, were also confined to their cells.

As a result, the prison industries were “hampered by the number of men confined to their cells.” Prison officials reported

that the handling of the “large shipment of laundry from the army transport Republic,” just in from Honolulu, was expected to be delayed. The Republic was on a tight schedule en route to the Panama Canal, where Father Damien's body was to be transferred to the Belgian ship Mercator, which would take his venerated remains on to the port of Antwerp.

The problem was resolved when the warden of Alcatraz announced the transfer of Dr. Jacobsen to a Marine hospital in Seattle; this “relieved the strained conditions” among the prison population. Still, the laundry delivery was nearly 12 hours late, forcing a delay of the Republic's scheduled departure. With Damien's casket again on board, the ship's captain made up the lost time during the voyage by sailing at full steam. Then authorities expedited the ship's passage through the Panama Canal, advancing her to the head of the line of waiting ships. The casket containing the leper martyr's body was transferred on schedule to the Mercator at Colon, Panama Canal Zone.

Finally at Rest

Father Damien was finally buried in Belgium on May 6, 1936. When he was laid to rest, one newspaper speculated that his deeds in Hawaii caring for the lepers might lead eventually to his “being enshrined in sainthood.” Those words were prescient.

The Hawaiian people, meanwhile, had considered the priest as one of their own. When Damien's body was removed from Hawaii for the long trek to Belgium, it took place amid the “wails and lamentations” of the Hawaiian people. Their feelings were finally addressed in 1995, when Pope John Paul II presented the bones of Damien's right hand to a delegation of Hawaiians. The relic was returned to Damien's original burial place on Molokai.

Blessed Damien of Molokai will be canonized a saint on Oct. 11, 2009. **A**

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John W. Donohue, S.J.,
on Blessed Damien of Molokai.
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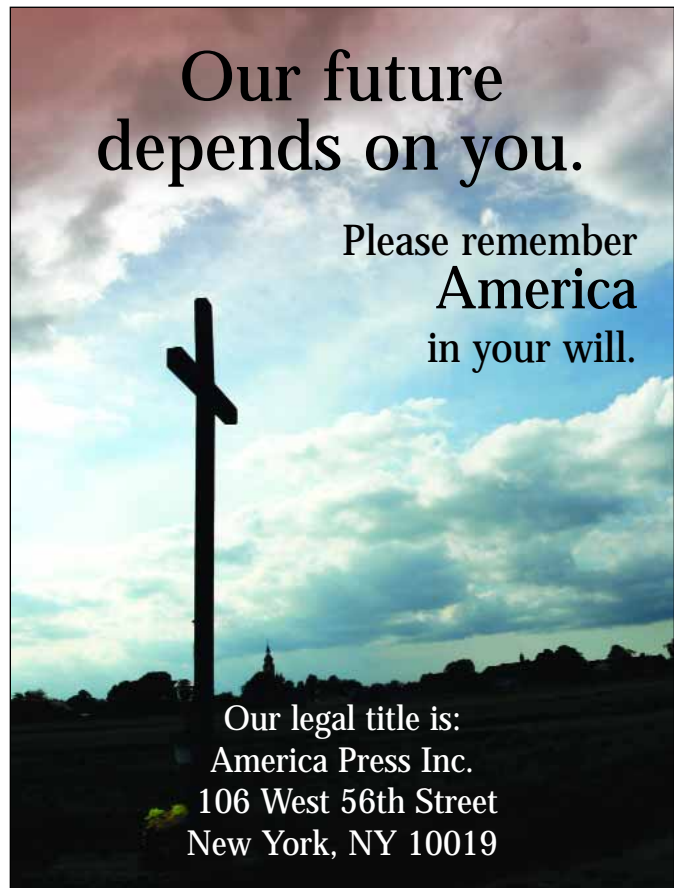


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BOOKS & CULTURE

THEATER | ROBERT E. LAUDER

DIVINE DIRECTION

A conversation with Liv Ullmann

Liv Ullmann, the Norwegian actress and film director, has led a life of extraordinary creativity. Best known for her work with the director Ingmar Bergman, in whose films she often starred, Ms. Ullmann is the winner of many international film awards, including the Golden Globe; she received two Academy Award nominations for best actress and one nomination for the Palme d'Or as director. She has also written several screenplays and two books of autobio-

graphical reflections, *Changing and Choices*. For years Ms. Ullmann represented both Unicef and the International Rescue Committee, for which she visited many developing countries. Currently, she is directing "A Streetcar Named Desire," a play by Tennessee Williams, starring Cate Blanchett. It will premiere in Australia from Sept. 4 to Oct. 10, then move to the Kennedy Center in Washington and on to the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York. This interview took place on June 3.

Why is it that many of the great plays and films of the last century have dealt with the silence or absence of God?

