

America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

APRIL 25, 2011 \$3.50



The Drama of Easter

VINCENT J. MILLER

James Franco and Me
PAUL MARIANI

Spring Books

OF MANY THINGS

In Holy Week my mind turns to Jerusalem, as I recall my participation in the liturgies and pilgrim devotions there. It is also a time for remembering the Church of Jerusalem. Palm Sunday is a special day for Holy Land Christians as they turn out for the procession from Bethpage down the Mount of Olives, past the graves of those buried facing west toward the Golden Gate, where by Jewish tradition the Messiah is expected to appear to establish the kingdom, to St. Anne's in the Old City. During the last two decades, the Palm Sunday procession has become a festival of Palestinian Christian identity, with the faithful pouring in from all over the region, from Galilee and, if possible, the West Bank as well as Jerusalem.

The route is so crowded the best word to describe it is "thronged" with people. Boy scouts in uniform, some quite beyond adolescence, provide crowd control along the margins of the road. Religious in a great variety of habits are strung throughout the crowd, and prelates of the different Catholic churches in their distinctive robes come toward the end, with the canons of the Holy Sepulchre and the Latin Patriarch at the very end. When the procession ends at St. Anne's, those privileged to squeeze into the monastery garden hear an exhortation from the patriarch followed by blessing with a relic of the true cross.

The Palm Sunday procession, a walk of a few kilometers under the hot sun, pressed around with sunburned, dusty pilgrims from many lands, may be as close as today's Christians will ever get to feeling what it was like to celebrate a holy day in St. Helena's Jerusalem.

I associate Holy Thursday with the Cenacle or Upper Room, but that site was taken over by the Muslims centuries ago, and the lower floor is now occupied by a yeshiva. Elsewhere the day might be an occasion for interreligious dialogue. In Jerusalem, it prompts

scrupulous observance of the Status Quo agreement, which allows various denominations and religions to share the same holy sites. On Holy Thursday, I think instead of the Olivetan Benedictine double monastery of Abu Gosh, built on the ruins of a 12th-century Crusader church, where the monks and nuns chant the liturgy in antiphony. "Ubi Caritas," beautiful wherever it is sung during the washing of the feet, is ever so beautiful reverberating within those ancient stone walls.

On Holy Thursday night and early Good Friday, I think of St. Peter in Gallicantu, the traditional site of Jesus' imprisonment, the trial before Caiaphas and Peter's denial (see *Am.*, 1/24). The Pit, the hollowed-out cistern where Jesus is said to have been kept the night before his death, is the very best place to share in his hour of darkness. St. Peter's is also where in 1998 I watched the announcement of the Northern Ireland Good Friday Agreement, and so I pray that day for peace with justice and forgiveness in the Holy Land, too.

On Good Friday, I also think of the Calvary Chapel at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The chapel itself, though I have been privileged to celebrate Mass there a number of times, does little for me until I think of the frail Pope John Paul II making his way back there, up the very steep steps, at the end of his pilgrimage in 2000, to pray in solitude for 45 minutes. He had more true feeling for the marbled-over Golgotha than I ever will.

The nearby Holy Sepulchre, with its low entrance, recreates the sensation of the disciples bending down low to peer into the empty tomb. But for Easter, I think of the Easter Vigil service at Abu Gosh, where deep in a crypt beneath the church, amid candlelight, for catechumens and infants baptized into Christ's death and rising, the resurrection is made real again.

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America

PUBLISHED BY JESUITS OF THE UNITED STATES

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Customer Service: 1-800-627-9533

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Cover: Detail from "The Disputation of the Sacrament," a fresco by Raphael. CNS photo courtesy Catholic Communication Campaign

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Goldstone Reports Again

Depending on one's view, the distinguished South African jurist Richard Goldstone has either once more demonstrated the honesty of his thinking or has cravenly capitulated to Israeli pressure. In an op-ed article in *The Washington Post* on April 1, he admitted that if he had known what has recently been revealed by internal Israeli investigations, the U.N. report he chaired on Israel's Operation Cast Lead, a 2008 military campaign against Gaza, would have been different. Israeli officials, who have heretofore reviled Goldstone, praised him and played his statement as if it were a renunciation of the report's conclusions. The former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations, Gabriela Shalev, went so far as to contend that "if in the future we have to defend ourselves against terror...there will be no way to deal with this terror other than the way we did in Cast Lead."

But Goldstone later told the press that, with one exception, "as presently advised I have no reason to believe that any part of the report needs to be reconsidered at this time." According to B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights group, the internal Israeli inquiry cited by Goldstone "by no means absolves Israel of all grave allegations regarding its conduct." Among the issues still deserving scrutiny, the group said, "are the levels of force authorized; the use of white phosphorous and inherently inaccurate mortar shells in densely populated areas; the determination that government office buildings were legitimate targets; and the obstruction of and harm to ambulances." In addition, because of lack of Israeli cooperation, the Goldstone team was never able to look into Israeli policymaking. For these and other reasons the U.N. process ought to continue.

At the same time, Hamas, the governing party in Gaza, needs to be held responsible for its use of rockets against Israeli civilians and for failing to conduct investigations of alleged war crimes on its side.

Tough Talk From Dublin

During a lecture at Marquette University last week (reported in *America*, "Signs of the Times," 4/18), the archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin, known as a tough talker on the topic of sexual abuse by members of the clergy, talked tough. He described, among other things, the inevitable results of a clerical culture that refused to take basic precautions against abuse (one priest's residence featured a swimming pool open only to children), the difficulty of "bringing an institution around to the conviction that the truth must be told" and the benefit of government-sponsored audits,

something resisted by many bishops and religious superiors.

The most surprising admission was this: "...with perhaps two exceptions I have not encountered a real and unconditional admission of guilt and responsibility on the part of priest offenders in my diocese." The inability of many abusers to feel remorse has been well documented. Some psychologists note that the two most prevalent traits among abusers are narcissism and grandiosity. The narcissist cares only about his own needs; others exist simply to gratify him. The grandiose person acts as a kind of Pied Piper, easily drawing children into his terrible orbit. Archbishop Martin's comments make clear that these malign pathologies run deep and that the church is, in many places, still resisting a complete truth-telling. We need more bishops to speak the truth as bluntly and frequently as Archbishop Martin has done.

Budget Cuts Hurt Women

Many proposals to cut federal spending on entitlements tend to gloss over a significant fact: entitlements benefit women—particularly the nation's poorest women—to a much greater extent than men. The reasons are obvious: women on average earn less than men but live longer. Single parents, who are overwhelmingly female, must stretch their incomes across decades as they rear their children. Many women with young children work part time, and employers seldom offer health insurance or other benefits for part-time work. Wage parity, which would help women and children enormously, still would not close the gaps produced by longevity and childrearing. Here is the problem: since entitlements disproportionately benefit women, cuts in entitlements disproportionately harm them.

Consider Medicaid, the state-federal program for the poorest, sickest and/or most disabled Americans. Women make up three-quarters of the adults covered. That totals 17 million women between the ages of 18 and 64; most are pregnant or have children under 18. Few voters realize that Medicaid finances 41 percent of all births in the United States. These are births among the poor. Medicaid also covers 43 percent of all nursing home spending. These entitlements are vital, not just for the poor and not just for women, but for a healthy society.

Unlike abortion, these services are authentic women's health issues. As such they ought not be cut even to reduce the deficit. Other expenses—administrative duplication, for example—should be cut and are already being removed through the Affordable Care Act of 2010. A clear link between women and entitlements is crucial information for the ongoing debates about the budget and deficit-reduction.

Easter Peace

“Peace be with you.” That first Easter evening Jesus’ greeting burst through the gloom and confusion of the upper room. The disciples’ grief over Jesus’ death, their dismay over Jesus’ rejection by Israel’s leaders, their shame over abandoning Jesus at the cross, their bewilderment over the empty tomb and Mary Magdalene’s wild report—all those feelings came to an abrupt halt with the familiar salutation: Peace be with you. But at that moment, Jesus’ salutation must have been more shocking than reassuring. Their heads must have been teeming with questions, with doubts and phantom terrors. What could these words mean?

When we Christians hear this Easter greeting anew this year, we too should be dismayed as much as consoled. For the peace of the risen Christ ushers us into a new existence, where nothing will ever again be the same. Because it is soul-transforming, Christ’s peace is a costly gift that demands radical conversion. Because that peace is all-embracing, uniting us with all sorts of people we would otherwise avoid, it rips away our prejudices and tears asunder the protective walls that afford us comfortable assurance. As Jesus explained, “Not as the world gives, do I give.”

The peace of Christ heralds the beginning of a new age. We are being drawn into a new way of life where the world as we know it—the world of black and white contrasts, of rivalries and wars, of domination and oppression, of zero-sum solutions and justified inequality—should lose its grip on our minds and hearts. Christ’s peace should cast out the fear that runs the world and too easily takes our imaginations captive. In the glow of Christ’s peace, the fear that chills our hearts, puts us on guard and sets us, however subtly, against one another should seep away. We should be set free to live boldly in hope and to challenge those who would shackle our Christian visions.

A primary effect of Easter peace is to unite the church itself. For St. Paul “the bond of peace” Christ gives his disciples defines the church. It unites its members across class, gender and ethnic barriers: slave-free, male-female, Jew-Greek. The bond of peace is more essential to the church’s identity, in Paul’s estimation, than any charisms or offices his disciples may exercise, and in the Christian community genuine unity ought to weigh even more heavily than any claims of religious lineage or preening orthodoxy.

Insofar as any of us in the U.S. church today may be on the prowl to catch out anyone else in a dissident position or find ourselves perpetually on the attack, Christ’s greeting of peace will be an uncomfortable challenge. Insofar as we

deny the gifts of others and steamroll over them in pursuit of uniformity of opinion, we have severed ourselves from the bond of peace, which is the risen Christ himself. Insofar as we drag the church into partisan political rivalries or seek from it petty political advantage, we are corroding the bonds of charity. Wherever the charism of unity is at work, where bridges are built, where common ground is celebrated and where enmities are overcome, there Easter peace is at work, healing, strengthening and making the many one in the body of Christ.



From the church, God’s peace ripples out to fill the world: “As the Father sent me, so I am sending you.” The baptized are charged with extending Christ’s work of reconciliation. We are fortunate to live in a time when, in the face of many armed conflicts, people inside and outside the church are taking up the challenge of peacemaking. Whether it is lay communities like Focolare and the Community of Sant’Egidio, Catholic nongovernmental organizations like Caritas Internationalis and Catholic Relief Services or teams of academics and fieldworkers in the Catholic Peacebuilding Network, women and men are working to make Christ’s farewell gift of peace a reality in zones of conflict. Leading this movement, Pope Benedict XVI himself has reached out not only to the interfaith community but also to agnostics and secular activists, inviting them to join in a common witness for peace at Assisi this coming October on the 25th anniversary of the Assisi Day of Prayer. Through all these peacemakers, Christ’s greeting, “Peace be with you,” echoes where it most needs to be heard.

