

# America



THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

DEC. 13, 2010 \$3.50

## On the Slope With Teilhard

DREW CHRISTIANSEN

New Images  
Of Mary

JUDITH DUPRÉ

Children's Books  
Roundup

# OF MANY THINGS

**A**mackerel sky weighed low over Long Island Sound as the Amtrak coach carried me home for Thanksgiving. From the time when as a boy I first noticed them, these altocumulus clouds, parallel bands laid end to end like vertebrae, have been associated for me with late fall in the weeks after leaves have fallen and the grass has faded, but the hard cold is still to come. I find mackerel skies vaguely threatening, perhaps because under them the weather seems to close in, or perhaps because I remember them, in colder times, sometimes preceding early-season snowstorms in which the world became dimmed still further in shadow.

November gray skies prepare us for winter. They make us introspective and brooding. When Ishmael sets out, at the beginning of *Moby-Dick*, for his journey on the Pequod, he does so because it is “damp, drizzly November in [his] soul.” Ishmael went to sea “to drive off the spleen,” escape thoughts of death and contain his pugilistic impulses. For others, however, November’s dreariness brings them together. My elderly mother used to tell us how much she enjoyed the long, dark evenings when the family was together; and of course most people celebrate Thanksgiving *en famille*.

Shorter daylight hours contribute to our November feelings. Walking with my grandnieces this past Thanksgiving, I was conscious of how very early the sun sets this time of year. I rushed to get them home before the fading light made us less visible to late afternoon drivers. Deep in the psyche there is something that tells us to gird ourselves up to move out into the evening darkness or early morning gloom to face the cold. By spring that deep-down defensiveness wears us down; the poverty of light enervates us more than the cold and wind and snow.

November’s shadows hold within them lessons for the soul as well as the psyche. Like Ishmael on his sea-journey,

each of us needs to find and assess the ways we can escape from letting the world lie too heavily on us or allowing ourselves to brood over petty upsets. It is time to practice patience, make apologies and take initiatives to ease relations. But it is also an occasion to tap into those resources that enable us to be patient. Like Ishmael, when I find myself growing short-tempered, I know it is time to move on, to travel perhaps, take in a couple of movies or visit friends.

Once we have become conscious of their effect on us, shorter days and cloudy skies can be an occasion for neglected introspection as well. Rather than allow ourselves to fall into depression, we can attune ourselves to the greater quiet and solitude late autumn brings. We can journal and pray. We can take up hobbies and crafts. In years past, farmers and their families took up woodcarving and quilting in winter. Though doctors may fret, one reason we overeat in winter is that cooking, not to mention eating, is simply a comforting indoor pastime. It is an art that engages all the senses, which even postmodern city-dwellers can enjoy. Spirituality, after all, includes reconnecting with the dynamics of the natural world from which urban life abstracts us.

For some, seasonal affective disorder is a real hardship. Those who suffer from it can be helped with trips to the Sunbelt and light therapy, but some of the hands-on, physical activities that were once part of the annual cycle of life may be of help to them as well. Our urban alienation from the land, the cycle of seasons and the work of our hands may have as much to do with wintertime depression as underlying biochemical changes in the brain.

Finally, for myself, the liturgy of Advent, with its play of light and darkness, its plaintive, longing music and its message of justice for the oppressed, never fails to lead me out of November’s shadows.

**DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J.**

# America

PUBLISHED BY JESUITS OF THE UNITED STATES

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Customer Service: 1-800-627-9533

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Cover: A climber’s hand on sandstone. Photo: Shutterstock/  
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# CONTENTS



## ARTICLES

### 13 ON THE SLOPE WITH TEILHARD

Lessons on spirit and matter

*Drew Christiansen*

### 17 TEACHING OR COMMANDING?

When bishops instruct the faithful

*Nicholas Lash*

## COLUMNS & DEPARTMENTS

### 4 Current Comment

### 5 Editorial Markets and Politics

### 6 Signs of the Times

### 10 Column Relish the Banquet

*John F. Kavanaugh*

### 21 O Holy Night 2 More suggestions from readers for keeping Christmas sacred

### 28 Letters

### 30 The Word Obedience of Faith; Light in Darkness

*Barbara E. Reid*



## BOOKS & CULTURE

### 22 ART New images of Mary **BOOKINGS** Books for children

## ON THE WEB

Drew Christiansen, S.J., right, discusses the spirituality of **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.**, and Harry Forbes reviews **“The King’s Speech.”** Plus, our series of video **reflections for Advent** continues. All at [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org).



### Don't Assassinate

As a candidate, Barack Obama claimed the president had no power to detain U.S. citizens without charges as enemy combatants. Now, without announcing a policy, he in practice claims presidential power to assassinate U. S. citizens without charges as unlawful enemy combatants. This policy of assassination includes a series of drone attacks or Joint Special Operations Command raids to kill a short list of U.S. citizens in Yemen, the best known of whom is Anwar al-Awlaki.

Born in 1971 in New Mexico and educated at three American universities, al-Awlaki moved to Yemen in 2004 as an Al Qaeda religious propagandist who hates America and says that killing Americans is like fighting Satan. Not an Al Qaeda boss, he is allegedly linked to the Fort Hood shooter, the would-be underwear bomber, the failed Times Square car bomber and the explosives shipped in laser printers on cargo planes from Yemen.

The Administration has offered no evidence that al-Awlaki is so extraordinary a threat that all the limitations of international and moral law can be brushed aside. Yet a U.S. citizen is to be killed by order of his government.

The American Civil Liberties Union and the Center for Constitutional Rights asked a federal court on Nov. 8 to rule that the U.S. Constitution and international law forbid targeted killings outside of armed conflicts except as a last resort. To rule otherwise, says the A.C.L.U., gives the president "unreviewable authority to order the assassination of any U.S. citizen." In short, to assume the power to kill a citizen at will makes the United States no more moral than the average dictatorship or terrorist. The administration's lawyers have not disowned the assassination policy.

### O Holy Not

One does not have to be a curmudgeon to pine over the loss of the Christmas season to Madison Avenue, a loss that is now more or less wholesale (pun intended). Set aside the Black Friday insanity that follows Thanksgiving Day, accompanied by now-annual reports of shopping-related injuries of stressed-out consumers. Set aside the fact that this year many department stores tacked up their Christmas decorations the day after Halloween. Set aside even the fact that attendance at Christmas Day Masses has fallen off sharply; one reason is that more Catholics want to "get it over with" the night before so that on the 25th they can concentrate on the main event: presents.

More irksome is the increasing number of stores that use imagery specific to Christmas to flog their wares, while at the same time expunging any explicit mention of the religious holiday they have hijacked. It makes for some bizarre marketing. "Believe" is once again Macy's "holiday" slogan. Believe in what? Jewelry? Appliances? J. Crew's online store this year offers a "Very Merry Gift Guide." Merry what? The guide features evergreen trees, glass ornaments and plenty of red-and-green outfits to entice. What holiday might they be referring to? If you click long enough, you will finally get an answer: Happy Shopping. One way to get around all of this, however, is the approach taken by Loft, a division of Ann Taylor, the women's clothing store. Their 2010 motto: "Create your own holiday." *Pace* Don Draper of "Mad Men," God has done that already.

### Illegal Organ-Trading

The recent breakup of an international organ-trafficking ring in Kosovo sheds light on a dark human rights problem. The ring was selling human kidneys and other body parts removed from poor people trafficked into Kosovo from Russia, Moldova, Kazakhstan and Turkey with promises of payments—though many received nothing. The organs were then sold to wealthy patients—"transplant tourists"—from Israel and Canada for up to \$200,000 per organ. The ring's leader was a surgeon and professor at the Pristina University Hospital, Dr. Lufti Dervishi. His son performed the surgery in a local clinic. An official in Kosovo's health ministry was also implicated, revealing upper-level government corruption.

The ring was already suspected two years ago, when police found a young Turkish man at the Pristina airport in a weakened state awaiting a return flight to Turkey. Visiting the clinic, they found an elderly Israeli who had received the man's kidney. Police believe the Kosovo ring may itself be part of a larger Israel-based criminal syndicate that exploited poor Romanians, whose kidneys were removed and sold to wealthy Israelis.

The World Health Organization estimates that a fifth of kidney transplants worldwide come through the black market. Some countries, like India, have laws banning the sale of organs, but an underground market persists. Because of extreme poverty, desperate people in developing nations remain at risk of exploitation. Police vigilance is needed now to end the trafficking that continues. This could be reduced if people in wealthy countries became more willing to donate organs at their death.

# Markets and Politics

Not long ago a certain stream of pro-market philosophers made a noisy public case for the creative synergy between capitalism and democracy. The growth of free-market capitalism, they argued, would inevitably bring democracy. Then came the financial crisis of 2007 and the rescue of the financial markets by individual nations, the European Union and the International Monetary Fund. Financial markets failed, and government came to the rescue. Of course, though it is hidden in the footnotes of economics textbooks and ignored by free-market-oriented think tanks, that is what is supposed to happen in democratic capitalism. But what are we to do when the financial markets saved by states threaten to bring down governments unless they do what the mercurial markets demand?

The Republic of Ireland faced that question last month, when after weeks of resistance it accepted an 85-billion euro line of credit from the European Central Bank. In doing so, it effectively surrendered its sovereignty, yielding its national budget, national priorities and government services to the direction of outside auditors. The Irish government's big mistake was to bail out the country's banks when they failed in the Great Recession. Now it must accept government by bankruptcy accountants. Has democracy been undone by capitalism? For the most part.

The Irish government, led on by the conventional wisdom promoted by the banks, the building industry and the business press, certainly had a role in the collapse by establishing policies that inflated the speculative real estate bubble before it burst. But unlike the banks and other business sectors, the government accepted responsibility and took on the debt of the failing banks. Then it adopted one of the most austere budgets in Europe to make good on its outstanding obligations. Now, because of "the market's" fear of the impact of Irish indebtedness on the euro zone, the European Central Bank has forced Ireland to accept an outsized line of credit at the price of even more draconian budget cuts.

Of the many object lessons to be drawn from this latest drama in the Great Recession, two in particular demand consideration. First, the primary perpetrators in the collapse have not borne the burden of their offenses. Second, the myth of the synergy between capitalism and democracy is shattered. They are lessons that apply to the United States no less than to Ireland.

In Ireland prosecutors have yet to announce whether they will prosecute officers of the Anglo-Irish Bank for

fraud. But by and large the geniuses behind the Celtic Tiger's unnatural growth will not be held accountable, just as in the United States most of those responsible for the inflated housing market, bundled mortgages and other infernal investment devices will not be held liable for the irreparable harm they worked in tens of millions of lives. Indeed, once rescued by public largesse, financiers seem to flaunt their continued prosperity without exhibiting the least sign of social responsibility. The people shouldering the burden will be politicians, the taxpaying public and society's weakest and most vulnerable members.