A lot of playwrights, and other people, try to connect with God because they feel this silence of God in their lives. They look at the bottomless black hole they feel inside themselves and, since there is such silence, they feel lonely with other people, and they question the strange world they live in—with violence and all those things—and they don't see that God exists. I believe that people who feel so deeply the silence of God are very, very close to finding God.

How has your religious faith influenced



PHOTO: REUTERS/VINCENT WEST

Liv Ullmann received a lifetime achievement award at the San Sebastian International Film Festival in Spain in 2007.

your work with Ingmar Bergman, whose films often dramatized the silence of God?

We didn't talk about how we influenced one another; nor did we discuss that sometimes he would write something and I could say it in a way that seemed the opposite and he would not mind. As an example, he wrote the movie "Private Confessions," which I directed. That film was very close to saying "I do believe." The film is not about the silence of God.

So I asked him, "Why did you ask me to direct that?" because he could have still done it, and he had other people who could have done it.

He answered, "Because you are the only one I know who has a close connection to God, and you have to have a close connection to God to do this movie."

He did not mind at all that I elaborated several scenes. For example, the

scene when the dying priest is getting Communion: In the script, there were just two lines, indicating that he is getting Communion, but I made it into many, many minutes—it was really long—the whole ritual of the eyes and the people looking at one another and the other priests who came to give this dying priest the bread and the wine. I thought that when he saw the rough cut he would say, "This has to go." But he never mentioned it. Later, when he talked about the movie—it was one of his three favorite movies—he just said, "I watch again and again when he is getting the Communion. I just love it."

In directing the play "Break of Noon," by Paul Claudel, a devout Catholic, was it difficult for you to communicate the religious dimension to the actors?

It was very difficult. Though the lead actor had a close connection to God and talked about it, he said, "Please, can't you stop talking about God?" I had that difficulty with all of them. They somehow did not like it too much; if you do that play, though, you have to be with people who have a sense of God or at least of mystery.

Although this lead actor struggled, at one of the rehearsals it was like a miracle: he did it. I know that God was with him. He did it and I shivered; and my assistant director, we shivered together; the hair was rising on my arms because he did it. He had to struggle with God, and then he found God, and it happened right in front of us. We asked him, "Do you know how incredible this was?"

Later he wrote me a let-

ter—although he fought with me often and kept saying "Stop talking about God"—to say that this was the most important time of his life in the theater.

Arguably, Kristin Lavransdatter, by Sigrid Undset, is the greatest Catholic novel ever written. In writing the screenplay and directing the film (1995), you created a beautiful work of art.

Well, I did a lot of research. And, you know, God was very much a part of

Kristin's life. I filmed mostly the first book of *Kristin Lavransdatter*, which was three books, but I took a little bit from the second book. If I were going to make another movie, I would take the last part, where she had a choice between sexual passion and human love on the one hand, and God; and she chose God.

My favorite moment in the play you are directing, "A Streetcar Named Desire," is when Mitch and Blanche see they need each other and she says, "Sometimes—there's God—so quickly!" Oh, that is rather important. She hears him and she sees him; he hears her and he sees her. He takes the candlelight and puts it in front of her and even holds an arm around her and says he will take care of her. That is when she says, "Sometimes—there's God—so quickly!"

If it hadn't been for other people, I think that maybe the two of them would have had a wonderful life together. That, of course, is the opposite of what happens in the end, when she feels that everyone turns against her and that they don't want her anymore.

When she goes with the doctor, she looks at the people who should have been close to her—who should have seen her—and she says to the doctor, "Whoever you are I have always depended on the kindness of

ON THE WEB

Jake Martin, S.J., reviews the film "(500) Days of Summer." americamagazine.org/culture

Pie

Authors of antique recipes
Encouraged larceny. *Take* so
And so, they brazenly advised,
Thereby dismaying farmers, grocers,
Game wardens everywhere. *Take four*
And twenty blackbirds, cooks were told—
And moralists had to admit
The heist made all the kingdom happy.
Watching their monarch slice that pie,
Then hearing the impromptu chorus,
Even blasé republicans
Applauded majesty, cuisine.

JOHN NIXON JR.

JOHN NIXON'S poetry has appeared in *The New York Times Book of Verse*, *Reading Rooms* and the poetry volume of the *Mississippi Writers series*.

strangers." She is right: she couldn't depend on the kindness of the people around her. And perhaps if God is not part of your experience, then God is a stranger. Perhaps if you turn to God and discover he is *not* a stranger, you can say, "I have always depended on the kindness of God and God seeing us." It is something that I want to make clear; but it all depends on which way the actors choose to go, too.

Would you say that your own experience of God is tied up with your creativity as an actress, author and director?

Yes, in my work I have found God. It is a help that I am an artist because it is all so real—because God is bigger in life and in death than I would have ever been aware of. Doing art, reading other people, connecting to the audience, I know that we live in a higher dimension, and not just at the best of moments. Absolutely.