To help others find peace and to sustain themselves from crisis to crisis, year after year, Christian peacemakers need themselves to draw deeply on God’s peace, which is “so much greater than anything we can understand.” From the depths of the divine beauty they will draw inspiration, from the reserves of divine strength they will draw energy, and in their vision of God and God’s kingdom they will find unfailing hope. For those ready to be challenged by Christ’s greeting of peace, for those open to hearing the call to be peacemakers in the broken places of church and world, the risen Jesus’ Easter greeting portends a springtime of abounding grace.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

ITALY

Church Teaching Tested By Immigration Crisis

More than 22,000 boat people, many fleeing political unrest in North Africa, have arrived on the tiny Italian island of Lampedusa this year. The growing intensity of the fighting in Libya has spurred more people to flee in recent weeks. Not all survive the trip. About 150 people drowned on April 6 when their boat capsized in rough seas. The new flow of North African immigrants into Italy is putting church teaching on immigration to the test.

Church leaders have underlined the broad right to emigrate, the specific rights of refugees and the responsibility of wealthier nations to welcome those in need. But their moral advocacy has provoked criticism and even derision among some Italians. Because Lampedusa lies only 90 miles off the North African coast, it has long been the gateway to Europe for North Africans. Residents have complained that the island's infrastructure is overwhelmed. Authorities have been relocating new arrivals to other Italian regions—whose residents seem not to want them either.

Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, president of the Italian bishops' conference, has called on Europe to recognize that Italy cannot handle the migration flow by itself. European bishops meeting on April 3 agreed, arguing that the crisis "requires the solidarity of all European countries and their institutions." But Cardinal Bagnasco also reminded Italians that the current immigration emergency stems in part from long-standing global inequities. He said Europe cannot keep out the world's poor simply by patrolling its borders.

"It is an illusion to think that one can live in peace, keeping at a distance young populations that are burdened by deprivation and that are legitimately trying to satisfy their hunger," the cardinal said. Persuading these people to remain in their homeland will require implementation of "policies of

true cooperation," he said.

The church suffered a significant political backlash in the current climate. Several groups and newspapers proposed that the Vatican open up convents, seminaries and its own unrented apartments to immigrants. In fact, Caritas Italy has already arranged to lodge some 2,500 in church institutions. Church leaders said they wanted to show that they practice what they preach and called on all Italians to make a "new effort of solidarity," despite the nation's own prolonged economic downturn.

This is not a popular message these days, but it is very much part of traditional church teaching on immigration. The responsibility to welcome the stranger has roots in the Bible, and as Pope Benedict XVI recently noted, Jesus was himself a refugee when the Holy Family fled into Egypt. The "right to emigrate" was defended in

Migrants from North Africa are met by Italian security near the southern Italian island of Lampedusa on March 14.



1952 in an apostolic constitution by Pope Pius XII, who also noted that states may control the flow of migration, but not for arbitrary reasons.

Immigrants make up 7.5 percent of Italy's population. Demographers say that immigrants, most of whom are young, help balance Italy's aging population and low birth rate. But some political parties maintain that immigration has reached the saturation point.

Archbishop Antonio Veglio, president of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Travelers, has said that while governments have a legitimate right to regulate immigration, "there is nevertheless the human right to be rescued and given emergency help." Behind that statement lies a fact sometimes cited by church experts: Over the past 23 years, more than 15,000 migrants have died trying to reach Europe—a toll that grows daily.



SECURITY

World Bank: 1.5 Billion Trapped By Violence

Some 1.5 billion people live in countries affected by repeated cycles of political and criminal violence, the World Bank reports in its latest development study. Noting that military and development disciplines too often work on separate paths, World Bank President Robert Zoellick called for bringing security and development together to break the cycles of fragility and violence that trap states in conflict and rob their citizens of economic and human development opportunities.

“While much of the world has made rapid progress in reducing poverty over the past 60 years, areas suffering from political instability and

criminal violence are being left far behind and face stagnation, both in terms of economic growth and disappointing human development indicators,” said Justin Lin, the World Bank’s chief economist.

People living in countries currently affected by violence are twice as likely to be undernourished, and 50 percent more likely to be impoverished. Their children are three times as likely to be out of school, researchers report. More than 42 million people are displaced globally as a result of conflict, violence or human rights abuses. “And the effects of violence in one area can spread to neighboring states and to other parts of the world,” said Zoellick, “hurting development prospects of others and impeding economic prospects for entire regions.”

The *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development* found that “no low-income, fragile or conflict-affected country has yet to achieve a single Millennium Development Goal.” Those goals, accepted by Western nations in 2000, aimed to cut in half the worst effects of global poverty in, for example, sanitation, health, hunger and educational attainment by 2015. Fixing the economic, political and security problems that disrupt development and trap fragile states in violence requires strengthening national institutions and improving governance in ways that prioritize citizen security, justice and jobs. It is a process that must be counted out in decades, not years, researchers said.

According to the report, in the 21st century organized violence appears to be spurred by a range of domestic and international stresses, like youth unemployment, income shocks, tensions among ethnic, religious or social groups and drug trafficking networks.

Conflict over resources, as in the Democratic Republic of Congo, or violence generated by drug trafficking, as in Mexico and Central America, exemplify the style of violence in the new century. Unemployment was overwhelmingly cited as the most important factor for recruitment into gangs and rebel movements. Risks of violence are greater when high social stresses combine with weak capacity or lack of legitimacy in key national institutions, as indicated by the recent turbulence in the Middle East and North Africa.

Building or restoring capable, legitimate institutions is crucial because they are able to mediate the stresses that otherwise lead to repeated waves of violence and instability. More than 90 percent of civil wars in the 2000s occurred in countries that had already experienced civil war in the previous 30 years. The report suggests short-term measures aimed at successful transitions from violence to rebuild confidence between citizens and the state. These include improving government transparency, special budget allocations for disadvantaged groups, removal of discriminatory laws and credible commitments to realistic timelines for longer-term reform.



Soldiers patrol in Goma, North Kivu Province, in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Bishops Divided on Pro-Choice Politicians

Asked why there was so much disunity on the question of pro-choice Catholics receiving Communion, Denver's Archbishop Charles J. Chaput told the audience at the University of Notre Dame on April 8: "The reason...is that there is no unity among the bishops about it." He said, "There is unity among the bishops about abortion always being wrong and that you can't be a Catholic and be in favor of abortion...but there's just an inability among the bishops together to speak clearly on this matter and even to say that if you're Catholic and you're pro-choice, you can't receive holy Communion." There is a fear, he said, that if bishops speak clearly on the issue, they would make it difficult for Catholic politicians to be elected and would disenfranchise the Catholic community. The strategy clearly has failed, he said. "So let's try something different and see if it works. Let's be very, very clear on these matters."

Church Conflict in India

The Vatican and many of the Latin-rite bishops of India are not treating the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church with justice, Auxiliary Bishop Bosco Puthur of Ernakulam-Angamaly in Kerala, India, told Pope Benedict XVI on April 7 during an *ad limina* visit to Rome. While other Christians and other religions enjoy the freedom to build churches and conduct services anywhere in India, the Eastern Catholic churches "are denied it, paradoxically not by the state, but by our own ecclesiastical authorities," the bishop said. Generally the leaders of Eastern Catholic churches, like the Syro-Malabar Church, enjoy full freedom to elect bishops and erect dioceses

NEWS BRIEFS

The attorney general of Virginia, **Kenneth T. Cuccinelli II**, issued an advisory opinion on April 8 that while "personal protection constitutes a good and sufficient reason" under commonwealth law to carry a concealed weapon into church, it was still acceptable for places of worship to restrict or ban handguns from their premises. + **Roy Bourgeois**, a Maryknoll priest, refused in a letter on April 11 to recant his belief that women should be ordained to the priesthood and now faces dismissal from the order and laicization. + **James Martin, S.J.**, author of *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything* and *America's* culture editor, will be honored with a Christopher Award at the 62nd annual ceremony in New York on May 19. + On April 12 the Vatican ordered the former bishop of Bruges, **Roger Vangheluwe**, 74, who admitted to sexually abusing his nephew, to leave Belgium and undergo "spiritual and psychological treatment" as a final decision on his status was prepared. + On April 6 Virginia became the seventh state to **bar abortion coverage** from being offered by private insurance companies joining its proposed state-run health insurance exchange, which is mandated by last year's health care reform legislation.



James Martin, S.J.

only in their church's traditional territory; otherwise, the responsibility is left to the pope, often in consultation with the Latin-rite bishops of the region concerned. Bishop Puthur told Pope Benedict that the Syro-Malabar church's traditional territory was all of India until Latin-rite missionaries arrived in the 15th century. Now any of its faithful who live outside Kerala State are subject to the authority of the local Latin-rite bishop.

U.K. Quakers Boycott Israeli Settler Exports

Quakers in Britain have agreed to boycott products from Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The Quakers consider the boycott a nonviolent move for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Half a million Israeli settlers live illegally in the West Bank,

including East Jerusalem. The settlements on Palestinian land are protected by the Israeli government and military, and they prevent or restrict access by Palestinians to their land, water supplies, education, health services and more. Extensive settlement infrastructure divides up Palestinian land, creating obstacles to peace. Palestinian Quakers are calling for Quakers around the world to consider boycott, divestment and sanctions because of the worsening situation caused by Israel's occupation. "People matter more than territory," said a statement from the Quakers. "We pray fervently for both Israelis and Palestinians.... We hope they will find an end to their fears and the beginning of their mutual co-existence based on a just peace."

From CNS and other sources.



Dawn Out of Darkness

Here is a parable for Easter. The world is at war. The British Isles are cloaked in darkness. Into the midst of this black night a German pilot, his aircraft disabled by hostile fire, bails out to save his life. Perhaps he prays as he plummets to the ground into the heart of enemy territory. Perhaps, as he struggles to release his parachute, he has a flashback image of the girl he left behind and dares not hope to see again. Minutes later his parachute becomes entangled in a tree, and he lies unconscious on the ground.

Dawn breaks. A young woman passes by. She is lost in thought. Her lover has asked her to marry him. She longs to say yes. But who can afford to celebrate a wedding in these dark days? Where will they find the ingredients for a wedding cake? Whatever could she wear for a bridal gown? Warning voices tell her to wait until the war is over—but who knows when that might be, and she loves him and longs to be his bride now...for tomorrow may never come.