The second lesson is that free-market capitalism and democracy are not always mutually re-enforcing. The success of China's entrepreneurial government since Deng Xiaoping took it down the capitalist road should be proof enough. But the events of the Great Recession have proved that once financial markets use governments to pay for market abuses, financial leaders can also turn on governments and demand the last drop of citizens' blood. To be sure, neither governments nor their publics lack responsibility in this tragedy. Governments (and regulators) established the business-friendly environment that brought prosperity; prosperity brought them popularity; and the public enjoyed the apparent growth in household wealth and higher lifestyles. But ultimately the major responsibility lies with "the masters of the universe," the financial titans who with few exceptions created the conditions for this crisis by bending laws to their purposes. The powerful financial class that benefitted from public rescues continues today to fight against re-regulation (at least in the United States), wallowing in renewed profitability and bringing governments to their knees.

How can free-market capitalism, especially financial markets, be made less inimical to democracy? The future of democratic government requires greater distance between finance and government, not an easy task given the modern expectation that government manages the economy. It also requires a rebirth of social responsibility and concern for the common good on the part of corporations and their leaders, and a renewed sense of moderation on the part of the public at large. But since government and the public continue to measure well-being almost solely in terms of economic growth, such moderation too may be out of reach—until the markets bring on a collapse too great for even a government rescue.



# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

PEACEMAKING

## U.S. Bishops Urge Support For Nuclear Weapons Pact

**T**he new president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace called on U.S. senators to set aside politics and ratify the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. The treaty, signed by President Obama and Russia's President Dmitri Medvedev on April 8, would reduce the nuclear arsenals of both countries by 30 percent.

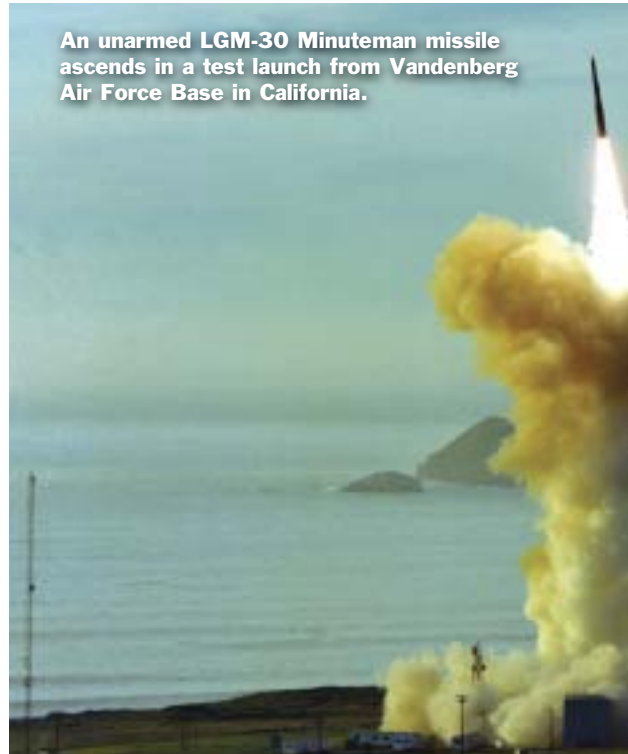
Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany, New York, wrote in a letter to the Senate on Nov. 29: "Consistent with Catholic teaching, the Holy See and the U.S. bishops have long supported reducing the number of nuclear armaments, preventing their spread to other nations and securing nuclear materials from terrorists. For decades they have promoted the twin and interrelated policy goals of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. We understand this is an ideal that will take years to reach, but it is a task which our nation must take up with renewed energy." Bishop Hubbard chairs the bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace.

Archbishop Timothy Dolan, the recently elected president of the U.S.C.C.B., said, "I renew and re-emphasize the position taken by my predecessor, Cardinal Francis George, that the [conference] is 'a steadfast

supporter of strong and bipartisan action on the new Start Treaty."

Bishop Hubbard called the new

An unarmed LGM-30 Minuteman missile ascends in a test launch from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California.



Start a "modest step toward a world with greater respect for human life." He added: "The church's concern for

CHINA

## Vatican: Bishop's Ordination Inflicts 'Painful Wound'

**A**n episcopal ordination in China inflicted a "painful wound" on the Catholic Church, and government pressure on other bishops to participate in the ceremony was a "grave violation of freedom of religion and conscience," the Vatican said on Nov. 24. Under close surveillance from local government officials on Nov. 20, the Rev. Joseph Guo Jincai was ordained bishop of Chengde—the first bishop ordained in China without papal approval in four years.

Eight bishops in communion with Pope Benedict XVI laid their hands

on Father Guo, whose ordination was illicit in the eyes of the church. Some of the ordaining bishops had been detained by government officials in the days before the ordination in an effort to force them to participate.

The Vatican said Pope Benedict "received the news with deep regret." Because the new bishop did not have the mandate or blessing of the pope, the ordination "constitutes a painful wound upon ecclesial communion and a grave violation of Catholic discipline," the statement said. The ordination was a violation of church law, and

Bishop Guo "finds himself in a most serious canonical condition," facing "severe sanctions," including automatic excommunication, it said.

"This ordination not only does not contribute to the good of the Catholics of Chengde, but places them in a very delicate and difficult condition, also from the canonical point of view, and humiliates them, because the Chinese civil authorities wish to impose on them a pastor who is not in full communion either with the Holy Father or with the other bishops throughout the world," the Vatican statement said.

The bishops participating in the ordination face canonical penalties unless it can be shown that they were forced by government security forces to attend the liturgy. John Liu Jinghe,



nuclear weapons grows out of its commitment to the sanctity of human life. This commitment led to the develop-

ment of just war criteria, including the principles of discrimination and proportionality. Nuclear weapons are a grave threat to human life and dignity. Nuclear war is rejected in church teaching because the use of nuclear weapons cannot ensure noncombatant immunity and their destructive potential and lingering radiation cannot be meaningfully proportionate. Pope Benedict XVI said in a January 2006 statement, 'In a nuclear war there would be no victors, only victims.'

New Start would commit the United States and Russia to reducing their strategic arsenals to 1,550 warheads deployed on long-range missiles, bombers and submarines. Under the previous Start pact, which expires this month, both countries reduced their arsenals to 2,200 weapons each.

A threat on Dec. 1 by Senate Republicans to block all legislation until expiring tax cuts are extended and a bill is passed to fund the federal government does not apply to Start,

and President Obama has made ratification of the pact a top priority.

In his letter to Congress, Bishop Hubbard argued that the treaty would be a step toward further international cooperation to limit the spread of nuclear weapons and nuclear material. "Military experts and former national leaders have come together across party lines to support the new Start treaty," Bishop Hubbard wrote. "Leaders from both parties, diplomats and military experts argue that the treaty does not constrain U.S. missile defense and that announced investments in our nation's nuclear weapons infrastructure will keep our nuclear deterrent safe and reliable.

"The U.S. bishops' conference is urging strong bipartisan support for the new Start treaty because the treaty makes our nation and world safer by reducing nuclear weapons in a verifiable way. We urge the Senate to take up the new Start treaty without delay," he concluded.

the retired bishop of Tangshan, refused to attend the ordination. More than 100 Catholics and dozens of government officials attended the ordination Mass at the church in the rural town of Pingquan. The village was surrounded by about 100 uniformed and plainclothes police. Cameras were banned in the church, and mobile phone signals were blocked in the area.

Bishop Guo became the first bishop illegitimately ordained since Pope Benedict issued his letter to Chinese Catholics in 2007. The papal letter strongly criticized the limits placed by the Chinese government on the church's activities; but on several key issues, including the appointment of bishops, it invited civil authorities to a new and serious dialogue.

In recent years, because of government requirements, the priests, nuns and laypeople of Chinese dioceses have elected their new bishops. Most of those elected have applied to the Holy See for approval. If such approval was given, it often was announced at the episcopal ordination.

Federico Lombardi, S.J., the Vatican spokesman, said the ordination would damage "the constructive relations that have been developing in recent times between the People's Republic of China and the Holy See."

Hong Kong's Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-

kiun condemned "the kidnapping [of bishops], the cutting of all communications, the huge show of police force as if dealing with dangerous criminals." "Are we not living well into the 21st century?" he asked.



**A Chinese Catholic kneels in prayer at his home near Taiyuan, Shanxi Province.**

## Condom Remarks Offer Teachable Moment

The public debate on church teaching about condoms triggered by Pope Benedict XVI's comments in a new book provides an ideal opportunity for parish priests to clarify that teaching for the faithful from the pulpit, said the president of Caritas Internationalis. Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, said that many Catholics do not know what the church teaches in this regard. "This could be a good opportunity for us in the parishes to clarify and to teach." Cardinal Rodríguez dismissed claims that the pope had changed the church's teaching on the use of condoms. "It has been the doctrine of the church all the time that when there are emergency cases the principle of double effect" applies. The book, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times*, is based on interviews Pope Benedict granted the German journalist Peter Seewald. In the book, the pope said that the use of condoms—for instance, to prevent the spread of H.I.V.—"can be a first step in the direction of a moralization, a first assumption of responsibility."

## Bishops: 'Alarming' Situation in Haiti

A cholera epidemic and poor infrastructure and organization in Haiti have created an "alarming" situation in the small Caribbean nation, said a group of bishops meeting at the Vatican. A special council of bishops working on the follow-up to the 1997 Synod of Bishops for America and Pope John Paul II's 1999 post-synodal document, "The Church in America," met at the Vatican on Nov. 16–17. They noted "with concern" the "alarming social situation in Haiti in the wake of the earth-

## NEWS BRIEFS

Pope Benedict XVI applauded on Nov. 29 the church's role in abolishing the **death penalty** in the Philippines. • Auxiliary Bishop **William Kenney** of Birmingham, England, denounced the British policy of repatriating Iraqi Christians fleeing persecution on Nov. 26, saying he knows they endure the "constant fear and tension of not knowing what will happen next." • The U.S. bishops commended a resolution in the House of Representatives that condemns recent attacks on **religious minorities in Iraq** and calls for the U.S. and Iraqi governments to do more to protect them. • "God's dream for us is to be a united people, and we must pursue it...and pledge together to do this," Archbishop **Gregory M. Aymond** of New Orleans said at the 2010 Centennial Ecumenical Gathering of the National Council of Churches in Christ. • Israel's measures to "ease" the illegal blockade of Gaza have done little to change the **plight of Gaza's civilians**, according to a new report. Kate Allen, Amnesty International's U.K. director, said, "The only real easing has been the easing of pressure on the Israeli authorities to end this cruel and illegal practice."