Has being a goodwill ambassador for Unicef and visiting developing countries for the International Rescue Committee made you a more spiritual person?

When I met people who had nothing, but who still had more to give me than I could give them, then I felt that the human being is so much greater than we realize. They were adequate; I was inadequate. As I was giving, I learned what it meant to give, and I learned how to receive too. I felt serenity with God when I stopped asking God for things I needed or that my fear would go away. It was only when I said, "Thy will happen," that I felt peaceful, because there is a higher power, and his will will happen. And I always know that his will is for the best.

REV. ROBERT E. LAUDER is professor of philosophy at St. John's University in New York, and is the author of *Magnetized by God: Religious Encounters Through Film, Theater, Literature and Painting* (2004).



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A PATH MADE STRAIGHT

IN DUE SEASON

A Catholic Life

By Paul Wilkes

Jossey-Bass. 320p \$24.95

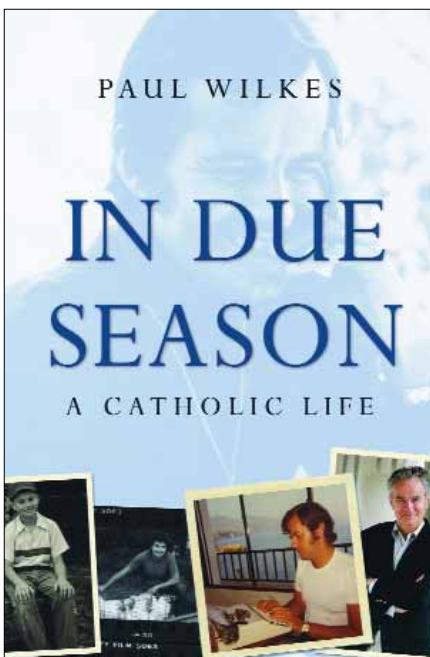
ISBN 9780470423332

In the introduction to this fascinating and frankly confessional memoir, Paul Wilkes notes: "Recollecting and reassembling the various shards, scraps, and fragments of my life, I find that some of the most horrific moments were gateways to grace. Some of the potentially holiest were mere tin idols. I have changed dramatically, and I have remained the same person I was from childhood."

That childhood was spent in Cleveland, Ohio, where Wilkes was born in 1938 and attended the Slovak parish school of St. Benedict's and then Cathedral Latin School, where he initially aspired to the heroism of becoming a Maryknoll priest but was distracted by "the sweet sinfulness" of sex. Continually getting into trouble in high school, Wilkes was changed for a while when a Marianist brother gave him *The Seven Storey Mountain*:

There was something in the writings of Thomas Merton I had never encountered before.... There were no sanctimonious paeans to God, no once-and-for-all, life-altering conversion experiences. Merton continually confessed his sinfulness, his conflicts, his desire to be and do good, and his ultimate failure in both.... And what was even more appealing was the way he spoke about his relationship with God. It was an uneven and unpredictable love affair, but both sides were committed to its ups and downs.

Thomas Merton would continue to be an extraordinary influence in Paul Wilkes's own ups and downs. And they were many. In 1956, having just been accepted to Marquette University, Wilkes was driving his mother to a liver specialist in Akron



when the car skidded off the highway and she was killed. And so he became an angry young man in college, scrounging money with factory work at night, just getting by in his classes, and finding relief with cheap booze in Red Arrow Park. Somehow managing to graduate, he joined the Navy, served as a communications officer during the Cuban missile crisis, fell in love with a Methodist missionary he met in Karachi, and became a teetotaler and Protestant when J.C. (the only way he identifies his wife) and he married.

A reporter's job with a Colorado newspaper led to a surprising acceptance to the famous graduate school of journalism at Columbia University. Crossing the George Washington Bridge, Wilkes halted his Corvair and U-Haul trailer in morning traffic in

order to scream to the Manhattan skyline, "New York: you're going to know about me!"

Soon New York did. Hired as a freelance writer for a variety of slick magazines, "I was in the locker room with basketball stars; on the set with television celebrities; in a restaurant watching the mother of women's liberation, Betty Friedan, attack a mound of steak tartare and tell me about the perils of male domination; at La Grenouille hearing the chef swoon to Women's Wear Daily's John Fairchild about the green beans just flown in from France. It all seemed to be going so well." His Brooklyn brownstone was featured in *House and Garden*, but his marriage, which seemed so right at first, was going wrong. Reawakening to his Catholic faith and co-founding the Bronx storefront community Christian Help in Park Slope only widened the rift between husband and wife, and soon he was separating from J.C., choosing voluntary poverty and making pilgrimages to monasteries in order to try out the *ora et labora* of Benedictines and Trappists.