And then her reverie is brutally interrupted. She almost stumbles over the German airman lying in her path. Her heart knows what she must do. She covers him gently with her coat and places her jersey under his head. There is still a pulse. There is still life. She fetches help. The casualty will be cared for—at least in his immediate need. Beyond that, who knows?

The next day her path takes her back past the spot where she found him. The torn parachute is still there,

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caught in the branches. She gazes at it but now, in her mind's eye, she no longer sees a parachute hanging there in the tree but the possibility of a silk wedding gown, a gift from God. For the next weeks she spends every spare moment with her needle, painstakingly transforming an abandoned parachute into a uniquely beautiful wedding gown.

From his bed in the military hospital, a lonely young German airman, recovering from disaster, sees the bridal couple pass by. His heart leaps with a sudden surge of hope. This time next year, perhaps, he will be with his own young bride once more. He little guesses that this English bride is wearing his parachute.

This time next year! Easter is a time to look forward. Too often the Christian story is told backwards, as if it were solely about God's rescue mission, God's parachute, bailing us out of the wreckage of our sin. Easter is the time to change the direction of our gaze and see the rescue mission for what it can become: an invitation to participate in the great adventure of becoming the people God is dreaming we can be and of transforming planet Earth into the seedbed of God's kingdom.

I was recently in Ireland with a friend. As we ambled along the country lanes, we saw our first lamb of the season, staggering around on its shaky, spindly legs. My friend turned to greet me with the traditional Irish prayer for such occasions: "Go mbeirimid beo ar an am seo aris," which means, "May we

still be alive when this time comes round again."

It is a lovely way of praying that we might live to see another year, another springtime, another new beginning.

May we be alive when the first lamb of 2012 appears. May we be more than just alive—may we have grown, in the intervening year, a little closer to the fullness of life that Jesus incarnates.

May the suffering people in all the world's places of anguish be brought to new beginnings on the returning tides of hope and trust and love that Easter promises. And may we work and pray untiringly to make that hope a reality.

You might ask: But what can we do about these situations? Per-

haps more than we think. The parachute in the story did not change overnight by magic into a bridal dress. The transformation took time, effort, energy, patience and perseverance, as the bride-to-be changed it, stitch by laborious stitch, into something radically new. God invites each of us to work at this transformation. We do it every time we speak or act in ways that increase, however slightly, the level of hope and trust and love in the world—by a word of encouragement, a small act of courage in confronting injustice, a refusal to join in the general grumbling about life that leads us and others down the track to despair and cynicism.

Stitch by stitch. Choice by choice. Moment by moment. These are the ways we are called to work with God to transform Good Friday into Eastertide.

God
invites
each
of us to
work at
trans-
formation.

An Easter Sunday procession in the town of Cospicua, Malta, in April 2003.



EVEN IN DEATH,
CHRIST NEVER LET GO.

Holding On

BY VINCENT J. MILLER

Moments come that demand everything of us. A partner's illness requires much more than we bargained for. An ethical conflict at work forces a decision that puts our job at risk. A political crisis demands that we take a public stand amid imperfect choices. We are pushed to our limits perhaps; but even more we are entangled, hemmed in, held by our relationships and must decide if we will hold on to them in return.

Squeezed between our finitude and the brokenness of the world, we are tempted to turn away, to wish to be dealt another hand. Isn't there some other relationship that will better fulfill me? A less dysfunctional workplace? Couldn't I have been born in a time when politics were clear and I would have stood with the angels? We are tempted to hedge our bets, to give as little as possible to preserve our sense of righteousness. I stay in the relationship but hold back, subtly communicating how unfair this is to me. I finesse the ethical or political challenge, doing just enough of the right thing to save my self-respect but keeping my head down.

Such moments force us to decide who we really are. Reality puts our daydream self-imaginings to the test. The world in its brokenness gives us the opportunity to say yes in the concrete, to love and to give ourselves in love to what is. Our temptations are as total as the demands placed upon us: not merely to refuse a particular responsibility but to refuse reality itself. Do we embrace the world or flee into fantasy?

Such crises open into the hard grace of the paschal mystery. When creation was broken by human sinfulness, God did not turn away or reshuffle the cards. The Creator doubled down on creation: insistently loving it, refusing to let it die of its self-inflicted wounds, respecting its finitude by entering into it bodily—becoming subject even to its sin and violence.

Nails

Jesus' embrace of sinful humanity was a free act but one that involved nails. Nails signify both suffering and irrevocable binding, a frightfully demanding embrace of what is. The paschal mystery is a strange freedom to commit fully. The world that nailed Jesus to the cross was held firm in God's saving embrace by those same nails.

At the heart of the paschal mystery lies not the cross but Christ's body

PHOTO: REUTERS/DARRIN ZAMMIT LUPI

VINCENT J. MILLER holds the Gudorf Chair in Catholic Theology and Culture at the University of Dayton in Ohio. He is writing a book on globalization, the church and discipleship.

stretched out upon it. The Dutch theologian Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P., attended to the human cost of Jesus' absolute commitment to his Father's will. Jesus experienced God's kingdom coming into being in his ministry. The same fidelity in which he preached the good news, healed the sick and practiced reconciliation also brought him into conflict with the powerful and led to his abandonment by the disciples. Jesus died watching it all fall apart. His faithful living of God's gracious salvation stripped him of everything. Through that complete giving, which looked so much like failure, God worked resurrection. It was through Jesus' holding on amid complete loss that everything was saved.

God's graceful giving has the last word. Paradoxically, life is found in death. Less paradoxically, life is found in a love that holds on through death. Such strength was not placid and assured for Jesus. He saw the loss of all that God had brought about in his ministry. It is no less difficult for us. Our dogmatic knowledge of the unity of the cross and resurrection does not remove the darkness of the cross. Although we can talk about it from the outside, the passing over remains a mystery that we must live into. Real suffering is always a surprise. We undergo not simply temporary pain, but real loss. There is no guarantee that any given crisis will turn out well, that our sacrifices will not be in vain or that we are holding onto anything more than a delusion.

Truths Intertwined

Within the bounds of the paschal mystery—between giving to the point of death and the surprise of resurrection—lie the intertwined truths of suffering and gift, freedom and binding. All of this can, of course, be twisted into a masochistic celebration of suffering for its own sake or an uncritical codependence that gives whatever the other demands no matter how destructive or pointless. These, however, pervert the cross into a passive acceptance of the world's sinfulness. What distinguishes the paschal mystery from these debasements is the activeness of love. We follow in God's refusal to let the world remain unsaved.

Jesus' words at the Last Supper, found in the heart of the eucharistic prayer, are the fundamental form of discipleship: "This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you and for all so that sins may be forgiven. Do this in memory of me." We "do this" not simply in the Eucharist, but in our lives. We pour out our lifeblood as Jesus did, in love for the part of the "all" we encounter in our own lives.

The paschal mystery is the fundamental form of Christian hope and grace. In it we are strengthened to face and to embrace the suffering and violence of the world.

We follow in God's refusal to let the world remain unsaved.

Isaiah's Servant Songs portray our fearful response to the world in straightforward and stark words. From the "man of suffering" we "hide our faces." We simply turn away. If our media-saturated world renders us callous to violence, we still have precious little tolerance for the victims of suffering. We still look away, having no patience for those "aching ones whose wounds cannot be nursed" of whom Bob Dylan sang.

It is not easy to tend wounds that heal more slowly than we can observe, to accompany the friend whose life careens from one crisis to another or to work with the powerless crushed in a system stacked against them. Myths of progress and success infect our imaginations. The endless enthusiasm for healing and self-help programs on daytime talk shows, business training seminars and the like are shiny glosses over our deep anxiety about finitude. Our everyday language betrays our denial. We exhort the sick to "get well soon" but have little to say to those who will not.

In the paschal mystery we are given the strength to look in the eyes of the overwhelming need of the world—suffering, disability, misfortune, injustice—and the courage to respond somehow in love.

We are not God. Precisely as we are squeezed between our finitude (our limited power, the short spans of our lives) and the searing need around us, we are thrown into the grace of the paschal mystery. There are times that demand action. Others present burdens so heavy that one can only hold on, trying to remain faithful, feeling powerless in the face of overwhelming need. And there are times when our most sincere efforts are not enough. Whatever the adequacy of our powers to the situation, we do what we can to help push the world and those who inhabit it toward the fullness it lacks. We give, haunted that we are fools, and sometimes experience shocking moments and long tides of grace. Things work out in a way that did not seem possible and our seemingly insignificant contributions play a part. Things heal. Justice is done. Salvation takes place.

Truth in the Mundane

Life is, of course, much more than crisis and struggle. If major challenges trumpet the unavoidability of the paschal mystery, the same truth whispers in the mundane rhythms of life. To love is to bind oneself to others' finitude. Their breath, in which we thrill, will one day cease. To commit oneself to any meaningful project is to court frustration and loss.

In this, the mundane teaches the full truth of the paschal mystery: sacrifice is subordinate to love. We hold on not with stoic tolerance of suffering but in love illuminated by faith in the possibility of salvation.

We are well aware of the weakness of our love manifest

in interpersonal relations. But the same temptations of escape and refusal mark the social and political as well. There is an apocalyptic mood in the church and abroad that seeks to separate the world into the good and the bad. The church's public engagement is hamstrung by a novel use of the category of "intrinsically evil" that partisan activists, with the assent of many bishops, use to separate candidates into good and evil. Lost in the process is the church's moral witness to the many profound evils that (conveniently for the powerful) cannot be reduced to such a simple moral calculus. Lacking the will for a complex debate of issues and policies, we seek instead scapegoats, villains and revolutionaries. We demand clarity and instant solutions. We are disgusted with the morass of compromise and policy talk necessary to govern in service to the common good.

Hans Urs von Balthasar's great insight into the drama of salvation can point us back to the paschal mystery. The Incarnation does not bring clarity but a deepening of the drama, he wrote. Good and evil become ever harder to discern as God works on many fronts and evil reacts with ever more frantic vigor. Bright lines cannot be drawn; there is neither a safe reservation from sin nor a realm outside the bounds of God's grace. We must engage the world as it is on all fronts amid a drama we live within rather than watch

from the outside. Full clarity comes only with the eschaton.

Our bodies are a fundamental touch point of the paschal mystery. Finitude, need and gift are all embodied experiences. The Gnostic dream of escaping the body is precisely a refusal of the paschal mystery's insistence on bodily redemption. Films like "Avatar" and online experiences like "Second Life" herald the virtual fulfillment of this ancient dream. Our off-screen lives, however, are haunted by a much more pervasive disconnect. Globalization stretches economic relationships across

the world: I am fed by Guatemalans and clothed by Bangladeshis. Distance renders these life-sustaining relationships abstract if not invisible, impoverishing our ability to imagine our own interdependence and to respond to the dependence of others.