**Iraqi Christians mourn after Oct 31 attack.**

quake" on Jan. 12. The current outbreak of cholera has aggravated an already difficult situation for Haitians, they said. The generous outpouring of aid from foreign governments and church organizations would reach those in need more effectively "if local agencies were better able to organize" the use and distribution of the aid, they said. The council members also expressed concern that in parts of the Americas, governments were promoting legislation that is "contrary to ethical norms," such as the legalization of abortion, euthanasia and same-sex marriage.

## No Justice for Christians in Pakistan

The Christian community in Pakistan was outraged by the acquittal on Nov. 27 of a rich Muslim man accused of raping and murdering a young

Christian girl. Chaudhry Naeem was found not guilty of raping and murdering Shazia Bashir, a 12-year-old Christian girl. Naeem's wife and son, who were accused with him of having forced Bashir to work as a maid in their home and of physically mistreating her, also were let off on all charges. Bashir died in January. Some charged that medical tests were manipulated to show that Shazia died of a "skin disease," and testimonial evidence from her family was deemed insufficient by the court. "It is not the first time that, in cases like this, the outcome of the process leaves influential Muslim citizens unpunished, despite the atrocities committed on poor and helpless Christians," said Nasir Saeed, head of the Center for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement.

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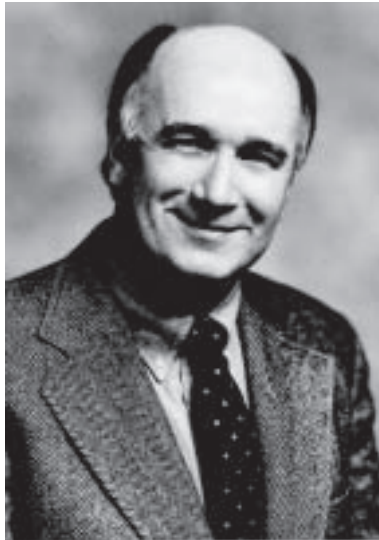
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**About Your Speaker**

Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M. is past chairman of the Department of Theology at Boston College. Prior to his move to Boston College, Fr. Himes taught courses in moral theology for many years at the Washington Theological Union.

Fr. Himes is a past president of the Catholic Theological Society of America and has served as a visiting faculty member at the Divinity School of Howard University (Washington, DC) and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. He also held the Paul McKeever Chair as a visiting faculty member at St. John's University in New York City.

He is the co-author of *Fullness of Faith*, and wrote the popular *Responses to 101 Questions on Catholic Social Teaching*. He was co-editor of *An Introduction to Christian Ethics* and was chief editor of *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*. Fr. Himes has published over 75 essays in journals and books, and was an editor of *New Theology Review* for a decade.

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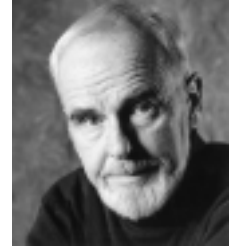
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# Relish the Banquet

Not so long ago, the day after Thanksgiving was the big shopping day, a mad rush to trigger Christmas consumer consciousness. Then some malls decided to start the spree at 12:01 Friday morning. Now, it seems, the day before Thanksgiving has been turned into the day after. Maybe soon we can skip Thanksgiving entirely.

After all, the spirit of giving thanks is not very good for craving and buying. If you give thanks, you are focused on what is, not what is not, on what you have rather than what you do not have. That is why Thanksgiving may well be the most subversive national holiday. It centers on the present moment, on the ritual of families eating together and especially on the appreciation of life.

Sometimes I think ingratitude was the original sin, the primal fall from grace. Adam and Eve, remember, really had everything. They were already like gods—made in the image and likeness of God. They had everything in their garden, including the tree of life itself. And yet the great deceiver, that snake, seduced them into fretting over what they did not have: the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree of limits. Like gods, they were not God. And that fact ate away at them just as surely as they would eat the apple.

The Incarnation, then, became the great reversal of our Fall, a yes to our humanness, not only in our limits, but even in our fallen, broken state. Mary's "Let it be according to your word" was

the harbinger of her son's "Into your hands" on the cross. Perhaps this is why Jesus, in his lifetime, seems so grateful for gratitude. Ten lepers are healed; one returns to give thanks. What happened to the other nine? Did they go on to their next crisis, their next craving need? What happened to giving thanks?

If we ever have that question, the answer is this: Don't let go of Thanksgiving. Instead of lurching into the "30 shopping days left till Christmas," why not extend thanksgiving all the way through Christmas and even into the new year? Let Advent be not just a longing for God, but a savoring of all the ways God already enters into our lives.

This requires a strategy. One that I have come upon and have found to actually work is this: enter the days. Savor them. Appreciate them. Then God can enter our days with us. All we need is a practical discipline. Here it is.

When Thanksgiving has already passed and December has begun, we can prolong the great day of banquets. Instead of counting shopping days before Christmas or anticipating the days after it, when unwanted trinkets can still be returned, we should number our own days, take hold of them and anoint them.

A simple way to do this is to use an 8-inch by 11-inch lined piece of paper. Draw a vertical line down the middle. Each horizontal line counts for a day, and each of the two columns will hold objects of gratitude. Make one column a list of persons, now living or in histo-

ry, for whom you are grateful—one person or group of persons per line. Make the other column a list of things, places and events for which you give thanks. Each day write one entry in each column. By the end of one month you will have a litany of gifts, a catalogue of the ways God has come into your life. Then, with the mother of Jesus, you can ponder these things in your heart. This is an exercise in

appreciation, being present to what is. In this anointing of the present, we will find ourselves entering God's presence to our lives.

We will also enter our humanity most deeply. And at the heart of our gratitude, we will find a communion even with those men and women who, not know-

ing God, have embraced our common frailty with love and thanks.

I am reminded of a short interview with Oliver Sacks published a few years ago, in which he mused on the paradox that he was filled with gratitude even though he did not know whom to thank. Later, in a journal of his own convalescence, *A Leg to Stand On*, he would write: "Who cared if there was really any Being to pray to? What mattered was the sense of giving thanks and praise, the feeling of a humble and grateful heart."

Well, I think it makes all the difference that there is Someone to thank. I suspect that Sacks, unable to repress his quiet prayers to a You, might wonder as much. Thanksgiving is not just a day. It is a way to God, whether we know it or not.

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



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LESSONS ON SPIRIT AND MATTER

# On the Slope With Teilhard

BY DREW CHRISTIANSEN

‘**H**ymn to Matter’ may be one of the oddest-seeming prayers ever penned by a priest. Christians pray to God, to the saints, to the angels perhaps, and sometimes to deceased loved ones. But a hymn to matter? To atoms and rocks, gases and plasma, minerals and stardust? It sounds like idolatry, and indeed as a boy the author of the hymn had such fascination with rocks that he referred to them as “my idols.” He explained, “as far as my childish experience went, nothing in the world was harder, heavier, tougher, more durable than this marvelous substance....” Soon, as he saw iron rust, he learned the impermanence of the hardest substance he then knew, and a spiritual hunger was born within him.

The prayer’s author, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), a renowned paleontologist and geologist during his lifetime, became better known after his death as a philosopher of evolution and a spiritual writer. But the Jesuit priest never left his rocks behind. Just as discovery of their flaws had initiated him on a mystic quest for a permanent and universal object worthy of his devotion, so Teilhard believed that without matter—without the resistance, disappointments and challenges matter offered humans—our intellectual and spiritual development as a species would be arrested.

## Harsh Schoolmaster

Teilhard’s “Hymn to Matter” praises the stuff of the universe as the harsh schoolmaster of the human spirit. “Without you, without your onslaughts, without your uprootings of us,” he wrote, “we should remain all our lives inert, stagnant, puerile, ignorant both of ourselves and of God.”

“By constantly shattering our mental categories, you force us to go ever further and further in our pursuit of truth,” he wrote. “By overflowing and dissolving our narrow standards of measurement [you] reveal to us the dimensions of God.” Matter, as Teilhard would write, is “‘the matrix of spirit’: that in which life

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DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S. J., editor in chief of *America*, prepared earlier versions of this essay for the United Methodist-Catholic Dialogue on Creation, Eucharist and Ecology (2009) and the Star Island Conference of the Institute on Religion in an age of Science(2010).

emerges and is supported, not the active principle from which it takes its rise.”

Drawing on his personal, intellectual and spiritual itinerary as a natural scientist and priest, Teilhard regarded the recalcitrance of matter and the need for human effort to uncover its secrets as the starting point for spiritual growth. Whereas other Jesuit giants of the 20th century, like Pierre Rousselot, Joseph Maréchal and Karl Rahner, built their philosophical theologies on the mind’s inherent dynamism toward God, Teilhard found the hard effort of learning to be a privileged opening to the divine. The attention the scientist pays to the problem he or she studies is practice for the attention the mystic pays to God. In this discovery, Pierre Teilhard was like another French philosopher, Simone Weil, whose essay “On the Right Use of School Studies” argued that whether it was translating Homer or solving a problem in Euclidean geometry, study fostered the attention essential to prayer. The poised, energetic openness of the questioner possesses a kinship with the reverent, alert readiness of a person before God.

### The Asceticism of Attention

In “Hymn to Matter,” Teilhard offered this blessing:

You who batter us and then dress our wounds, you who resist us and yield to us, you who wreck and build, you who shackle and liberate: it is you, matter, that I bless.

Unlike some who believe that once they enter the world of thought they can leave the physical world behind, Teilhard proposed that the human spirit matures in its effort to understand (master and respect) the natural world. That understanding of the physical world, however, comes through a discipline the scientist must endure. Whether nature or human nature is the subject, applying one’s mind to a problem will involve hard effort (including, for a field scientist like Teilhard, physical effort), disappointment and disillusionment. Only then will one find joy in discovery and pleasure in the cumulative growth of understanding.

Insofar as the discipline of science helps us better appreciate God’s creation, Teilhard proposed, it is a kind of asceticism, a spiritual practice with potential to deepen the spiritual life. Traditional spirituality stressed control of the body through simplicity, fasting, chastity and physical discipline. For his part, Teilhard pointed out the discipline inherent in the active life and especially in the application of the mind to learning, a discipline he practiced in fieldwork as well as in museum and laboratory research: identifying and analyzing distinctive facts, classifying and relating findings, posing hypotheses and verifying or disproving them. As we Christians practice the mechanics of learning, our spirits can grow as well. As the élan of the learning mind

awakens its particular excitement in the learner, the process of inquiry holds the potential to whet our appetite for the infinite mystery of existence.

One problem that afflicts us today, as it did in Teilhard’s time, is that there is often too little intellectual discipline on the part of those regarded as authorities in the spiritual life. They mistake the whole of faith with its most elementary expressions and regard question-and-answer catechizing as the equal of serious theology. No doubt, as Alfred North Whitehead wrote, religion takes place “at all temperatures” along a scale of human potentialities. Nonetheless, a richer intellectual life can often make for a richer spiritual experience and a profounder theology. Teilhard teaches us not only that the findings of science can add to our religious wonderment, but also that the scientific way of knowing can strengthen the mind’s ascent to God.