But then his first book, *Trying Out the Dream: A Year in the Life of an American Family*, became a major television series for which he would be the producer and on-air host. Wilkes took up drinking again and ditched his former life for the fashionable Hamptons where he was "handsome, popular, and, despite my own insecurities, quite the lady's man." This was America in the 1970s, and "The new god had arrived. It was me." Eventually, he felt the chiding of Merton's example and fled the high life for a hermitage near St. Joseph Abbey in Spencer, Mass. "Once a New York bon vivant, the life of the party who rubbed elbows with Capote and Vonnegut and Warhol, I was now a rural solitary, living in a simple, wood-shingled house set on a knoll that overlooked my freshly tilled garden and beyond." But after months

of frustration and desolation, Wilkes discerned that the monk whose writing had excited his spiritual yearnings was leading him not to the Trappists but to a second marriage.

With his wife, Tracy, Wilkes started a family he thought he didn't want and found renewed success as a journalist with his wonderful New Yorker profile of The Rev. Joseph Greer, which was published in book form as *In Mysterious Ways: The Death and Life of a Parish Priest*. "A different kind of spiritual and religious life was slowly taking shape, intermingled with a writing life I could have only dreamed about. The constraints of a family, blessed stability, and a sense of purpose conspired to focus me as never before in my life. I was discovering a new voice as a writer, a clarity about what to write about, and a way to write about it." That "it" was "the sights, the sounds, the smells of Catholicism," which "captured my imagination and pierced my heart far more deeply than the Church's dogmas, doctrines, laws, and prohibitions. It is the difference between *wanting* to believe in something I found attractive rather than having to believe in something I was told I must."

CECILIO MORALES

ECHOES OF THE PAST

THE NEXT PROGRESSIVE ERA

A Blueprint for Broad Prosperity
By Phillip Longman and Ray Boshara
Polipoint Press. 240p \$22.95
ISBN 9780981576947

Recently repeated cheers that only a few hundred thousand workers lost their jobs may reflect the fact that those who measure, label and publicly analyze the economy are not among the 14 million unemployed Americans as of June. But it is also a sigh of collective relief that, so it seems, the eco-

Shifting his home to Wilmington, N. C., Wilkes found Mepkin Abbey to the south and began visiting the Trappist monastery for part of a week each month in order to "write about what I experienced and how it worked—or didn't—in my life." The "aspiring monk and aspiring writer at last were introduced to each other."

The inspiring book on his retreats with the Trappists, *Beyond the Walls: Monastic Wisdom for Everyday Life*, was succeeded by *The Good Enough Catholic: A Guide for the Perplexed* and by Lilly Endowment studies of Catholic parishes and Protestant congregations. All told, Wilkes has published hundreds of articles and some 20 books. And this compelling memoir is possibly his best, for in his fierce honesty about his failings, his strivings, his ups and downs, and his discovery of the holiness in the ordinary, Paul Wilkes has described our own lives, too, and offered both absolution and hope.

RON HANSEN's novel *Exiles, about Gerard Manley Hopkins and "The Wreck of the Deutschland," is now in paperback. He teaches at Santa Clara University, Calif.*

omic crisis that started in 2008 is not a rerun of the Great Depression.

Does this mean that we are not looking at a new New Deal recovery program ushering broadly distributed government-supported social insurance? That is precisely what Phillip Longman and Ray Boshara argue in their new book, and it is hard not to take them seriously once they roll out the precedent

of the panics of 1893 and 1907 and their origins and aftermath.

The 1893 debacle, which led to double-digit unemployment for about five years, stemmed from a loss of confidence in certain peculiar bonds backed by mortgages on about half the nation's 4.1 million homestead farms at the time. These had been sold to uninformed investors in Europe, who fled to gold once fears about their soundness arose.

History does not repeat itself, Mark Twain once remarked, but it rhymes. In Longman and Boshara's book, another anticipation of the present is the crash of the Knickerbocker Trust and the domino-effect bank and business failures in 1907. By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, some 1,800 failing companies of the 1890s had merged into 93 surviving giant corporations.

Does any of this sound familiar? Once that realization sinks in, the reader will take a second, hard look at the America of bicycles, handlebar mustaches and barbershop quartets popularized by various Disney films and amusement parks as a golden bygone era.

That sepia-toned time, from about 1890 to 1920, was also called the Progressive Era. Back then the competing presidential candidates William Howard Taft, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson eagerly vied for the label "progressive"; it was only later that it became the false flag flown by those afraid to call themselves liberals

or leftists in the wake of the cold war political climate.

Progressive reformers like Roosevelt, the authors tell us, created the Federal Reserve System to stave off depression and the Food and Drug Administration to protect the public from fraud, like the original snake oil, sold as a cure-all for aches and pains. (If you want to

know what the F.D.A. found in that



snake oil, you'll find out here.)

The authors argue that the progressives' core value was thrift, in a sense broader than merely saving money. Drawing on its etymological source, "to thrive," the progressives thought of "thrift of health" and also thrift in terms of time, which the authors argue is the source of the American preoccupation with efficiency.