In the headline dramas and quiet corners of life we encounter the challenge, truth and grace of the paschal mystery. Do we flee from the needs of others in denial of our own finitude, or do we hold on, giving our lives for others? In Bruce Springsteen's words, "In the end what you don't surrender, well, the world just strips away." In the paschal mystery, we surrender not to the world as it is but to its surprising salvation woven by God through our mortal embrace. **A**

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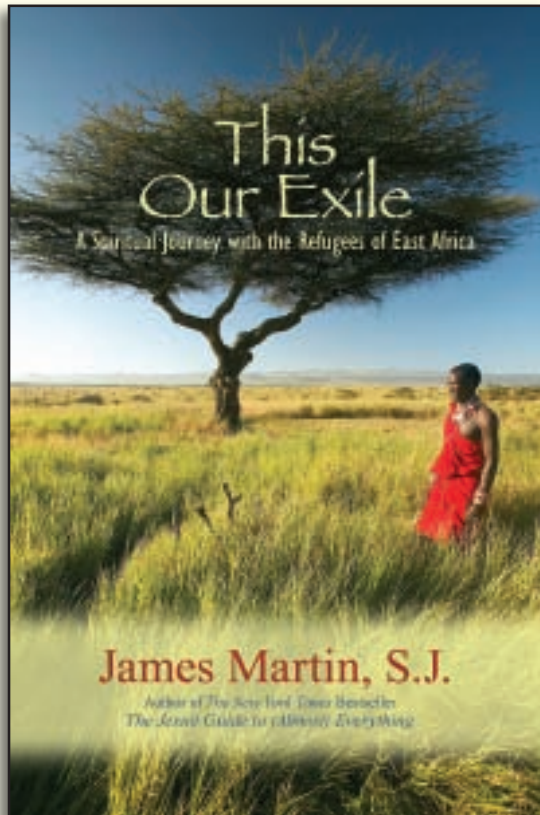


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The Good Fight

How Christians suffer, die and rise with Jesus

BY JEROME KODELL

In the early 1960s, when the racial struggle was white-hot, an interracial retreat was held at my monastery, Subiaco Abbey in Arkansas, sponsored by Friendship House. One participant was a recent college graduate at work in voter registration in the Mississippi delta area of eastern Arkansas. In conversation we asked him, “Isn’t that dangerous work you’re doing? We hear the reports of hatred and violence.”

“It’s true,” he said. “The hatred is vicious, and the punishment is violent.”

“Have you ever been hurt yourself?”

“Yes, I’ve been spit on, beaten with fists, with pipes, with chains and left a bloody mess.”

“But you’re pretty big. Weren’t you able to protect yourself sometimes, to fight back?”

“Yes. At first I did fight back. I made some of them sorry they had attacked me. But then I realized that by fighting back I wasn’t getting anywhere. The hatred coming at me in those fists and clubs was bouncing right off me back into the air, and it could just continue to spread like electricity. I decided I would not fight back. I would let my body absorb that hatred, so that some of it would die in my body and not bounce back into the world. I now see that my job in the midst of that evil is to make my body a grave for hate.”

We were all shaken by what this young man said. But what he was describing was the Gospel of Jesus.

We do not fight evil with evil. As Paul wrote to the Romans, “Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good” (12:21). The young man’s insight was profound, and his courage was great. But even his insight into what he was doing does not quite capture the majesty of the Gospel of the death and resurrection of Christ in us. Because when we make our bodies a grave for hate, the evil that we absorb does not simply die. If we accept suffering in union with Christ, it becomes the dying of Jesus in us, and by the power of the Holy Spirit it is transformed into resurrection. Instead of simply dying and no longer having an evil effect, what attacks us as sin returns to the world as grace.

JEROME KODELL, O.S.B., is the abbot of Subiaco Abbey in Subiaco, Ark.

Baptism, then Decision

In St. Paul’s writings there are three kinds of death: physical death, the common lot of all; sin, a step on the road to eternal death; and redemptive death, which leads to life. In Jesus, without sin, the first and third types of death coincided



Isabel Rosado, 93, protests peacefully outside the U.S. naval base in Vieques, Puerto Rico, in May 2000. The white ribbons woven into the fence symbolize peace.

PHOTO: CNS FROM REUTERS

ed perfectly. His physical death became the sacramental sign of his interior death.

We Christians, Paul says, are baptized into Christ’s death. At baptism we began a lifetime of growing into redemptive death with Jesus. We empty ourselves of ego and self and lay down our lives in love and obedience as he did. As we move toward physical death, our interior death

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should also be taking place. We have no choice about physical death, but the other type is up to us: We decide whether we will die with Jesus.

We are not doomed by our circumstances. The choice is ours. Will we live from our heart with Christ, pouring ourselves out in love? Or will we shield ourselves from the world's pains in fear and self-protection? Sometimes when I visit a person in a nursing home who is in a desperate condition, I am overwhelmed by the faith and peace that come from that person's smiling eyes. Love pours forth from the dying of Jesus within. I recall Hemingway's description of the fisherman Santiago: "Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated." I return from the nursing home as if I had made a retreat.

As the interior death grows, resurrection life also grows. Death and life are intertwined. Paul puts this beautifully: "Always carrying about in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our body. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor 4:10-11). The word for "death" here is used only twice in the New Testament, both times by Paul, and it carries the nuance of "dying." We carry about in our living bodies the dying of Jesus.

Where there is this kind of dying, there is always the resurrection, the living of Jesus. And where the dying of Jesus is not happening, Paul says, neither is the resurrection happening, no matter what kind of show we put on. "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1). The life looks all right, but it sounds tinny. There is nothing to back it up.

Love as a Dying

Gospel love is not easy to do, but it is quite simple to understand. It means wanting what is best for the other and doing what is best for the other. Feelings come and go, but love is a matter of decisions and actions. Love is a dying to oneself and one's own wishes and preferences, putting the other first. Jesus set the pattern for us in his self-emptying death.

During his public ministry, Jesus quoted the ancient proverb, "Do to others whatever you would have them do to you" (Mt 7:12), but he set a higher standard with his new commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 14:34). The norm for love among Jesus' disciples is laying down one's life for others as he did. This was not only a single act at the end for Jesus but his life program, and now it is the program for his disciples. In Paul's terminology this is "carrying about the dying of Jesus" (2 Cor 4:19) or being "crucified with Christ" (Gal 2:20).

We see the love, but ordinarily we do not see the inner dying of Jesus that supports it. That is the way it has to be. St. Maximilian Kolbe and Archbishop Oscar Romero were able to make the ultimate sacrifice—martyrdom—at the end of their lives because in a mostly hidden way they had been dying with Jesus in love for others moment by moment, inch by inch, drop by drop in the time before.

The dying of Jesus is lived in secret. Even when we see another person suffering patiently, we cannot see his or her interior decision for love. But what becomes evident if we are dying with Jesus, whether we are conscious of it or not, is the resurrection light that begins to shine. We keep hidden our pain, our suffering, the injustice we suffer, the loneliness, the bitter disappointments in other people, ourselves, the church. We do not hide the good we do, but we do not parade it either. We rely on Jesus to be with us as we walk with him on our own road to Calvary.

Often, however, we prefer the reverse: to advertise the interior dying and to hide the resurrection. We want everyone to know about our pain, our stress, our hard work, the way we are misunderstood and the sacrifices we make. Yet we are embarrassed to show a resurrection face to the world, because if we smile people might think we are naïve. What's

the matter with you; don't you know how bad it is? We fear to expose the subterranean river of joy that flows within us.

But when we spoil our interior dying by parading it, it loses its transforming power. Jesus himself speaks of a grain of wheat that must die in the ground or it will never sprout and give life. The dying has stopped, and there is no resurrection. In another image, Jesus speaks of the foolishness of sounding a trumpet when giving alms or of praying on a street corner to get attention: "Truly I tell you, they have received their reward" (Mt 6:2). And as Georges Bernanos's country priest says: "When our suffering has been dragged from one pity to another, as from one mouth to another, we can no longer respect or love it." In Paul's view, when we haul our suffering onto the public stage, it decays.

Feelings come and go, but love is a matter of decisions and actions.

Signs of Resurrection

We ought never to hide the signs of the Resurrection, which Paul calls the "fruit of the Spirit"—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness (Gal 5:22). That is the difference in the way death and resurrection are lived: the dying is the backdrop for the resurrection, which, by contrast, is a public gift to the world, a light on a mountaintop, the light of hope. The world knows well enough the realities

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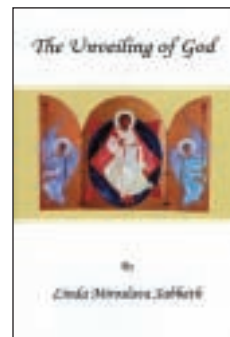
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of spiritual death: sin, hypocrisy, injustice, hatred and violence; it can create those for itself. But the world will see the Resurrection only through disciples who interiorize the dying of Jesus. There is no other source.

Faithful disciples of Christ, including those who pass long lonely days in a hospital or nursing home after decades on the front lines, need to know that they are still fighting the good fight and that by offering their suffering as the dying of Jesus in them, they are transforming the world. That college student in Arkansas who let his own body absorb racial hatred also seemed to understand this.