### An Eye for Rocks—and for God

As a field scientist, Teilhard was reputed to have an exceptional eye for rocks, quickly noting features that escaped the observation of his colleagues and understanding their implications. It is not surprising, then, that whereas the ancient masters of prayer taught about freeing the mind of preoccupation the better to open it to the divine, Teilhard believed that the attention of science to the smallest detail of the physical world made the mind even more *capax dei*, “radically open to God.” The secret to the spiritual life, as to science, he believed, lies in unremitting attention to details. As we come to appreciate the richness and complexity of the universe, so does our perception grow of the glory of God.

Of course, other spiritual masters also emphasized paying attention to details. St. Thérèse of Lisieux’s “little way,” for example, is about doing with devotion the small things of daily life. Teilhard’s way differs from that of Thérèse or that of the desert fathers, however, in two ways. First, it is about the active life, in which humans exercise their creativity and inventiveness. The creativity of the artist, the problem-solving of the scientist, the inventiveness of the computer engineer, the diagnosis of the physician—all give opportunity to grow in holiness as much as attention to the routines of the monastery or the sacristy.

Second, the attention to details relates especially to intellectual activity and pre-eminently scientific research. Scholarship about the Bible and the classics had held a role in Benedictine spirituality and later in Christian humanism, but science involves active investigation and more than that, revision of earlier ideas. As the mind meets the resistance of the material universe—rocks and atoms, genes and galaxies—“our mental categories” dissolve and “our narrow standards of measurement” are shattered. Research in the natural world weans us from preconceptions to which we would otherwise cling; and as we discover the endless wonders of

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the universe, the mind opens up to the unimagined dimensions of God.

Asceticism comes in applying ourselves to the learning, letting go of prejudices and obsolete theories and acquiring new skills. At first the development of the students' minds involves rote learning, but the hope is that the atomic table and DNA become so natural that students can apply them in school exercises, design their own experiments, observe anomalies and finally verify their findings through replication. All stages—rote learning, application, experimentation, examining anomalies, verification—entail discipline. For the self-aware scientist or student, the effort it takes to prove a simple fact offers a hint of the dedication that growth in the spirit also requires. Likewise, for the believer and spiritual searcher, the practice of science should suggest the gradual growth of skills, including intellectual ones, that are entailed in the human cooperation with divine grace.

## Moving Upward

In time Teilhard came to see matter in broad terms, not just as the object of physical science, but as everything in life that by giving us resistance helps us to move ahead, whether in knowledge, material progress or spiritual development. In

*The Divine Milieu* he offered an illuminating analogy that is the key to the spiritual appreciation of matter. "It is the slope on which we can go up just as we can go down," he wrote, "the medium that can uphold or give way, the wind that can overthrow and lift up." Matter's proper role is to be the road of sanctification. "Created things are not exactly obstacles but rather footholds, intermediaries to be made use of, nourishment to be taken, sap to be purified and elements to be associated with us and borne along with us" on our journey into light.

Matter is not a static thing. It is the book just read, the hypothesis confirmed or falsified. It is landlines, fax machines, modems and the Apple computer. It is Gandhi's experiments with truth and the Tea Party movement. It is the past that has brought us forward and the past that has held us back. Matter is the toehold of the spirit in history. That toehold defines two zones:

the zone already left behind or arrived at, to which we should not return, or at which we should not pause, lest we fall back—this is the zone of matter *in the material and carnal sense*; and the zone offered to our renewed efforts toward progress, search, conquest and 'divinization,' *the zone of matter taken in the spiritual sense*; and the frontier between the two is essentially relative and shifting.

We must lean on the things of this world to move us forward or when they give way, we will tumble back. The spiritual appreciation of matter involves both counting on its resistance to hold us as we press ahead and expecting the exertion demanded of us to move upward. Both forces are necessary.

Like mountaineering, the spiritual life requires steady movement upward, Teilhard reflected. Unless the rock climber poised on her toehold moves forward, she will slip and fall back. "That which is good, sanctifying and spiritual for my brother below or beside me on the mountainside, can be misleading or bad for me," Teilhard advises. "What I rightly allowed myself yesterday, I must perhaps deny myself today."

How matter functions depends on the route of each person's spiritual progress. What I make of the questions I face in my work, what I do with the events in my life, the opportunities I make of crises I encounter, all will determine how deeply I will participate (and the degree to which others share) in the divinization our world is undergoing in Christ. Like mountaineering, advance in the spiritual life depends on making upward progress, discovering, as Teilhard did, as we go that the matter of our life is "the sap of our souls, the hand of God, the flesh of Christ." **A**

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A conversation with Drew Christiansen, S.J.  
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# Teaching or Commanding?

When bishops instruct the faithful

BY NICHOLAS LASH

**W**hen the Second Vatican Council ended, several of the bishops who took part told me that the most important lesson they had learned through the conciliar process had been a renewed recognition that the church exists to be, for all its members, a lifelong school of holiness and wisdom, a lifelong school of friendship (a better rendering of *caritas* than “charity” would be). It follows that the most fundamental truth about the structure of Christian teaching cannot lie in distinctions between teachers and pupils—although such distinctions are not unimportant—but in the recognition that all Christians are called to lifelong learning in the Spirit, and all of us are called to embody, communicate and protect what we have learned. Much of what is said about the office of “teachership” or magisterium seems dangerously forgetful of this fact.

## Aspects of Instruction

The concept of instruction is ambiguous. If I am “instructing” someone, I may be teaching or I may be issuing a command. Someone who is “under instruction” is being educated, but “I instructed him to stop” reports a command. “Instructions for use,” however, provide information and hence would seem to be educational. There may be cases in which it is not easy to decide the sense. It is, however, important not to confuse the two senses and even more important not to subordinate instruction as education to instruction as command.

I have long maintained that the heart of

the crisis of contemporary Catholicism lies in just such subordination of education to governance, the effect of which has too often been to substitute for teaching proclamation construed as command. As Yves Congar said, it is impossible to make the function of teaching an integral element of jurisdiction because it is one thing to accept a teaching, quite another to obey an order: “*Autre chose est agréer une doctrine, autre chose obéir à un ordre.*”

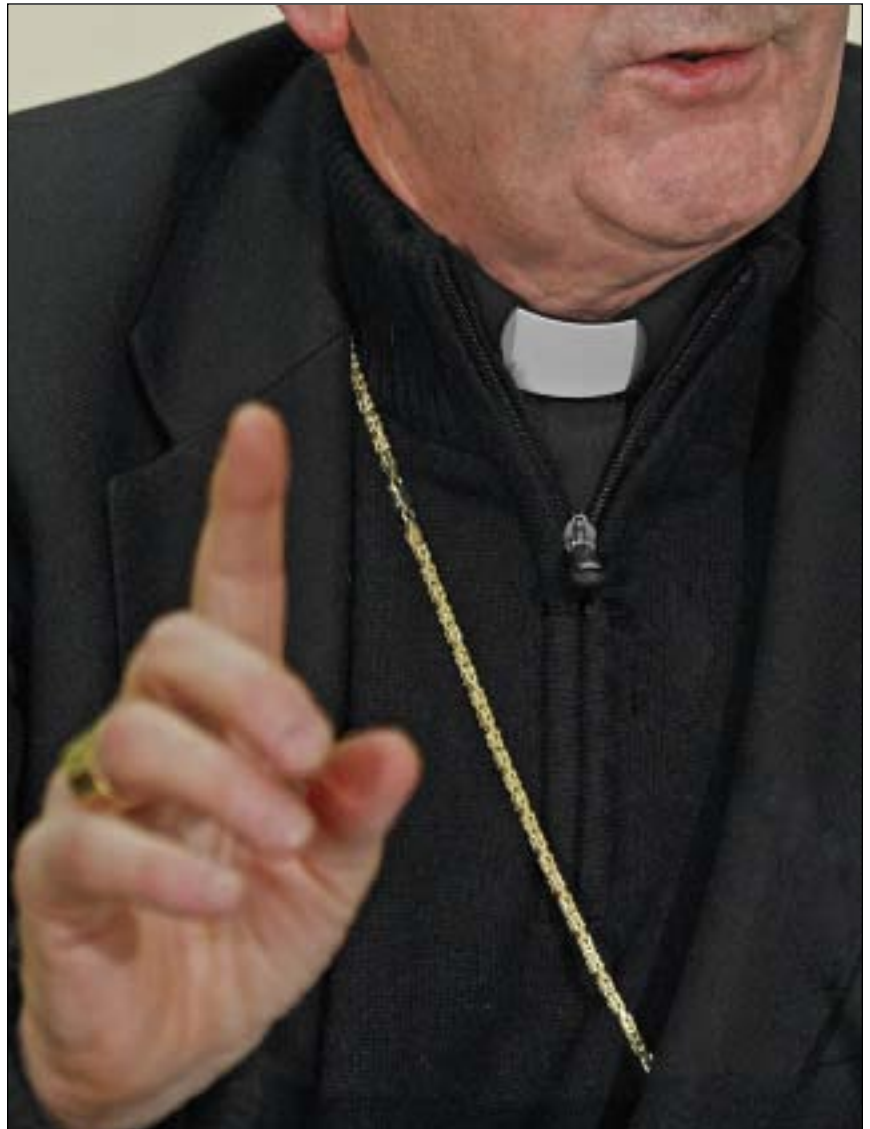


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**NICHOLAS LASH** was for 20 years the Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University. This article is adapted from his talk honoring the theological achievement of Michael Buckley, S.J., delivered at Boston College in 2009.

## Dissent and Disagreement

I have said that Catholic Christianity is a lifelong school of friendship, holiness and wisdom. Yet the tasks of those exercising the pastoral teaching office seem not, in fact, primarily to be teaching, at least as this activity is understood in most schools.

In 1975 a plenary session of the International Theological Commission issued a series of theses on the relationship between the magisterium and theology. In 1966 Paul VI had addressed an international congress on “The Theology of Vatican II” on the same topic, and the commission introduced its theses with two brief quotations from that address. The commission defined ecclesiastical magisterium as “the office of teaching which, by Christ’s institution, is proper to the college of bishops or to individual bishops joined in hierarchical communion with the Supreme Pontiff.”

What terminology might be appropriate to describe what someone is doing when, for whatever reason, he or she seeks to take issue with some particular instance of magisterial teaching? “Disagreeing” is the term that comes to mind. But because teaching is, in current ecclesiastical usage, usually construed as governance, as command, such taking issue is described in the recent literature not as disagreement but as “dissent.”

Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., reminded readers of his 1983 book *Magisterium* that Pius XII, in “*Humani Generis*,” announced that “when a pope, in an encyclical, expresses his judgment on an issue that was previously controverted, this can no longer be seen as a question for free discussion by theologians”; Father Sullivan goes on to point out, however, that “there is no such statement in any of the documents that were approved by the Council.” The silence of the Second Vatican Council notwithstanding, John Paul II, addressing the American bishops in Los Angeles in 1987, said without qualification: “It is sometimes said that dissent from the magisterium is totally compatible with being a ‘good Catholic’ and poses no obstacle to the reception of the sacraments. This is a grave error that challenges the teaching office of the bishops in the United States and elsewhere.”

If Father Sullivan’s study seemed content to work with the terminology of “dissent,” Ladislav Orsy, S.J., is more troubled by the notion. “Dissent has become,” says Father Orsy, “one of the dominant themes in Catholic theology in the United States,” but “is mentioned less in European writings.” Dissent, he says, “is an imperfect term under several aspects”: It is purely negative; it implies “deep-lying internal antagonism”; it is historically loaded; and so on. “It follows

that if we abandoned the word ‘dissent’ altogether, we would lose little and gain much.” I agree. Yet, “All these arguments notwithstanding,” Father Orsy concludes, “it appears that for the time being at least” we must “live with an unsuitable word.” For goodness’ sake, why?

Here is a very simple model: The teacher looks for understanding, the commander for obedience. Where teaching in most ordinary senses of the term is concerned, if a pupil’s response to a piece of teaching is yes, the student is saying something like “I see” or “I understand.” If the response is no, the pupil is saying “I don’t see” or “I don’t understand.” When subordinates say yes to a command, they obey; when they say no, they disobey. Dissent is disobedience. The entire discussion about the circumstances in

## What we call ‘official teaching’ in the church is, for the most part, not teaching but governance.

which it may be permissible or appropriate to dissent from magisterial utterances makes clear that what is at issue is when and in what circumstances it may be virtuous, and not sinful, to disobey. There could, in my opinion, be no clearer evidence that what we call “official teaching” in the church is, for the most part, not teaching but governance.

I am not in the least denying that governance, the issuing of instructions and commands, has its place in the life of the church, as of any other society. That is not what is at issue. The point at issue is that commands direct; they do not educate. It is one thing to accept a doctrine, quite another to obey an order.

## Manuals and Rule Books

Commenting on Pope John Paul II’s encyclical “The Splendor of Truth” (1993), Herbert McCabe, O.P., contrasted manuals and rule books. A manual helps one to acquire some skill: as a football player or a piano-tuner or, if we extend the range of skills to those habits we call the virtues, as a just or generous person. A manual is an instrument of education. In addition to manuals there are rule books, which tell you what, in some particular context, you are and are not allowed to do. Father McCabe writes: “The rule book does not tell you anything about acquiring skills in football; it simply tells you the rules and the kinds of action that would break them.” The rule book is an instrument of governance. What worried Father McCabe about “The Splendor of Truth” was that it is, he said, “in great part, an attack on those who want to read the rule book as a manual by those who want to read the manual as though it were a rule book.”

Nowhere in “The Splendor of Truth” does John Paul II discuss disagreement in the church or the duty of episcopal authority to monitor and guide it. Indeed, near the end of

the encyclical, in a passage denouncing “dissent” and “opposition to the teaching of the Church’s pastors,” the pope comes close to claiming that there is simply no place for disagreement on moral questions in the church: “While exchanges and conflicts of opinion may constitute normal expressions of public life in a representative democracy, moral teaching certainly cannot depend simply upon respect for such a process.” It “cannot depend *simply*” upon “exchanges and conflicts of opinion”—fair enough. But might Catholics not have expected him to say something about the part such “exchanges” should play?

### ‘Teachership’

“It is for ecclesiology,” said Robert Murray, S.J., an English Jesuit, “that [the term] *magisterium* till about the mid-nineteenth century referred to the *activity* of authorized teaching in the Church. The use with a capital ‘M’ to denote episcopal and especially papal *authority* was developed mainly in the anti-Modernist documents.”

The 19th-century shift from the name of a function, that of teaching, to the name of a group of officers or “functionaries” was for two reasons most unfortunate. First, it was unfortunate because it created the impression that in the church only bishops bear responsibility for witnessing to the Gospel. (We should never forget that most bishops were first catechized by their mothers.) Second, it was unfortu-

nate because bishops seldom do much teaching in the ordinary sense, being preoccupied with the cares of middle management. As a result, the contraction of the range of reference of *magisterium* to the episcopate alone served only to deepen the subordination of education to governance that I have deplored.

There are, of course, exceptions to the claim that most bishops seldom do much teaching in the ordinary sense. Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, when he was archbishop of Milan, could fill his cathedral with people who came to hear him interpret the Scriptures. And an encyclical like Pope Benedict XVI’s “*Caritas in Veritate*” (2009) is surely a quite straightforward exercise in teaching.

I have referred to the contraction of the range of “official teachers” to the episcopate. In fact, during the 20th century the *magisterium* contracted even further. John Paul II’s encyclical “*Veritatis Splendor*” is addressed “to all the bishops of the Catholic Church.” Near the end of it, the pope says: “This is the first time, in fact, that the Magisterium of the Church has set forth in detail the fundamental elements of this teaching,” thereby contracting the range of reference still further—to himself.

According to the church historian Eamon Duffy, John Paul II, like Pius XII before him, “saw the pope as first and foremost a teacher, an oracle.” However accurate the image of particular popes as “oracles” may be as a description, it



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remains the case that any pope who behaves within the church as an oracle misunderstands his office. The image of the oracle is of one who brings fresh messages from God. This no pope can do, for the church he serves as its chief bishop has *already* heard the Word and lives by that faith, which is its God-given response. It is the duty of those who hold teaching office in the church to articulate, to express, to clarify the faith by which we live.

## Reception

Hence the importance of the doctrine of “reception.” In one of St. Augustine’s sermons (No. 272) he says: “When I hold up the host before communion, I say ‘Corpus Christi,’ and you reply ‘Amen,’ which means: ‘Yes, we are.’” The response of the faithful to sound teaching in the church is to say, “Yes, that’s it.” Where this response is lacking, the teaching is called into question.

*Securus judicat orbis terrarum* (“The judgment of the whole world is secure”). In the months leading up to the first Vatican Council, Cardinal John Henry Newman insisted that he “put the validity of the Council upon its reception by the *orbis terrarum*” (whole world). And when, after the council, he hesitated before accepting the definition of papal infallibility, Lord Acton remarked, “He was waiting for the echo.”

## ON THE WEB

From 1992, Nicholas Lash reports on the state of theology in Europe. [americamagazine.org/pages](http://americamagazine.org/pages)

“Human community,” says Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., “is sustained by conversation.” That he regards this axiom as an ecclesiological and not merely an anthropological principle is clear from his later remark that “sharing our faith is always more than stating our convictions: it is finding our place in that conversation which has continued ever since Jesus began to talk with anyone whom he met in Galilee, and which is the life of the Church.” Disagreement is an unavoidable feature of serious conversation about the things that matter most.

David Woodard, a brilliantly effective but somewhat eccentric parish priest with whom I had the privilege of working in the early 1960s, came back one day

after visiting a neighboring parish and exclaimed: “Those people are completely lacking in Christian charity; they can’t even disagree with one another!”

*In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas* (“Unity in essentials, liberty in open questions, in all things charity”). Pope John XXIII quoted this 16th-century motto in his first encyclical. It seems to me that where the relationships between governance and education and between the episcopate and teachers of theology are concerned, there are few more important tasks for the bishops to undertake than to act as moderators of disagreement, educators in Christian conversation. A

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## O HOLY NIGHT 2

*More suggestions from readers for keeping Christmas sacred*

### The Walnut Doors

The happiest memory of my childhood is of Christmas Eve, as I stood with my cousins and knocked on the double walnut doors that led to the living room at the house of my Grandma and Grand Pap. Several weeks before Christmas these huge doors had been closed and locked. No one was allowed in the Christmas room except my grandparents. Grand Pap would drag in a tree from the market. Grandma would assemble the family's magnificent German nativity set. Presents galore were carefully laid around the huge tree, which seemed to stretch to the top of their 11-foot-high ceiling.

On Christmas Eve the whole family would gather and wait outside the walnut doors. We would sing carols and dunk Grandma's anise cookies in her eggnog, freshly made and specially spiced with nutmeg. As each family of aunts, uncles and cousins arrived, we would loudly sing in greeting, "We Wish You a Merry Christmas."

Grand Pap would slip unnoticed into the Christmas room and light the tree. We children would knock on the doors, "Is it time yet, Papap?" "No, not yet! Santa's still working," he would say playfully. Time and again, we would knock and call, "Is it time yet, Papap?" We lined up before the doors from youngest to oldest waiting for the moment when the Christmas room would be revealed. But not until every family member was present and our excitement had built to bursting did those walnut doors swing open. Then, before the first gift was opened, all the grandchildren knelt in front of the nativity to sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus.

Grand Pap and Grandma are long home with Jesus now. Their house with the walnut doors has been demolished, but the customs live on. We still sing "We Wish You a Merry Christmas" as each of my eight sisters and brothers and their children arrive at the house for Christmas. We still line up, youngest to oldest, to march into the Christmas room. And we still sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus. It wouldn't be Christmas unless we did.

(REV.) LARRY W. DORSCH  
*Weirton, W.Va.*

### City Celebration

The Christmas vigil Mass in our suburban parish was always exciting, with the pews packed and the choir at the top of its game. But some years ago, after a priest friend was made pastor of an old inner-city parish on Chicago's North Side, my wife and I packed our seven kids into the van to celebrate Christmas at his parish. The exodus of Catholics

into the suburbs over the years had left his congregation much smaller and the church building rather neglected. While we would be strangers at the city parish, we would also be guaranteed an open pew and could sit together as a family. So off we went in our 12-passenger Dodge to find St. Gregory the Great, its outside well lit with decorations. Inside we found a pew and a congregation with a sprinkling of young, vibrant Catholics of diverse backgrounds who welcomed us warmly to their parish.

Thus our Christmas migration to different parishes in urban Chicago. There's always room in the pews at these grand places, so we've often invited relatives to join us. Each year we honor the Incarnation by visiting a parish that is not our own. Enveloped in familiar prayers and a tradition that makes us feel at home, we are surrounded by strangers who remind us that we are not quite there yet. We always return home richer for the experience.

TED ROSEAN  
*Wilmette, Ill.*

### Making Links

This year our parish has adopted the theme "Welcoming the Stranger," in an attempt to show the connections between Mary and Joseph as refugees and those who are immigrants and refugees around the world today and our own spiritual journeys. As Advent begins we feature an evening of reflection for adults on the experience of immigrants. Later we offer schoolchildren a "Journey to Bethlehem" breakfast and a walk past tableaus by slightly older children depicting Nativity scenes. In preparation for Christmas we set a table in the church with one place-setting missing to remind us that we ourselves must provide the welcome and place-setting for the stranger in our midst.