Nothing illustrates the spirit of the savings education, the interest rate cap that held firm until the early 1980s and the thrifts, credit unions and immigrant banks promoted by the progressive movement better than the records of a Trimmers Club the authors located in Iowa. The group offered a penny a day to any boy who refrained from tobacco, liquor, gambling and swearing. After accumulating their first dollar, the boys were required to deposit 50 cents in a savings account.

Yet our world would not have seemed too strange to them. As in recent years, the nation in their time saw the emergence of a Protestant conservative movement based on a series of tracts called "The Fundamentals." A kind of globalization began as international trade claimed an increasing share of national income—or loss.

The era had two notable blemishes. Faced with a yearly average of 400 lynchings, many progressives went from ardent advocates of civil rights to strict segregationists, reasoning that the best way to avoid the murderous fruit of Southern bigotry was to force a separation of whites and blacks in the public square. That conclusion led to the fateful Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, in 1896, which sanctioned segregation. Similarly, the era ended with the notorious immigration raids of 1919 to 1921 launched by Alexander Palmer, President Wilson's attorney general, which targeted foreign leftists as well as Mexicans who were fleeing civil war.

To Longman and Boshara, who

acknowledge both horrors, what is lasting in the progressive legacy are the solutions that attempted broad change rather than piecemeal policy tinkering and their institution building, which formed the base for the eventual New Deal.

Last, the progressives embraced a social and economic model that was not purely rational and that, without curtailing America's pluralism, sought to improve human behavior

through a scientifically based "soft paternalism."

Given the distinctly homiletic quality of President Obama's major pronouncements, I am tempted to believe that the authors may well have a crystal ball for predicting the nation's evolution once prosperity returns.

CECILIO MORALES has covered federal economic policy as a journalist in Washington, D.C., since 1984 and is currently executive editor of the *Employment and Training Reporter*.

RICHARD M. GULA

WEIGHT OR DEBT?

SIN

A History

By Gary A. Anderson
Yale Univ. Press. 272p \$30 ISBN
9780300149890

When I teach the section of my moral theology course that deals with sin, one of my goals is that students come to a clear understanding of their governing metaphor for sin and the implications of that metaphor. Some favor the forensic concept of "breaking the law." Others stand with relational notions, such as "selfishness" or "misuse of power." No one has ever spoken in the economic idiom of "debt." Yet sin as debt is the metaphor this work of biblical theology examines.

Gary Anderson, a professor of Old Testament at the University of Notre Dame, argues that sin has a history. But "history" here is rather narrowly conceived. Anderson does not give an analysis of the various ways we have understood sin over the millennia, and he restricts his sources to Old Testament literature, rabbinic literature and some of the early Christian sources.

When Anderson says that sin has a history, he means that there are shifting metaphors for sin in the Bible. Though they abound, the first stage that Anderson describes in his history is the dramatic change from the metaphor of weight or burden that dominated the older books to the metaphor of debt prominent in the younger books. Anderson compares the ritual of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement in Leviticus, where sin is like weight on one's back, with the understanding of sin as debt that must be repaid, as found in the famous line in Matthew's version of the Our Father, "forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." He attributes the shift from weight to debt to the rise of Aramaic as the official language of law and commerce. Its word for "debt" in a commercial context became the word for "sin" in a religious context. In this stage, he lays out thoroughly the biblical roots of the debt metaphor by careful use of philology and by comparing biblical and rabbinic literature. This material makes up most of the book and should be of interest to any student of the Bible.



In the second stage of his history, Anderson traces the cultural implications of understanding sin as debt as this idiom works its way into Jewish and Christian thought, eventually showing up as central to Anselm's atonement theory. Anderson examines the semantic and theological links behind the notion of sin as debt and virtue as credit. He shows how the spiritual practice of giving alms to the poor developed in a dialectical relation with the debt metaphor.

Concern for the poor is found throughout the biblical tradition, but seeing sin as debt contributed significantly to a brisk business in almsgiving in the early Christian period. After the Temple's destruction in A.D. 70, almsgiving replaced making sin offerings at the altar of sacrifice as a direct conduit to God. Such an exalted understanding of almsgiving later became a stumbling block for the Reformers, who took it as humans saving themselves by good works. But through the judicious comparing of texts, Anderson shows that almsgiving was seen as humans expressing their faith in God's promise of grace found in the hands of the poor. Giving alms was a public testimony of faith that this is the same type of treatment we hope to receive from God. It is not an act of self-redemption.