It is said that an earthquake often begins when a sliver of rock is dislodged deep in the earth. The surrounding mass adjusts slightly, which starts a chain reaction of larger adjustments until on the surface there is a cataclysm. The faithful disciple who joins his or her suffering to Christ is a sliver of rock upsetting the sinful structure of the world. **A**

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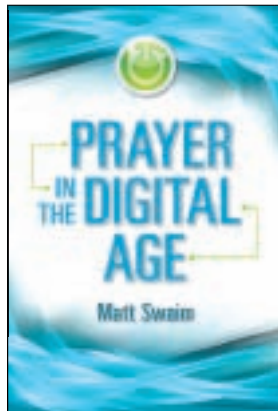


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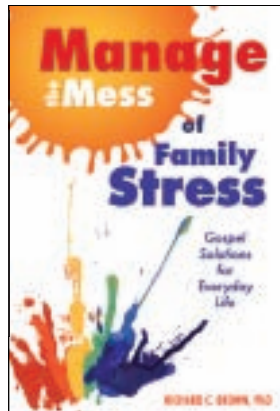
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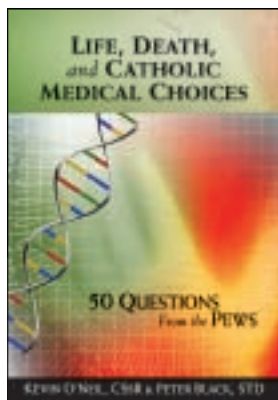
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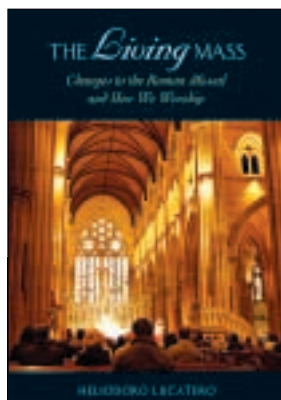
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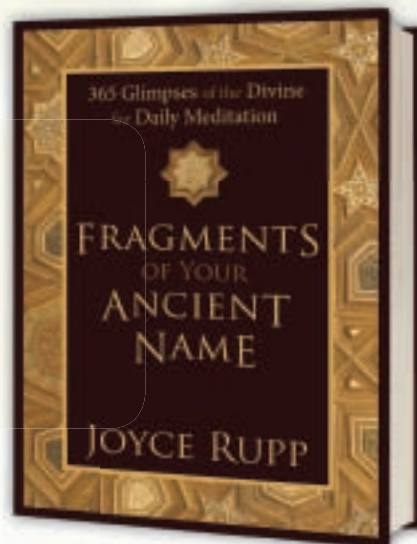
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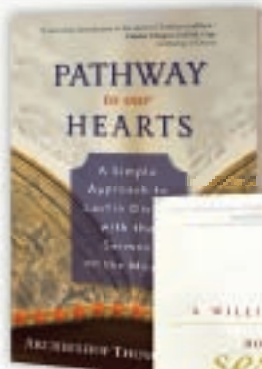
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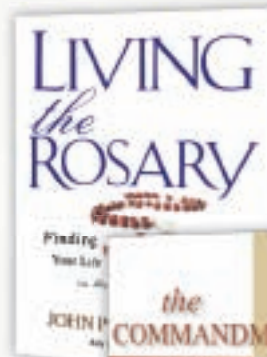
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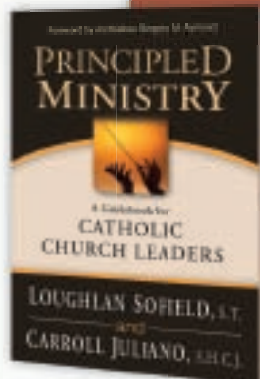
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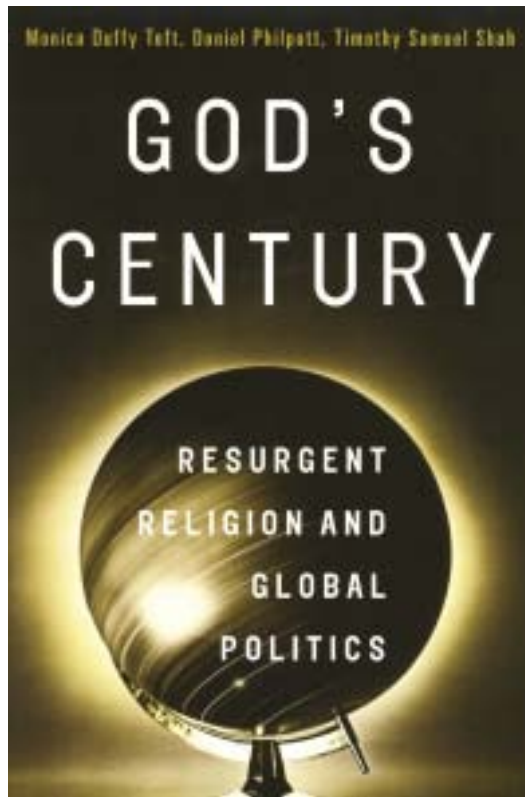
GOD'S CENTURY Resurgent Religion And Global Politics

By Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah
W. W. Norton. 276p \$25.95

Back in the 1960s, there was almost universal acceptance among social scientists of the “secularization thesis,” the belief that as societies became more modern—more economically developed, technologically sophisticated, democratic, etc.—they would become increasingly secular, to the point that religious belief would virtually disappear. As a result, social scientists and the policy makers who looked to them for guidance were surprised by the prominent political role of religion in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, whether in fostering the collapse of Communism or inspiring terrorism. In *God's Century*, the political scientists Monica Duffy Toft, Daniel Philpott and Timothy Samuel Shah (who teach at Harvard, Notre Dame and Boston University, respectively) argue that the secularization thesis has been refuted by the events of the past four decades in which we have witnessed a resurgence on a global scale not simply of religious belief but of robust political engagement by religious actors. They further contend that this resurgence of politically engaged religion gives every indication of continuing into the foreseeable future.

To explain this rise in politically

assertive religion, and why in some cases it assumed peaceful and democratic forms while in others it assumed violent forms, the authors focus heavily on two key variables: 1) political theology and 2) the type of relationship existing between religious authority and political authority. Political theology refers to “the set of ideas that



a religious community holds about political authority and justice.” Religious communities vary widely in the kinds of political theology they embrace. Some seek a theocratic control of the state; others emphasize personal piety so strongly that they eschew all political involvement; still others urge active citizenship for their

members while insisting on a sharp distinction between religious and political authority. Differences also exist among religious communities regarding the acceptability of violence, with some taking a pacifist position, others reluctantly accepting the use of violence in special circumstances, as in the just-war tradition, and others accepting violence as a legitimate way to advance their religious objectives.

Similarly important is a religious community's relationship with political authority. Consensual independence obtains when “religion and state enjoy autonomy from each other and are mutually content with this autonomy.” The classic example is the United States.

Conflictual independence prevails where a religious body manages to carve out a sphere of independence despite vigorous pressures by the state to control it, as in the case of the Catholic Church in Communist Poland.

Consensual integration is characterized by mutual support between the state and the dominant religion, as in the case of present-day Iran.

Finally, conflictual integration exists where religion becomes so integrated with the state as to lose all autonomy, as with the Orthodox Church in Soviet Russia.

Having laid out these categories, the authors devote a chapter to “the rise of politically assertive religion.” They contend that prior to 1500, and despite important differences, the relation of Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity to political authority was one of consensual integration, but that in the ensuing centuries their autonomy steadily dimin-

ished until by the late 18th century and up through the mid-20th century their relationship to the state had become one of conflictual integration. With the state so dominant, the secularization thesis seemed confirmed.

Yet late in the 20th century, aspects of modernization itself, like globalization, advanced communications technology and democratization, all contributed to religion's political resurgence by giving religious communities the freedom to operate and organize politically, to promote their beliefs and to receive support from their co-religionists in other countries.

Drawing upon an enormous range of data and concrete examples, Toft, Philpott and Shah then discuss the influence of religion over the past four decades on global democratization, terrorism, civil wars and work for peace and justice, demonstrating the importance in each case of a religious actor's political theology and its level of independence from the state. For example, in discussing the prominent role of the Catholic Church in fostering the Third Wave of democratization that took place from 1974 to 1991, they note the church's adoption at the Second Vatican Council of a political theology committed to human rights and political freedom, including religious freedom, as well as its decision to reject consensual integration as its model of church-state relations in favor of one closely resembling consensual independence. This new stance, coupled with its transnational organization and formidable resources, enabled the church to be extremely effective in promoting democratization around the world.

Religiously inspired terrorism, meanwhile, often results from a repressive regime that privileges a particular faith or branch of a faith to the exclusion of others. If the excluded faith

feels it should be privileged instead and has a political theology that embraces violence for religious ends, then religiously inspired terrorism may result. A case in point is Saudi Arabia's privileging of a particular brand of Islam,

the Wahhabi school, which gave rise to an Islamist opposition that ultimately led to the global terrorism of Al Qaeda.

Of course, where political theology is concerned, there is considerable variation among and within different faiths. For example, as the authors

note, despite Vatican II's endorsement of democratization, there were those in the church like the Argentine hierarchy who resisted this development. Similarly, Islam contains a wide range of perspectives, prominent among which is Sufism, which rejects violence and promotes tolerance.

God's Century is a very rich and illuminating work to which it is impossible to do justice in a brief review. It will be read with profit by social scientists, students of religion and policy makers.

WILLIAM J. GOULD is assistant dean for juniors at Fordham University, New York City.

ON THE WEB

Richard Rohr, O.F.M., discusses his new book, *Falling Upward*.
americamagazine.org/podcast

RON HANSEN

FATHERLESS SON

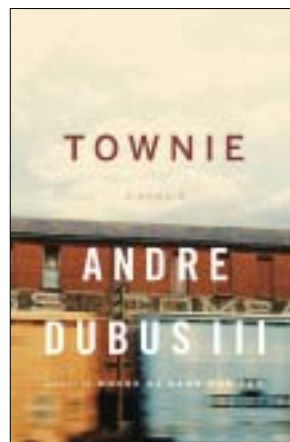
TOWNIE A Memoir

By Andre Dubus III
W. W. Norton. 400p \$25.95

When Andre Dubus III was 10 years old, his father, Andre, called "Pop," left his wife and four small children to be with a pretty, rich girl at tiny Bradford Junior College, where he taught English and creative writing. The former Mrs. Patricia Dubus first found work as a nurse's aide, then returned to college and got a job in social services. But she was gone all day and exhausted when home. Even with Pop's alimony, the family of five was forced to live in squalor on a diet of sodas and Frito casseroles in one cheap rented house after another in the failed mill town of Haverhill, Mass. Soon the oldest girl, Suzanne, was falling in with losers, and after-

noon parties with drugs and sullen strangers were common in the house. Andre's younger brother Jeb was focused on a hidden life in his room, practicing classical guitar and having an affair with an art teacher some 15 years older than he. And the oldest son, Andre III, was furiously learning boxing and inflating his muscles with weightlifting in order to protect his kin from the horrific, jail-worthy violence of "the Avenues."

The senior Andre Dubus was increasingly becoming an acclaimed writer of graceful, sensitive, acutely observed short stories during this period, but he was stunningly oblivious to what was happening to his abandoned children. Immersed in his fiction writing and teaching, he seemed not to notice the filth or lack of food in his former wife's house, or perhaps he just felt he could do nothing about it. Inviting Andre III over for a rare Sunday alone with his father, Pop



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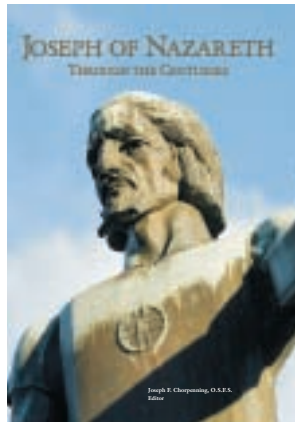
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seeks to fill the barbecuing time by playing catch but finds out his son has never learned to throw a baseball and never heard of his Pop's beloved Red Sox, since his father never thought to invite him to a game. When he is later introduced to the woman who will become his father's third wife, he'll have to ask where Manhattan is, and when later he is serving drinks at a party, he will hear about Harvard Law School and have no clue about it.