(REV.) SAMUEL ESPOSITO  
*McMurray, Pa.*

### Vigil Dinner

During my first year in medical school, I called my family and asked them if they'd like to have dinner at a nearby restaurant before attending the Christmas Vigil Mass. The dinner was so relaxed, so laugh-filled and such a good chance to rediscover one another that we have repeated it each year for the past 20 years.

JIM HEDERMAN, S.J.  
*Bronx, N.Y.*

*For more O Holy Night stories and suggestions by America readers, visit [www.americamagazine.org/holynight](http://www.americamagazine.org/holynight).*

ART | JUDITH DUPRÉ

## HIGHLY FAVORED ONE

### *New Images of Mary*

In her exquisite new book *Full of Grace: Encountering Mary in Faith, Art and Life*, Judith Dupré meditates on a variety of images of Mary throughout history. The author considers, with the help of artists' renderings of Mary, how the story of the simple young woman of Nazareth has influenced the Christian imagination.

Here we present from her new book a meditation on the Virgin's meeting with the angel Gabriel in the Gospel of Luke and Dupré's commentary on two contemporary portraits of Mary: one by Tanja Butler and one by John Nava.

—The Editors

Consider the space between Gabriel's appearance and Mary's eventual yes. We do not know if a moment, an hour or a day elapsed. More abstractly, we wonder what shape such an opening between an ethereal and a human being took. There is no way to describe the interaction between the two, but it was elastic and porous enough to capture the imaginations of royals, ordinaries and artists for 2,000 years. Being a practical yet remarkable girl, Mary had the composure to ask the angel, "How can this be?" A natural-enough question for a virgin. But those four words do not convey what must have been an extraordinary shock. The first shock was simply the appearance of Gabriel—an otherworldly angel with great beating wings appearing in an ordinary field on an ordinary day. As Mary came from devout Jewish stock, she would have heard stories upon



**"Annunciation," 2006, by Tanja Butler**

This intimate diptych is constructed of two five-inch-square panels; the bottom panel provides the Annunciation's historical narrative while the upper panel describes eternity, symbolized by the gold background. In the lower panel, the angel

Gabriel, in street clothing ruffled by a breeze, and looking like a friendly salesman, announces God's offer of redemption to humanity through Mary. She is poised just beyond the portal of the door of salvation, which had been closed since the fall of humanity, referred to in the upper panel by the withered tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Now a ladder stretches between heaven and earth. Apple blossoms, spring crocuses and bursting pomegranates herald new life. Byzantine and medieval theologians likened the Incarnation to the image of the burning bush confronted by Moses: Like that miraculous bush, Mary contained God in her physical body but was not consumed by the divine flame. The contemporary Noguchi paper lamp, nearly hidden behind Mary, also evokes light and fragility.

Tanja Butler's paintings are visual meditations on the intimacy of God's love. With exuberance and disarming candor, her works combine

elements of Latino and Russian folk art with the prismatic geometries explored in the Cubist and Suprematist movements. Her ecumenical approach weaves together the diverse artistic traditions of Western, Byzantine and Islamic art.

stories about the miraculous appearances of angels. But that was in the distant mythic past, not now, not in Nazareth. Angels appeared to her mighty forefathers—Moses, Daniel, Elijah, not to impoverished young girls, certainly not to her.

How must she have felt when the angel appeared? We can imagine the sudden voiceless chill that claimed her body, accompanied by a surface tingling, a sensation that was almost heat, as the urge to flee raced through her. The aftershocks were scored to Gabriel's words, sounds that slowly gained volume as she returned to the present moment: You, a virgin, living in the backwaters of Jerusalem, will become the Mother of God. Her body, before the penetration of these words: mindless, shuddering, vulnerable, pliant. Then, in a few minutes, after checking the earth with her toe, touching a tree, a rock, something to confirm that her world was still there, her thoughts kicked in—bumping, fractious thoughts—shouldering up to one other, shoving other thoughts aside, all of them racing toward understanding what this heavenly being was saying. She was no longer spellbound. The words *shame*, *risk*, *reproach* and *scandal* were forming in her head. In time, this moment would raise Mary from a handmaiden's lowliness and would cause all ages to call her blessed, but for now, it was a blind leap into the unknown.

In the Book of Genesis, God asks Adam and Eve, "Where are you?" It's a strange question because God, who created those first beings and every other living thing, has no need to make such an inquiry. The couple, beguiled by the serpent, has found fig leaves to cover their nakedness and hide from their Creator's question. "Where are you?" Life's pilgrimage is a daily answering of that question, for ourselves and for God. Discovering and naming where you are—the geographic, emotional and spiritual place that you occupy, right here, right now, hon-

estly and nakedly—stirs up life's force, tenderizes the heart and clarifies and concentrates thoughts. Answered candidly, it can coax the spirit out of hiding. There is much that will never be known about Mary, yet we know the most important thing about her:

When confronted by God, she answered in the affirmative, allowing herself to become impregnated with spirit. Although she did not know where she was about to go, in that moment, full of grace, she said yes to the journey.



PHOTO BY ARTIST

**"Study for a Virgin," 2001, by John Nava**

Artists through the centuries have tried to imagine how Mary received the news of her astonishing pregnancy. Rather than portraying apprehension at the angel's arrival, John Nava paints her as a shy teenager with downcast eyes, yet aware of the implications of her consent. Nava wanted to paint a non-European Madonna in the

New World tradition of the soulful, dark-skinned Virgin of Guadalupe. His model was a 16-year-old girl of mixed Irish and Chinese heritage. By portraying Mary with features that could be seen in any number of places across the globe, the portrait was intended to engage the spiritual imagination of a wide swath of viewers.

**JUDITH DUPRÉ**, a student at Yale Divinity School, is the author of *Full of Grace (Random House)* and also wrote *Churches and Monuments*.

## START THEM YOUNG



Christmas is the high holiday of the child year. It was especially so for me growing up in Bethlehem, Pa., which was founded on Christmas Eve 1740. Christmas loomed large in the Christmas City. The giant star of Bethlehem shining on South Mountain even eclipsed the smokestacks of the Bethlehem Steel plants. But a high point for our family was always the exquisite music at our parish church, Notre Dame of Bethlehem, and the violin and trumpet of our friends, the Bosch family. The Bosches were immigrants from Germany. Every Christmas Mrs. Bosch played “Silent Night” on her

violin and sang the carol in German. I grew up hearing about the Christmas truce, how soldiers during World War I disobeyed orders and refused to fight and sang “Silent Night/Stille Nacht” across the trenches. I was just a little child, but the story stayed with me of these young soldiers, inspired by the Prince of Peace, reaching out across their fears in the dark of night to make peace in the middle of a war zone. It pierced my heart.

Yet in all my school work to follow, I rarely read a word about the Christmas truce. So I was delighted to read the new children’s book *Truce* (for ages 9 to 12), by the Newberry

Honor medalist Jim Murphy. Integrating careful archival research, eyewitness accounts, photos and maps, Murphy offers a clear, concise and moving account of both World War I and the Christmas truce of 1914. Makeshift chapels were hastily assembled for religious services. Soldiers met on the battlefield, buried their dead, exchanged handshakes and gifts, beer and plum pudding. The truce was informally organized by the soldiers themselves, against the orders of their commanding officers. Winston Churchill had an intuition it could happen. A month before the truce, he asked, “What would happen if the armies suddenly and simultaneously went on strike?” Corporal Adolf Hitler refused to take part. For children who may believe war is inevitable, whose entire lives have been lived in wartime during the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and the long war on terror, *Truce* provides a useful reminder that peace is possible, that soldiers long for peace, and that we all have opportunities and responsibilities to, as one German soldier wrote, “keep the command ‘Peace on Earth.’”

Like *Truce*, all the books in this roundup offer an antimaterialist antidote to the consumer rush of the Christmas season. To readers of my children’s books, these themes will come as no surprise. Feeding the spirits and minds of the young (and young at heart) with inspiring and original ideas, these books all follow the beat of a different drummer boy or girl.

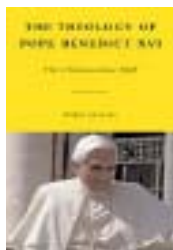
Claudette Colvin was only 15 years old when she stood up against racism. She was arrested in Montgomery, Ala., for refusing to give up her seat to a white passenger a year before Rosa Parks did the same. Rosa Parks was lauded by history and supported by the civil rights community; Claudette Colvin was largely left to fend for herself. **Claudette Colvin** (for grades 6 and up) was the lead witness in the court case that ended segregated bus-



ing. But she was darker skinned, of a lower economic class than the leaders of the civil rights movement and, later, an unwed teen mother who refused to straighten her hair in the style of the times. She was shunned by both the black and the white communities. Philip Hoose's moving account weaves interviews, photos and other primary documents to rescue the history and recount the courage of this remarkable teen.

**Marching for Freedom** by Elizabeth Partridge (ages 9 to 12) is another excellent story of children and teens in the civil rights movement. "Don't worry about your children. Don't hold them back if they want to go to jail! Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. told parents. "They are carving a tunnel of hope through the great mountain of despair." Filling the jails with children was a deliberate part of the strategic plan. Children were not the breadwinners, so they did not have to worry about losing their jobs. And jailing children was less socially acceptable, so it helped in the shaming and naming tactics of the campaign. The book's focus on the Selma march is important, but perhaps too narrow. It omits "The Children's Campaign" in Birmingham, familiar because of the iconic photos of children fire-hosed and beaten by the Birmingham police. Still, Partridge provides an important and empowering history of the Selma campaign.

The Caldecott Honor-winning illustrator Rachel Isadora quite literally brings us different drummer boys and girls, as she sets **The 12 Days of Christmas** carol in Africa (ages 4 to 8). Isadora's 12 drummers drumming play drums from Nigeria and Ghana in bright cut-paper collages that come alive against white space. The latest in her series of children's classics recast in Africa (*The Night Before Christmas*, *The Ugly Duckling* and others), these books reimagine familiar tales with fresh eyes and serve as lush visual



## The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI The Christocentric Shift

Emery de Gaál  
386 pp. / \$95.00 cl.

Many refer to Pope Benedict XVI as "the Mozart of Theology." This study attempts to shed light on the unifying melody of the policies and positions of a pontificate charged with spiritual and theological depth. Especially in the 1970s an anthropocentric shift had occurred. Emery de Gaál argues that, amid a general lack of original, secular ideas stirring public opinion, Benedict XVI inaugurates an epochal Christocentric shift; by rekindling the Patristic genius, he provides Christianity with both intellectual legitimacy and the scholarship needed to propel it into the twenty first century.