In addition to the valuable textual studies that make it a great resource for biblical students, *Sin: A History* appeals to a broader audience in the way it shows the relation of a particular understanding of sin to the meaning we give to associated concepts, such as atonement, penance, punishment, forgiveness, virtue and God. The temptations that come with thinking about sin as debt are many. This metaphor can give rise, for example, to a moral vision of rigid obligations that we must fulfill to earn God's mercy. It can make God a meticulous accountant whose sole task is to extract every penny owed. Penances

become penalties, the price we have to pay for our misdeeds. Virtue is reduced to merit winning our salvation. Christ's suffering and death become the way to repay God for our sins.

Do these narratives have to follow from the metaphor? Anderson's great contribution is to show that they do not. He draws on Paul Ricoeur's idea that symbol gives rise to thought to demonstrate that metaphors do not lock us into one and only one narrative expansion. (It would have been another book to delineate criteria for judging the fidelity of the narrative to the metaphor.) In the end, Anderson holds that context always makes a difference in the way we interpret a metaphor. God does not have to be reduced to a

lending officer demanding every penny. The idiom of debts and credits can fit within the framework of belief in a gracious and loving God.

Sin: A History makes a valuable contribution to biblical studies in its investigation of changes in our understanding of sin, and it will be useful to theology students who are interested in retrieving the biblical roots of Anselm's theology of atonement. But Anderson's demonstration of how symbol gives rise to more than one narrative should interest anyone who wants to know more about the power of metaphors to shape beliefs.

RICHARD M. GULA, S.S., is a professor of moral theology at the Franciscan School of Theology, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, Calif.



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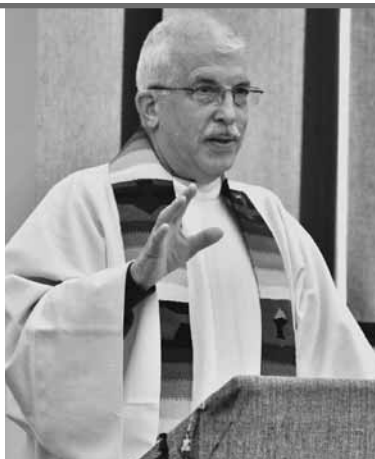
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LETTERS

An Overabundance of Hugs

What a treat it was to see the cover of your Aug. 17 issue! The tiny hand being held by the elderly hands of the therapist belongs to my daughter Nora. Daystar, where Nora receives treatments, is a wonderful place that provides foster care and also respite care for infants with special needs.

Nora has been treasured, wanted and loved from the time she was conceived, through her diagnosis with Trisomy 18 and after her birth, as we adjusted to taking care of a tiny infant who we were told would not survive.

Trisomy 18 (the presence of a third 18th chromosome) most often results in medical issues so severe that the vast majority of children with it do not survive beyond infancy. The medical literature said it was “incompatible with life” or that the few survivors could not

enjoy “quality of life.” Social workers cautioned us about the stress it can put on a marriage and on other children. None of that mattered. We welcomed Nora into our lives with no expectations for anything but giving her the same love we would to any other child, for as long as we would be blessed to have her. Miraculously, she just celebrated her ninth birthday! She does have medical and developmental issues, none of which affect her (or our) perception of quality of life, and she is comfortable, happy, healthy and cherished by those in her life. Our family is closer and stronger for having her.

In short, Nora lives at home with an adoring brother and sister, and a proud mommy and daddy, and she would heartily dispute the idea that she “suffers” from anything, unless you count an overabundance of tickles, hugs and dog kisses.

LAUREN SAMPLE
Rochester, N.Y.

Up Is Really Down

Regarding the “Wheels of Misfortune” (Current Comment, 9/14), I suspect that the location of the Taconic Parkway disaster in Westchester County is more accurately described as “downstate” rather than “upstate.” Perhaps from *America’s* point of view, upstate begins at West 262nd Street.

JOE McMAHON
Seaford, N.Y.

From Screen to Classroom

William J. O’Malley, S.J., is brilliant, as always, in “Faulty Guidance” (9/14)—yet another amazing article from his pen for *America*. For all who hear his call to engage movies as “plows,” try taking kids through “The Bells of St. Mary’s” (1945), “The Cardinal” (1963) and “Dogma” (1999) to show them the evolution of Catholic images in popular culture. Compare and contrast the views of religious life shown by Audrey Hepburn in “The Nun’s Story” (1959) and the images of the sisters in “The Sound of Music” (1965). Also, have them check out “The Mission” and “Black Robe.” Show “Entertaining Angels” (Dorothy Day’s life story) and “Roses in December” (about Jean Donovan). Show them “On The Waterfront.”

Most kids desperately want to find a way to live the call to heroism in “Varsity Blues” and ignore the siren call of the “American Pie” movies. Most college kids really need to learn that college should be “With Honors” and not “Animal House.” “Places in the Heart,” “First Knight,” “Life Is Beautiful,” “Hotel Rwanda,” “A Beautiful Mind,” “Pay It Forward,” “Remember the Titans,” “Hoosiers,” “Rudy,” “Patch Adams” and the Internet Movie Database’s No. 1, “The Shawshank Redemption.” There are many good movies out there.