It is only when Andre III enrolls in Bradford that father and son get to know each other, but then it is as hale and hearty drinking buddies, with Pop interested in the same co-eds and too much impressed with his son's willingness to launch himself into a merciless street fight with anyone foolish enough to insult him. But Andre III can still be humiliated by the undergraduate girl whom he overhears saying, "That's Dubus's son. Look at him. He's such a *townie*."

"I'd heard the word before," he reports. "They used it for the men they'd see at Ronnie D's bar down in Bradford Square, the place where my father drank with students and friends. It's where some men from the town drank, too—plumbers and electricians and millworkers, Sheetrock hangers and housepainters and off-duty cops: townies." Andre III escaped the stigma by quitting school and then heading west to the University of Texas, where he became a Marxist, earned a degree in sociology and took up meditation. And then, in discontent and desperation back in Massachusetts, he discovered the yen to write fiction just as his father had, and he sold his first-ever story to *Playboy* magazine.

"I felt more like me than I ever had, as if the years I'd lived so far had formed layers of skin and muscle over myself that others saw as me when the real one had been underneath all along, and writing—even writing badly—had peeled away those layers,

and I knew then that if I wanted to stay this awake and alive, if I wanted to stay me, I would have to keep writing."

Andre Dubus III would later publish *The Cagekeeper and Other Stories* and the novel *Bluesman*, but it was in 2000, when Oprah Winfrey chose his *House of Sand and Fog* for her book club, and which was later made into an Academy Award-nominated film, that he found a public recognition far wider than his father's.

Andre senior was dead by then, having suffered a heart attack at age 62 after being confined to a wheelchair for 12 years following a freak car accident that dramatically changed and

softened him. And his son was a changed man, too, a husband and father who had given up his vicious responses to others after recognizing how much his own aggressiveness cost him, both emotionally and spiritually.

Looking into the New Testament in his distress, he chanced upon the line, "Love one another." His frankly confessional, even-tempered, often shocking memoir is a testament not just to a stubborn, against-all-odds survival but to a healed man who has found the redemptive power in fulfilling that command.

RON HANSEN's novel *A Wild Surge of Guilty Passion* will be published in June.

THOMAS P. RAUSCH

MISSION-DRIVEN

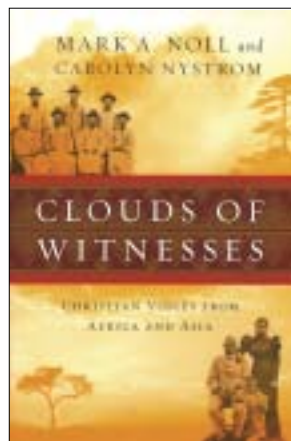
CLOUDS OF WITNESSES Christian Voices From Africa And Asia

By Mark A. Noll and
Carolyn Nystrom
InterVarsity Press. 286p \$25

If Protestants came late to missionary work, at least in part because of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination that made evangelization seem unnecessary, they more than made up for their tardiness in the late 19th and 20th centuries, and those they influenced have helped change the face of global Christianity. At the beginning of the last century, more than four-fifths of the world's Christians lived in Europe or North America. Today, about two-thirds of them live outside those areas. This book, by Mark Noll of Notre Dame and Carolyn Nystrom, a freelance

writer from Chicago, tells the stories of 17 men and women from Africa, India, Korea and China who played significant roles in planting Christianity in those countries. The authors acknowledge that their survey is fragmentary and preliminary. It is largely limited to those formed by the evangelical movement, though they include the stories of several others not easily categorized and of one Roman Catholic, Ignatius Kung Pin-Mei, bishop of Shanghai, who spent 30 years in prison, more than one-third of his life, for refusing to join the government-sponsored Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. In 1979 Pope John Paul II named him a cardinal *in pectore*, though Pin-Mei did not learn of this until 10 years later.

The legacies of some were mixed. John Chilembwe, born in Malawi, studied for more than two years at



Lynchburg, Va., where his contact with American racism radicalized his own views on race and justice. On his return to Africa, he worked to protect African rights and led an uprising against British colonial powers in Malawi in 1915. John Sung, a Chinese evangelist with a doctorate in chemistry from the United States, preached in a histrionic style like that of Billy Sunday; at one point he spent six months in a psychiatric hospital. Y. T. Wu (Wu Yaozong), a Chinese follower of the social gospel, moved from pacifism after Japan's brutal occupation of much of China to an embrace of Mao Zedong's Communism. The leading role he played in the growth of the "Three-Self Movement" was at the cost of other Christian communities that remained unregistered or belonged to larger ecclesial communions, even if it helped Protestant Christianity survive the dark days of Mao's regime.

The stories of many in the book continue to inspire. Albert Luthuli, a Zulu chief born in 1898 in Bulawayo in what is now Zimbabwe, was a lay preacher inspired by the doctrine of creation in the *imago Dei*, the image of God. A leader in the African National Congress, he fought for justice all his life and received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1960. Janani Luwum, from northern Uganda, was a member of the Acholi tribe. As Anglican archbishop of Kampala, he worked regularly with Catholic leaders. After the diverting of an Air France flight to Entebbe airport and the dramatic rescue of its Israeli hostages, he became increasingly active in criticizing Idi Amin's government, even though he continued to try to work with its representatives. He was murdered on Feb. 16, 1977, possibly by Amin himself.

Pandita Ramabai was a Hindu woman, born in 1858; after her conversion she devoted herself to the education of women and the securing of their rights. V. S. Azariah, born

into a Christian family in the south-east of India, was an evangelist who contributed to the growth of the Y.M.C.A. in India and later became the first Indian bishop in the Anglican Church and its second non-Briton. Shi Meiyu, also known as Mary Stone, was born in Jiujiang to a family converted by Methodist missionaries; she studied at the University of Michigan. Returning to China as a medical doctor, she founded a hospital and later a nursing school at Jiujiang, which combined medical training with evangelism. Today her school is part of Jiujiang University, a four-campus institution with over 30,000 students.

A number of those whose stories are told have helped shape both church life and Christian theology in their countries. Some recognized the importance of developing a truly inculturated theology. Byang Kato, a Nigerian, early on saw the importance

of developing a theology by and for Africans. Today there are evangelical theological schools and journals in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa that reflect his influence. Others sought to establish indigenous Christian communities free of denominational entanglements. In India, Sundar Singh, a mystic born of a Sikh family in northwest India, sought to integrate Indian models of spirituality into his understanding of Christian faith. In his words, "Indians need the Water of Life, but not the European cup." The "Three-Self Movement," churches that were "self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating," was not an invention of the Chinese Communist Party but grew out of the idea of indigenous local churches encouraged by missionaries like the Americans Rufus Anderson (1796-1880) and John Nevius (1829-93) and the British missionary Roland Allen (1868-1947). In China, missionaries

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like John Sung and W. T. Wu favored house churches, which are now growing rapidly in China.

Because of the evangelical focus of the book, Catholic missionary work is mentioned only in passing, but it was significant. Beginning in the 16th and 17th centuries, Jesuit, Franciscan and other Catholic missionaries in China and Japan created Christian communities that endured to modern times. In 1952, when Western missionaries had to leave China, there were one million Protestants and three million Catholics. These Christians paid a high price for their faith. An estimated 8,000 mostly lay Korean Catholics

were killed in the mid-19th century. During the Boxer Rebellion (1900-1), some 4,000 Protestants and 30,000 Catholics died in China. But the remarkable stories of these African and Asian men and women, ordained and lay, professionally trained or charismatic, whose zeal and commitment planted the faith so widely is inspirational for Catholics as well as evangelicals at a time when the Catholic Church is becoming more conscious of its evangelical mission.

THOMAS P. RAUSCH, S.J., is the T. Marie Chilton Professor of Catholic Theology at Loyola Marymount University.

DAVID VAN BIEMA

REASONS TO BELIEVE

IN THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW On the Foundations Of Religious Belief

By James L. Kugel
Free Press. 256p \$26

One of the abiding mysteries in the Book of Psalms, a work that James Kugel, Starr Professor of Hebrew Literature emeritus at Harvard, has studied probably as fruitfully as any living person, is the sudden pivot in many of the so-called Psalms of Lamentation (or Complaints). Four-fifths of the way through, songs intensely devoted to bemoaning their authors' dire straits abruptly shrug off their sackcloth and seem to proclaim, "Despite the fact that my bones are melting and my heart failing, I assert my faith in You."

In his latest, most personal book, *In the Valley of the Shadow*, Kugel advances a proposal that solves that particular mystery, although it extends beyond the psalms: that rather than "Despite all that," it is "because of all that"—because of the experience of

helplessness, because of the "eerie proximity" to death illustrated in the Complaints—that we profess faith. Tragedy lies in the loss of that sense of helplessness.

This insight did not come cheap. Ten years ago, when he was 54, Kugel's doctors diagnosed him with cancer (he never specifies what kind) and gave him two years, perhaps five, to live. Obviously, he has beaten the odds—the doctors now say he is cancer-free. (In the years since, in fact, he produced his magnificent and provocative *How to Read the Bible*.) But during his illness and grueling treatment, he inhabited the place where, as he puts it, the background music suddenly stopped—that is, "the music of daily life...of infinite time and possibilities...now suddenly...replaced by nothing."

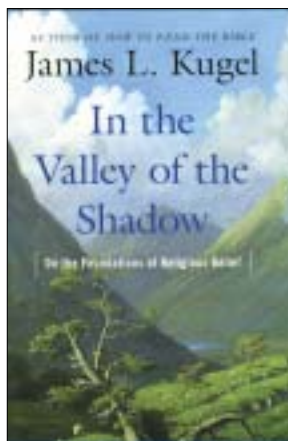
Most people lucky enough to experience that state and survive would hurry to forget it. Kugel does not chase

the memories, but he regards the fact that "they keep following me around" as a "privileged insight." For him, the eerie proximity, the sense of his life as a "compact, little thing," of having a "semi-permeable soul," of inhabiting "a stark world"—the book is poetic, as obsessed with naming and renaming the condition as analyzing it—is both the door to faith at its elemental level and the reason moderns find it increasingly hard to enter.