**"Father Emery de Gaal has beautifully and exhaustively clarified the fundamental interpretive key to the Ratzinger texts and to the life of Pope Benedict XVI."**

—Francis Cardinal George, OMI, Archbishop of Chicago

**"de Gaál gives us the most comprehensive study of the pope's theology now available: the revolution that abandoned neoscholasticism and shifted its focus to Christology. That story is indeed a dramatic one, and here it is dramatically and comprehensively told. This book is a 'must purchase' for every theological library – and for all admirers of that perhaps greatest of great theologians, Joseph Ratzinger."**

—Fr Edward T. Oakes, S. J., Chester & Margaret Paluch Professor of Theology, University of St. Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary

**"It is the deepest analysis of the topic currently available."**

—Tracey Rowland, Professor and Dean, John Paul II Institute for Marriage and Family, Melbourne, Australia

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reminders of our common humanity across richly varied cultures.

**Too Many Toys** is a boisterous picture book by David Shannon (ages 4 to 8) with intriguing, antimaterialist observations. In scenes that will resonate with many families, Spencer and his mother engage in protracted and hilarious negotiations over which of Spencer's too many toys will be given away. Spencer uses pouty eyes, nostalgia, lawyer tactics and a willingness to turn in Dad's toys to try to protect his oversized collection, but in the end realizes that while many of the toys can go, the box must stay. In **It's Christmas, David**, Shannon's rascal David returns for easily recognizable holiday mischief: sneaking Christmas cookies, peeking at gifts, breaking ornaments. David fears his behavior may bring him nothing but coal. But repeating the formula familiar to readers of the "No, David" series, David instead finds forgiveness and unconditional love. Shannon's engaging, child-

like artwork and one-liners create laugh-out-loud favorites.

What do you get when you cross "Old McDonald Had a Farm" with a New York arbitration lawyer? Why *Click, Clack, Moo and More*, of course, a newly released compilation of three delightfully funny and subversive barnyard adventures by Doreen Cronin and Betsy Lewin (ages 4 to 8). These stories turn Mother Goose animal stereotypes on their head, as the animals creatively stand up to repressive authority, Farmer Brown. Children love the ways the "little guys" prevail, while adults appreciate the fun and subtle civic and human rights subtexts. In the title book, **Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type**, the animals want better working conditions, while Farmer Brown believes the animals should do as they are told. With the aid of a typewriter to convey their concerns and Duck as a neutral party to intercede, the animals go on strike—no milk, no eggs. Farmer Brown and

young readers learn the power of organizing, non-violent resistance, compromise and speaking out, all while enjoying Betsy Lewin's humorous, Caldecott Honor-winning illustrations, in pen with watercolor washes. In **Giggle, Giggle, Quack**, the second book in the compilation, Farmer Brown leaves them to go on a tropical vacation, until Duck leads the animals cleverly to get some at-home vacation perks of their own through writing, social organizing and knowing the importance of who sets the rules. In **Dooby, Dooby, Moo**, every living creature has an irrepressible creativity. Working together, they get their chances to shine at the County Fair's version of "America's Got Talent." *Click, Clack, Moo and More* is a great value, as three picture books are combined here for essentially the price of one. Great primers on democracy, these books are smart and funny read-alouds, also suitable for beginning readers, that along the way invite chil-

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dren to think about power relations, the value of all living creatures and the importance of speaking out for the underdogs and underducks.

Antoinette Portis's delightful **Not a Box and Not a Stick** picture books celebrate the power of children's imaginations, turning everyday objects into flights of fancy. With plain covers, line illustrations and minimalist text suitable for read-alouds and beginning readers (babies to kindergarten), simplicity reigns, and children are encouraged to think and play outside the box.

The Newberry medalist Richard Peck invites us to take a new look at cantankerous Grandma Dowdel in the beautifully written **A Season of Gifts** (grades 5 and up, now in paperback). In a small Illinois town in the 1950s, Grandma Dowdel encourages her reputation as the town's curmudgeon. Bob, son of the new minister, meets Grandma Dowdel when he is strung up naked in her outhouse by the town bullies. Over time the new neighbors

come to appreciate Grandma Dowdel's many gifts to the community, always deliberately disguised by her gruff appearance. When Bob comments that Mrs. Dowdel doesn't have any presents under her Christmas tree, so she must not give gifts, his father challenges Bob to reconsider the generous gifts of herself she gives. "You don't mean anything wrapped up with a ribbon, right?" answers Bob. "No," his father replies, "nothing that small." Folk wisdom and a keen sense of humor will please readers young and old.

Coleen Paratore offers an empowering social justice twist for middle grade and high school readers in **The Wedding Planner's Daughter** series. After moving to beautiful Cape Cod, Willa Haversham rises above her concerns for her single mom and her outsider position as the perennial "new kid" through the transformative power

of service. Bucking the popular kids at school, Willa posts inspirational quotes from literature on the community message board and organizes her classmates to save a local library, help needy children and address homelessness. Willa's isolation and social outsider status will resonate with pre-teens and teens. But Willa draws on community, faith and books to mend the holes in her family. Parents and teachers will appreciate "Willa's Picks," accessible book reviews in each book.

Greg Mortenson offers two adaptations of his adult blockbuster, *Three Cups of Tea*, for younger readers: **Listen to the Wind**, a picture book for preschool to grade 3, and a young readers' edition of **Three Cups of Tea** (grades 4 to 8). Mortenson's real-life adventure began when he stumbled into a poor village in remote Pakistan after failing to scale K2. The people of

### ON THE WEB

Harry Forbes reviews "The King's Speech." [americamagazine.org/culture](http://americamagazine.org/culture)

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Korphe opened their homes and hearts to Greg, nursing him back to health. Moved by their kindness, Mortenson vowed to return and help build a school for the children. Mortenson discovers his failure to summit K2 was a blessing, revealing his vocation of educating the most neglected peoples of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The artist Susan Roth's vivid collages bring *Listen to the Wind* to life, including fabric scraps and found objects that show the people's tendency to recycle whatever materials they find. Each book benefits from photographs and a more compressed and focused re-telling than the original.

**Almost Astronauts**, by Tanya Lee Stone (grades 5 to 8), tells the stories of the 13 women pilots dubbed the Mercury 13, who fought to become part of the U.S. space program and who paved the way for the women who would eventually become astronauts 20 years later. Told with photos, interviews with the remaining women and news stories from the time, Stone's account is a thought-provoking, accessible story that may inspire young readers to reach for the stars.

At the darkest time of the year, these books all spark a light of inspiration.

---

**MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE**, a professor of international relations at the Catholic University of America, in Washington, D.C., is author of several childrens books: *You Are My Miracle*; *Sleep, Baby, Sleep*; *You Are My Wish*; and *You Are My I Love You*.

## LETTERS

### Death in a Jar

In response to your current comments "Death in Connecticut," followed by "How Graphic?" (11/29): Until we as a society demand that the death penalty be abolished, it will continue to be used as a method of revenge. Many murders are so heinous that viscerally we entertain the most savage retributions we can muster. But we have Christ's words, the church's teachings and secular law to stop us from taking such action. We are one of the last democracies to use the barbaric method of state-legitimized murder, and until the community recognizes it for what it is we can attempt to use the force of law against it.

ALINA SIERRA SEDLANDER  
New Orleans, La.

### Setting the Bar High

In response to the Signs of the Times report on "Archbishop Dolan Surprise Victor in U.S.C.C.B. Vote" (11/29): Whenever Bishop Gerald Kicanas, whom he defeated, arrived for liturgies at our high school in Illinois, the young women were ecstatic. He exuded warmth, his smile was instantaneous, his brown eyes twinkled and he displayed a deep measure of genuine interest in their concerns. He always came early and would involve the lectors, eucharistic ministers and musicians in animated conversations. He remembered each of

their names and past concerns from prior gatherings. In him these students saw a role model who centered his life in God, who loved his church and who had the ability to make both God and the church relevant to their lives.

Ministering to the youth was an obvious priority for Bishop Kicanas; so too was commitment to the poor and the marginalized. He challenged the students to go out into the community and become involved.

Bishop Kicanas truly is an apostle of the youth, who makes the institutional church appealing in their eyes. He sets the bar high for all cardinals, bishops and people who minister in our church with the genuineness of his message of unconditional love and compassion for all.

MARY GRAMINS  
Deerfield, Ill.

### 51 Citizens United vs. Citizens

While I agree with the main point of your editorial "Money and Media" (11/29), it is not exactly news that Fox News is not "fair and balanced." What is more alarming is MSNBC's appropriation of the Fox News model for a left-leaning cable news channel, albeit not to the same degree—yet.

The larger concern is the Supreme Court's decision in the Citizens United case, which directly decreases the influence of citizens on elections. Campaign finance reform is not a pop-

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ular issue, but its annihilation by Citizens United underlies both the money and the vitriol brought to the midterm election.

EDWARD VISEL  
*Winnebago, Ill.*

### Newsweek's Transformation

What you describe in the current comment "Who Will Speak for Us" (11/22) about Newsweek's coverage of those who make the "superlative lists" is the transformation of journalism into something as old as the Sears Roebuck mail-order publication. Print media are becoming catalogs for their advertisers. The list is a come-on designed to attract an indiscriminating audience.

Flash signs and billboards are not bad in themselves. But one must ask about the purpose of these teaser covers. To get more readers and advertisers? Fine. A move to less substance and more fodder for advertisers? Not so fine. Journalism should mean discrimination, timeliness, investigations of matters the people should know. Is Newsweek emulating People and becoming a catalog? Here is part of the last paragraph of the article about Rush Limbaugh by Zev Chafets:

Limbaugh told me that he might be willing, under the right conditions, to serve as a dollar-a-year adviser to the administration. It would mean spending time in the hated capitol, but a guy with a private jet can commute to Palm Beach. And the pay cut would be mitigated by a precipitous drop in his personal income tax.

The reader can decide whether this belongs in People or in Newsweek. Is this reporting? Does this belong in a respected magazine or in an advertiser's catalogue?

NORMAN COSTA  
*Poughkeepsie, N.Y.*

### Let My People Go

I was pleased to read your current comment "Rights Prize for Cuban" (11/15) on the European Union awarding its Sakharov Prize to the Cuban dissident Guillermo "Coco" Farinas. Nevertheless the comment erred in naming Orlando Zapata Tamayo, who died following a hunger strike in February, as a previous prizewinner.

It is true that the prize has gone to Cubans three times in the past decade, but the third recipient was Oswaldo Paya, head of the Christian Liberation Movement and the driving force behind the Varela Project. This project attempted to exercise Article 88 of the Cuban constitution to gather signatures in support of holding a referendum that, if passed, would have reformed the government to permit democratic elections, free speech, free enterprise, free assembly and freedom for political pris-

oners. Forty-three of the remaining 53 (out of a total of 75) prisoners of conscience arrested in the Black Spring crackdown of March 2003 had been arrested for collecting signatures as part of the Varela Project.