Movies can be powerful tools for preparing people, both young and

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older, to have hearts that want to know the reality and power of Christ's presence and grace in our lives. Father O'Malley is so right: Start with the stories!

RICK MALLOY, S.J.
Philadelphia, Pa.

Gotta Know the Territory

William O'Malley, S.J., never ceases to hit the nail right on the head. As a teacher who has labored "in the trenches" of high school for more than 30 years, I continue to marvel at his ability to view his students with such a clear eye and the tasks before us with such level-headed passion. I'll be sure that all of my colleagues have a copy of this article in their mailboxes tomorrow morning. Like "The Music Man's" Harold Hill, Father O'Malley knows the territory very well.

FRED HERRON
Brooklyn, N.Y.

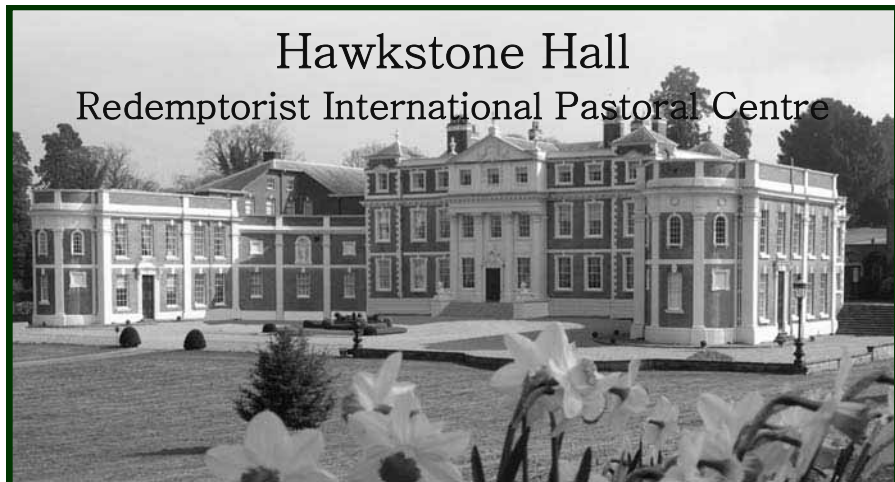
The Mystical Connection

As a former high school teacher of religion and for many years a teacher of freshmen and women in college theology, I say bravo to William O'Malley, S.J. Thank God for his courage in objecting to this out-of-touch document. His words will be balm to many a person trying to impart the faith to contemporary youngsters. My years of teaching convinced me that we were missing the boat in precisely the ways he outlines. It is the mystical connection that students crave and seek outside a church that insists on giving them (a) history or (b) dogmatic assertions. Is there someone in the hierarchy who will listen?

MARY AQUIN O'NEILL, R.S.M.
Baltimore, Md.

The Way of Jesus

Amen! Jesus played with children and taught adults. We *always* have it backwards. I am a convert. I give thanks every day of my life that I am a product of neither Sunday school nor cate-



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LINDA BALLARD, O.S.C.
Woburn, Mass.

Vernacular for What Counts

Re: "The New Old Liturgy" (Current Comment, 9/14): I still feel, after almost 40 years as a priest, that the Mass and all other liturgical celebrations should be celebrated in the same language in which the announcements about the collection are made.

JOHN KANE, C.M.
Opelika, Ala.

The Risk of Public Service

Re: "Camelot's End" (Editorial, 9/14). Whatever criticism could be leveled at Edward M. Kennedy—and admittedly he deserves some—it cannot be denied he took the risk of public service, and this country knows the price both he and his family paid for taking that risk. For this reason Senator Kennedy, regardless of one's personal opinion concerning his conduct public

or private, deserves and should receive the respect of all Americans. This is not to say everything he did or said in life was right or wrong. It is simply to acknowledge his humanity and our own. If we make such an acknowledgement then we can safely ask God's mercy for Edward M. Kennedy's soul and ours as well.

EDISON WOODS
Gulf Breeze, Fla.

Chipping Away Civility

I think your editorial was a fair and respectful appraisal of Senator Kennedy. But I think you missed an important aspect of his life. You bemoan the loss of civility in our current political discourse. But Ted Kennedy himself certainly helped chip away at that dam. In 1987, on the floor of the Senate and on national television, he said the following about the Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork:

Robert Bork's America is a land

in which women would be forced into back-alley abortions, blacks would sit at segregated lunch counters, rogue police could break down citizens' doors in midnight raids, school children could not be taught about evolution, writers and artists would be censored at the whim of government, and the doors of the federal courts would be shut on the fingers of millions of citizens for whom the judiciary is often the only protector of the individual rights that are the heart of our democracy.