For if Kugel's subject is the "small" state of mind, his goad was his hospital-bed reading on scientific explanations for religion and the New Atheist literature that cites them. *In the Valley* is Kugel's own idiosyncratic volley in the God/no-God wars. He found himself both fascinated and exasperated by evolutionary biologists' contention that religion is a "hyperactive agency detection device," the reflex of attributing agency to every random ripple of the tall grass because back in the day, a saber-tooth tiger would often jump out. As big predators declined, goes the argument, the hypersensitivity to inexplicable phenomena lived on; and God or gods, the ultimate Agent, became the (erroneous) receptacle for all the corresponding emotion.

Kugel demurs. He concludes that however archaic our agency detection device may be, it remains valid regarding the one irreducible mystery of material life: death. Our error, really our calamity, which he tracks back as far as the early Middle Ages, is that

as we have gradually subtracted phenomena from the inexplicable list we have come to think of our own role as progressively "bigger," to the point where all agents outside of those huge selves have been crowded out, rendering faith incomprehensible. At which



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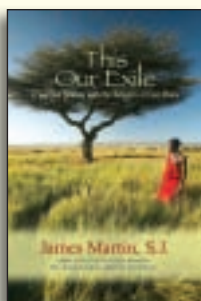
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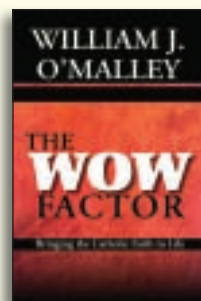
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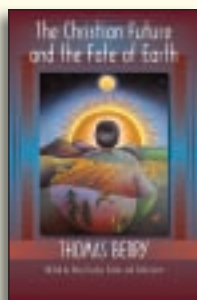
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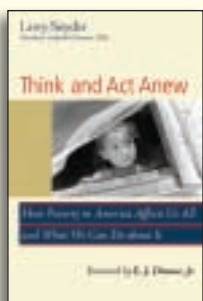
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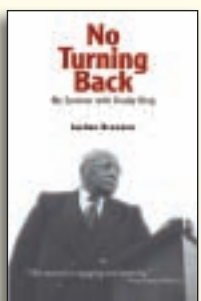
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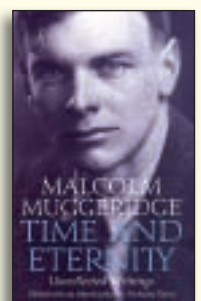
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point death, the exception, becomes unbearably terrifying. Nor does Kugel think that moderns can recover our former sense of the cosmos: "There we hang, so big that we can barely see that which is real but...outside ourselves, and utterly unable to return to what was an earlier, truer sense of things."

This is plausible but hardly conventionally uplifting, first, because one hates to feel this lost. And also because even if we could recover the old way of seeing, we would regain our reason to believe, but not (by this particular argument) any content for that belief. This is an occupational hazard of arguing God/no-God; but Kugel once wrote a book called *On Being a Jew*, so presumably there was some kind of faith ready when he needed it. He does not explore it here.

Offsetting the aridity of his destination, however, is the ride. Kugel has always worn his great erudition not just lightly but alluringly, and a memoir/polemic frees him as never before. He unveils a stream of perfectly framed illustrations, associations and digressions featuring everything from African witchcraft to the psalms (exemplifying art that expresses both

death's starkness and the only useful response) to Leonard Cohen to Wittgenstein to the ancient radio punch line "Was you dere, Charlie?" to the enduring puzzle of why we hit the elevator button when it clearly has already been pressed.

In *the Valley of the Shadow's* other virtue is Kugel's indelible insistence on his experience, in all its small, eerie particularity. At one point he compares himself to Tiresias, the mythical Greek who (involuntarily) shuttled back and forth from male to female and back again. This rendered him uniquely wise, but inquirers sometimes found his wisdom disquieting. In the admittedly vast American genre of near-death tales, it is hard to imagine another book simultaneously so tough-minded, so uncanny and yet, despite all, so enjoyable. Kugel's last line is, "From way up here...I can see you all, floating." What makes this unnerving is that he is still down here, writing. What makes us grateful is the same thing.

DAVID VAN BIEMA is writing a book on the history and cultural interpretation of the *Psalms*.

potter: "He does not understand" (Isa 29:16).

Are such words blasphemous? Was God foolish making us as we are? Or was God inept? Did the one who fashioned us misunderstand our makeup or our propensities? But who of us has not at times harbored some of these same questions? Who has not asked: Why did God make the world the way it is? Realizing that these are questions posed by believers, and devout believers at that, we can turn again to the first words of the poem and perhaps even make them our own.

The poems in *God's Invitation: Meditations on a Covenant Relationship* flow from Thomas Flowers's reflections on episodes from his own life, coupled with aspects of various biblical characters or events that somehow relate to those episodes. The 20 reflections are creatively gathered under five headings, each directly corresponding to one of the Old Testament covenants: the covenant that God initiated with creation (Gn 9:16-17); with Abraham and his descendants (Gn 17:5-7); with the Israelites at Sinai (Ex 20:5); with David and his dynasty (2 Sm 7:16); and with all those open to a new covenant (Jer 31:31-33). Flowers, a Jesuit scholastic, artfully weaves together threads that are variously colored by his own experience, vivid strands taken from biblical

accounts and others that bear especially the hue of covenant theology. The poems are Flowers's responses to the ways he sees God active in his own life. They are personal prayers that reveal aspects of his own spirituality and explain the familiarity with which he speaks to God.

Poets always reveal themselves in their poetry.

Flowers's self-revelation is twofold, in his poem-prayers and in his recollec-

DIANNE BERGANT

GOODNESS IN OUR MIDST

GOD'S INVITATION Meditations on a Covenant Relationship

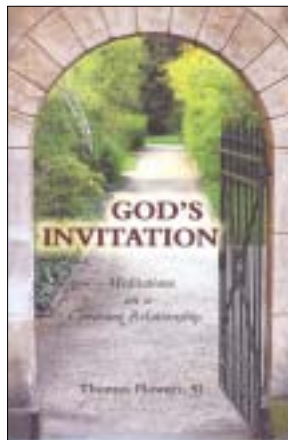
By Thomas Flowers, S.J.
Paulist Press. 128p \$12.95 (paperback)

*If you made us for yourself
You truly are a fool.*

—"Credo"

If the first words of this poem do not get the reader's attention, very little will. They are obviously words of a believer, one who acknowledges the existence of the Creator. Though defi-

nately a believer, this poet still appears to be something of a skeptic, wondering about God's intentions, the value of the Creator's creation and perhaps the skill with which God creates. Nonetheless, the sentiment in the poem is reminiscent of a passage found in the Book of Isaiah. Employing the image of God as a potter, the prophet wonders if the vessel dares say of the



tions. Though very personal, these reflections are not self-indulgent or self-promoting. Rather, they present to the reader examples of how one's reflection on events in one's life can illuminate

the deeper meaning of biblical stories and how, comparably, reflection on biblical stories can provide insight into the religious significance of personal events. The events that he describes are quite commonplace—struggling as a teacher, working in a retirement center, enjoying the ocean. But he came to see a much deeper reality in these everyday experiences—realizing that God had accomplished much good through him, seeing the beauty of human beings in the brokenness of life, allowing the magnificence of creation to recreate him. His reflections invite the reader to ponder her or his own life in order to discover there the goodness of God, even in the midst of the ordinary.

Flowers's observations on the biblical stories stem from his interest in them as stories. He does not analyze them as a scholar might, nor does he read into them meaning that is not already there. He lifts the characters off the biblical pages and introduces them to the reader as women and men of flesh and blood, people who struggle with the realities of life as we all do. The difference between them and us is the fact that their stories have endings, endings that we know. We, on the other hand, are still moving toward the endings of our stories. But that is precisely why Flowers has us meet them. The ending of their stories assures us that God will always be with us, as God was with them.

The personal reflections in this volume lay bare human limitations and neediness. The initial poem, with its startling beginning, and all the poems that follow reflect not on these limitations or neediness but on God's gra-

riousness in the face of them. Judging by human standards, one might say that it was foolish of God to make women and men who, at the slightest provocation, would fail to live

up to their potential. God is not bound to human standards, however, but lavishes extraordinary blessings on weak

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and unreliable human beings. That is why this initial poem, after pointing out God's graciousness, ends:

*And so you are a fool,
Which is, of course,
Why I love you.*

DIANNE BERGANT, C.S.A., a former *Word* columnist for *America*, is professor of biblical studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.

BILL WILLIAMS

REMEMBERING RAY

A WIDOW'S STORY A Memoir

By Joyce Carol Oates
Ecco. 432p \$27.99

Millions of readers are familiar with the oeuvre of Joyce Carol Oates, who has written well over 100 books of fiction, short stories, plays and poetry and is the recipient of numerous literary awards.

In *A Widow's Story* Oates describes in wrenching detail her excruciating grief after the death of her husband, Raymond Smith, following a short illness three years ago. She is overcome by a "kind of visceral terror" and sinks into depression, loses weight, endures sleepless nights and blames herself for not taking better care of her husband.

"I just feel exhausted, groggy around people and want to crawl away somewhere and sleep," she tells a friend.

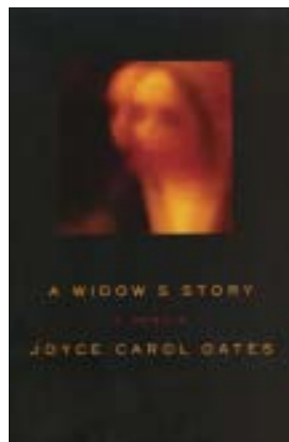
She struggles with resentment, despair, rage, bitterness, fury and guilt and often thinks about suicide, but in the end rejects that option. Within

days of her husband's death, the author's "consoling fantasy" is to "swallow as many pills as seem feasible, to put myself to sleep; that is, to sleep forever; for truly I want to die, I am so very tired." Oates accumulates bottles of pills for depression and worries that she will become addicted.

Oates is assailed by a voice she identifies as a basilisk, a mythical lizard-like monster that insists she is "utterly unloved...of no more worth than a pail of garbage." She is so paralyzed by grief that she has neither the physical nor mental energy to begin writing again. "No more could I plan a new novel than I could trek across the Sahara or Antarctica," she says.

Momentary consolation comes when she discovers an unsent Valentine card "To My Beloved Wife" and a short phone message left the very night Smith died: "This is your honey calling."