JAMES BENSON  
*Silver Spring, Md.*

### A Reader Who Acts

Professor Charles K. Wilber's "Awakening the Giant" (10/18) gave me at last some comprehension of the economic picture and possible ways to go! I ask that you convey my deepest thanks to Professor Wilber for enlightening a 76-year-old with the clarity of his writing on a subject so gnarly. Unlike the writers to Letters who complain without doing anything, I sent copies to my sons and all the members of Congress from Vermont.

BONNIE JUENKER  
*Burlington, Vt.*



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America (ISSN 0002-7049) is published weekly (except for 13 combined issues: Jan. 4-11, 18-25, Feb. 1-8, April 12-19, June 7-14, 21-28, July 5-12, 19-26, Aug. 2-9, 16-23, Aug. 30-Sept. 6, Sept. 13-20, Dec. 20-27) by America Press, Inc., 106 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019. Periodicals postage is paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. Business Manager: Lisa Pope; Circulation: Judith Palmer, (212) 581-4640. Subscriptions: United States, \$56 per year; add U.S. \$30 postage and GST (#131870719) for Canada; or add U.S. \$54 per year for international priority airmail. Postmaster: Send address changes to: America, 106 West 56th St. New York, NY 10019. Printed in the U.S.A.

# Obedience of Faith

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (A), DEC. 19, 2010

Readings: Is 7:10-14; Ps 24:1-6; Rom 1:1-7; Mt 1:18-24

*“When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him” (Mt 1:24)*

Today’s teens are significantly more tolerant than their elders, according to a recent Pew Research Center study. Millennials—young people born between 1981 and 2000—think nothing of dating members of other races. One student summed it up: “People are people, regardless of their skin color, religion or culture. We have no reason to be fearful of anybody.” At the same time, studies of college students show that they are about 40 percent lower in empathy than students of the previous two or three decades (see the University of Michigan’s Institute for Social Research).

Researchers suggested that the decrease in empathy is due to factors such as the numbing effects of violent video games, the impersonal nature of technology and the glib, harsh language that is standard on television and online. Schools find that they need to construct activities designed to enhance understanding and empathy, which go far beyond tolerance.

Today’s Gospel brings to the fore the situation of Joseph, whose culture had little tolerance for a formally betrothed woman who was found to be with child by someone other than her intended. Joseph is a righteous man, faithful to all the demands of the Jewish law. The strictest interpretation

of the law would call for the death of the apparently adulterous Mary (Dt 22:23-27). But Joseph is unwilling to denounce her publicly and searches for a way out. There cannot be a secret divorce; two witnesses are needed; and Mary’s pregnancy cannot long be hidden.

Joseph’s first solution is to avoid a public trial and divorce Mary quietly without declaring the reasons (see Dt 24:1). This solution would preserve Joseph’s reputation, but Mary would still be exposed to public shame. The only way to preserve Mary’s honor would be for Joseph to complete his marriage to her and adopt the child as his own. In order for Joseph to make this choice he has to shift focus away from concern about his own righteousness and reputation and turn empathetically toward Mary. Only when he can make her the center of his attention, allowing himself to feel her distress, can he make the divinely directed choice that will uphold her honor at the price of his own.

In so doing, Joseph mirrors the divine action of empathy with humankind manifested in the Incarnation. Just as the Holy One rectifies the broken relationship with humanity by becoming one with us, so Joseph rescues a dishonorable and potentially deadly situation by choosing to unite himself completely to Mary. Joseph exemplifies what their

son Jesus will later teach his followers: one must go far beyond what the law requires in order to fulfill it truly.

This is what St. Paul calls “the obedience of faith” in his letter to the Romans. Obedience, as Paul elaborates later in this letter, is not blindly following commands but comes from hearing, “and what is heard comes through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). In fact, the



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Pray for an increase in empathy.
- Ask God to lead you to the obedience of faith.
- Give thanks for the ways in which you experience God-with-us.

word obedience (*hypakoe*) comes from the same Greek root as the verb “to hear” (*akouein*). In the Gospel, Joseph’s ability to hear with his heart the cries of his beloved Mary as well as the voice of our empathetic God leads to his faithful obedience. As Christmas approaches, it can be difficult for us to hear God’s voice above the din of many demands. When we pause each day to listen attentively, our faithful obedience, like that of Joseph, can have world-changing power as it creates the space for the Holy One to be ever birthed anew in our midst as God-with-us.

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 is vice president and academic dean.

ART: TAD DUNNE

# Light in Darkness

THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD (A), DEC. 25, 2010

Readings: Is 52:7-10; Ps 98:1-6; Heb 1:1-6; Jn 1:1-18

*“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (Jn 1:5)*

Nearly the whole world was riveted by the rescue on Oct. 14 of the 33 miners trapped for more than two months below the surface of the earth in Chile. Among the many concerns about how they would adjust to normal life again, was the effect on their eyes of their exposure to light after such a long time underground. The miners were given dark glasses to shield their eyes from the sudden brightness. There had also been concern about the effect on their spirits from extended light deprivation. One of the miners, José Henríquez, took on the role of pastor to the group, leading them in prayer twice a day so that they would not succumb to the darkness of despair. After their rescue, Henríquez spoke of what he considers his obligation to testify to how God used him to help bring his companions out of darkness into the light.

Today’s Gospel speaks of the Word becoming flesh as “light” that “shines in the darkness” and of its radiant effects. In the fourth Gospel, darkness and light are frequently contrasted, with darkness serving as a metaphor to signify everything that is opposed to God. It should be noted that this literary convention is not intended to feed racism, privileging light skin over dark. In fact, Jesus and the people of his land would not have been pale-skinned. The evangelist often uses this dichotomy, light versus darkness, to set before the reader the choice between belief and unbelief.

The prologue makes three important assertions about the light. First, the light that was coming into the

world enlightens everyone. There is nowhere it does not shine. It can pierce the stoniest recesses of the heart. It must, however, be consciously chosen. It does not force its way into any caves in which we may choose to retreat. All who choose to accept it share in the light and spread it. Some, however, prefer darkness to light. Later in the Gospel, Jesus says to Nicodemus, “the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds might not be exposed” (3:19-20). This dualistic contrast does not account, however, for the fact that no one walks totally in the light or completely in the darkness. There is always something more in us that needs to be brought to the light.

Second, while the light shines in us, we ourselves are not the light itself. Like John, we are illumined by the true light and we testify to it, inviting others into its brilliance, but we know we are not the source of the light. It is through God’s desire and divine initiative that we share in this life and light as children of God (vv. 12-13).

Third, no matter how deep the darkness, it cannot overcome the light (1:5). There is no individual or collective sinfulness that is able to extinguish the divine light. The opening phrase of the Gospel recalls the opening line of the book of Genesis, which introduces the first creation account. Most likely written in post-exilic times, it asserts that although the nation has considered itself guilty and punished in Babylon for its unfaithfulness, God considers humankind, along with all creation, very good (Gn 1:31).

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Invite the Light of the World to shine more brightly in you.
- How do you testify to that light?
- Ask Christ to illumine anything that keeps you in darkness.

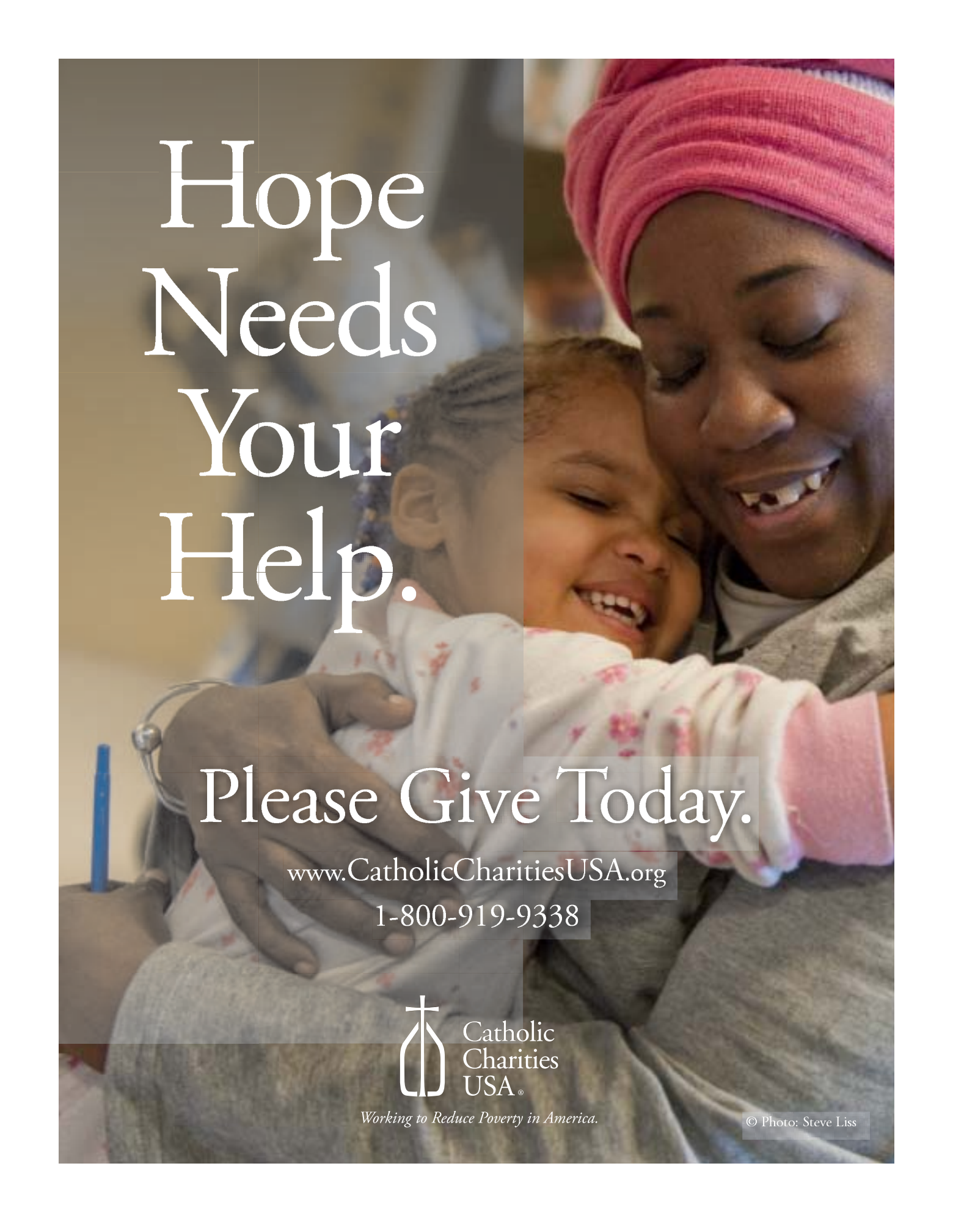
The Gospel assures us we are always capable of letting ourselves be brought to the light. Like the rescued miners, we are offered the way out of darkness and now must be willing to testify to the power of the light within us.

**BARBARA E. REID**

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