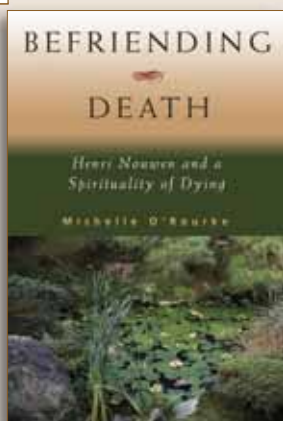
Those vicious words marked the beginning of a new era in partisan politics. And it just seems to be getting worse.

JAMES HAMEL
Temple Hills, Md.

A Christian Heart

There were some times in the past when I deplored Ted Kennedy's personal failings and his defense of the pro-choice position. But beginning in the 1980s, when even Democrats were bailing out on the poor and the marginal, Ted was still there fighting for them. And he never stopped. He did not fear being called unpatriotic when he voted against giving President Bush the authority for the war in Iraq. In my mature years, I see the integrity in his public life. In the newly discovered small and personal gestures toward the grieving, the sick and the outcasts that were taking place out of the range of photographers and reporters, I see a wise and big heart—a Christian heart, in fact.

WINIFRED HOLLOWAY
Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

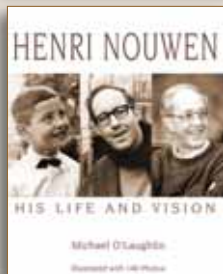


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Toward a Sacred Unity

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), OCT. 4, 2009

Readings: Gn 2:18-24; Ps 128:1-6; Heb 2:9-11; Mk 10:2-16

“The two shall become one flesh” (Gn 2:24; Mk 10:8)

The divorce rate in the United States for the past decade has been approximately 50 percent for first marriages. The majority cite “irreconcilable differences” as the cause. Two-thirds of those who divorce have young children. While no statistics are available for first-century Palestine, divorce was not uncommon. But marriage practices and attitudes toward marriage were considerably different from our own. In their patriarchal social system, marriages were arranged between families to strengthen the social cohesion of the two clans. The terms were negotiated between the groom and his father and the father of the bride. Divorce would mean a messy separation of the two families and would bring shame on the family of the bride, since in Jewish tradition, only a man could initiate divorce.

It is in this context that the Pharisees “test” Jesus about the Law concerning divorce. The only text in the Torah that deals with divorce is Dt 24:1-4, where Moses declares that a man who becomes displeased with his wife because he finds in her “something objectionable” may write her a bill of divorce and hand it to her and dismiss her from his house. The meaning of the Hebrew term used here had long been debated by the rabbis. In the time of Jesus, some impor-

tant teachers, like Shammai, interpreted it strictly as meaning only sexual misconduct, whereas others, like Hillel, thought it allowed even for spoiling a dish. Jesus’ response is startling. He interprets Deuteronomy 24 as a concession on the part of Moses to the peoples’ hardness of heart and redirects them to the ideal put forth in Genesis 2. He underscores the divine intent for oneness and harmonious relations among all creatures, most especially human beings, male and female, created in God’s image and likeness.

The creation of woman in Gn 2:18-24 has often been misinterpreted in misogynistic ways: that the creation of woman as second, and from the man’s side, makes her subordinate to and derivative from him. And the Hebrew phrase in verse 18 has been poorly rendered in some translations as “helpmate,” making the sole purpose of woman’s creation to be an aid in man’s work. More recent translations have rightly rendered it as “suitable partner” (revised NAB) or “a helper as his partner” (NRSV). These capture the nuances of the Hebrew words for “strength, indispensable aid,” often used of God’s saving help, and for “corresponding to.” As a myth of origins, Genesis 2 tells of how human beings came to be and how male and female relate to one another with mutuality and partnership. Having been created from man’s rib (literally,

“side”), woman is to stand alongside him as his equal. As the man’s exclamation in verse 22 affirms, she corresponds to him exactly. She is strong like him (“bone of my bones”) and weak like him (“flesh of my flesh”).

Jesus quotes this text to his opponents, changing the focus from divorce to God’s original intent for oneness and mutual correspondence. Just as later Christians would come



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- How does the divine intent for oneness and mutual correspondence between man and woman undermine patterns of domination?
- Pray for the grace to attain the ideal of unity and for compassion when this is not possible.
- What does childlike powerlessness and receptivity look like in your life?

ART: TAD DUNNE

to understand God as three in one, so the unity of man and woman in marriage reflects this sacred unbreakable oneness.

The reasons why not all marriages reflect this sacred unity are many; and from the very first, Christians have understood that there are exceptions to Jesus’ stark pronouncement of “no divorce” (see 1 Cor 7:11, 15; Mt 19:9). When the ideal cannot be realized, it is equally important to remember Jesus’ insistence on compassion, forgiveness and unconditional love.

BARBARA E. REID

BARBARA E. REID, O.P., a member of the Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids, Mich., is a professor of New Testament studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Ill., where she has been named vice president and academic dean.

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