The author effectively uses repetition, returning again and again to the days before and immediately after the death of her 77-year-old husband, the highly regarded founder and editor of



The Ontario Review, who awoke early one morning in February 2008 not feeling well. Oates insisted on taking him to the emergency room at nearby Princeton Medical Center in New Jersey, where he was diagnosed with pneumonia. They both expected a quick recovery but within a week Oates received a call, at 12:38 a.m., requesting that she come quickly. When she arrived at the hospital, her husband was dead. She cannot grasp that awful fact and wishes she could “stop time...reverse time.”

Library shelves are filled with books about grief. Some people may compare this one with Joan Didion's affecting memoir, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, which became a widely praised best-seller six years ago. But comparing grief memoirs misses the point that there is no single way to grieve. For Oates, grief is “like a sodden overcoat the widow must wear.”

We do not learn how long the author suffered or how she is doing today because the book covers a period of only a few months after her husband's death.

Oates struggles, without success, to find meaning in her numbing grief. “I am no longer convinced that there is any inherent value in grief,” she writes. “Or, if there is, if wisdom springs from the experience of terrible loss, it's a wisdom one might do without.” She wonders if a widow's grief is “sheer vanity; narcissism; the pretense that one's loss is so special, so very special, that there has never been a loss quite like it.”

The book quotes extensively from e-mail messages to and from Oates, although in many cases she leaves out the sender's name, believing it is “unconscionable” to humiliate others in the name of full disclosure. She rails against a deluge of sympathy baskets sent by well-meaning friends. She tosses many of them into the trash and pleads, “No! No more of this! Please have mercy.”

Oates becomes intensely curious

about her husband's early life, wondering if she ever really knew him. Her husband had grown up in a strict Catholic family at a time when many such families hoped that one of their sons would become a priest. Smith entered a Catholic seminary at age 18, but within months he quit, which led to estrangement from his father, who believed he would be held responsible if his son went to hell. Whenever Oates tried to bring up the subject of Smith's seminary experience and loss of faith, he refused to talk about it.

Oates, too, was raised in a Catholic family, although no one in her family discussed religion. Surprisingly, the author says almost nothing about her own spiritual beliefs. If she ever wonders what happens after physical

death, she gives no hint of it here. Yet she acknowledges being touched when her friend Gloria Vanderbilt gave her a small statue of St. Theresa.

On the last page of this intensely felt memoir, Oates briefly mentions a small dinner party for some Princeton colleagues, including a neuroscientist she was meeting for the first time. What she does not say is that she and the neuroscientist later married.

That tantalizing and unexpected turn of events may have served as a bridge that led Oates from crippling grief to a new, happier life, which I hope will become the subject of a sequel.

BILL WILLIAMS is a freelance writer in West Hartford, Conn., and a former editorial writer for *The Hartford Courant*. He is a member of the National Book Critics Circle.

FILMMAKING | PAUL MARIANI

SEARCHERS

James Franco, Hart Crane and me

You're standing on the fourth step of an old brownstone stoop in Brooklyn Heights, N.Y., on a cold, raw, cloudy morning in early December. It's 7:30 a.m. and you've been up since 6:00 a.m., when two young women came to the door and began transforming your 70-year-old self into the 58-year-old photographer Alfred Stieglitz, who was married to the painter Georgia O'Keeffe and who reinvented photography for the modern age. You're wearing an authentic suit of clothes dating back to the 1920s, an overcoat that you can barely button, a fedora and a pair of leather shoes that must weigh five pounds, which you must negotiate with. They have removed your own glasses and given you a pair of wire-rimmed glasses with little oval lenses through which the world looks distorted and teary. Then there's the fluffed-out graying hair and that gray-white moustache to top it all off.

You look into the mirror and swear that you are looking at the ghost of your father and grandfather, those quintessential New Yorkers who lived just across the East River in Stieglitz's time.

Now you're looking into the eyes of the actor James Franco, who is on the cement sidewalk below you. He is speaking fast and reverently up at you. He is dressed in a handsome old camel coat and striped sweater. He—or rather the poet Hart Crane, whom he is portraying—is telling you how much your photographs, especially the new batch you took up at Lake George earlier that year, have spoken to his own sense of the kinetic possibilities of the image for the poetry he wants to create.

By which you (you meaning the biographer and poet, but likewise the dead photographer Stieglitz standing there) take him to mean the sense of a

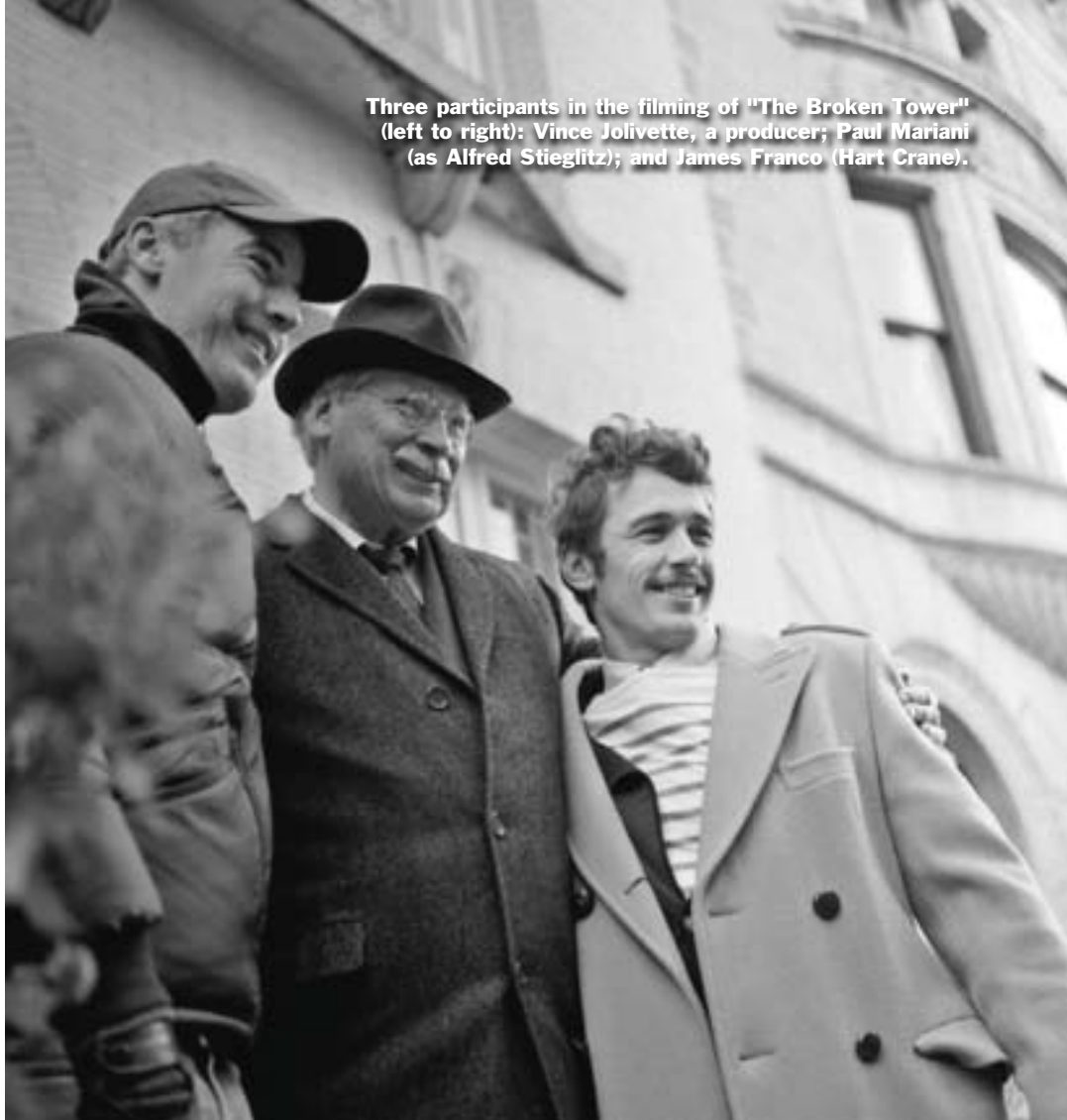
majestic, larger-than-life image that will lend a myth to God. You (the poet) take this to mean a kind of dynamic stillness, the still point of the turning world, what he—the poet—has found in that icon of New York: the 140-year-old Brooklyn Bridge that strides the East River just blocks from here.

“Apples and gable,” you say after a nervous hesitation, which you hope will come across as a considered profundity. It is spoken with a slight Jewish-German accent to recreate what you take Stieglitz’s voice to be, considering he was raised in Hoboken, N.J., and spent 15 years of his youth studying photography in Berlin before returning to the States. You have practiced those three words before a mirror countless times, and you are still afraid you’re going to blurt out “apples and oranges,” but you don’t. The scene is shot once to the quiet applause of the young film crew taking all of this in. James looks pleased.

Good, he says, but let’s do a second take for insurance, and we do. We shake hands and Hart Crane walks off down the deserted street to see Charlie Chaplin in the classic film “The Kid.” You turn and walk up the steps as your moustache begins to slide down over your lips.

The Movie of the Book

Two years ago, James Franco’s agent e-mailed me to say Franco was interested in turning my biography of Hart Crane, *The Broken Tower*, into a movie. The book’s title is after the last poem Crane wrote before he killed himself at the age of 32 by jumping from the stern of the S.S. Orizaba somewhere off the coast of Florida. He was returning, broken in spirit, to the “chained bay waters,” as he called them,



Three participants in the filming of “The Broken Tower” (left to right): Vince Jolivette, a producer; Paul Mariani (as Alfred Stieglitz); and James Franco (Hart Crane).

of the East River and New York. The date was April 27, 1932, just before noon—eight bells. He had been severely beaten by members of the ship’s crew hours earlier after trying to hit on one of them, even as his fiancée was in her cabin sleeping.

Hart Crane—Harold Hart Crane—born in 1899 in Garrettsville, Ohio, raised in Cleveland, was the only child of a set of horribly mismatched parents who seemed always to be going at one another. The boy from the Midwest meant to change American literature as those other two Midwesterners, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, would also do. In spite of everything, Hart (he took

his mother’s family name to replace Harold when he reinvented himself and moved to New York) was going to show America a sense of new possibilities. He saw Walt Whitman as his gay brother-in-arms and Isadora Duncan as the courageous figure who would remake dance and movement for the young century. When T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* was published in 1922—good, Hart thought, but so damned dead—he saw it as his duty to rewrite that epic and give it an optimistic ending mirrored in the Brooklyn Bridge, which, against the odds of Tammany Hall and business-as-usual, had actually been built and stood now, like a New World cathedral, replete with its

ON THE WEB

Karen Sue Smith reviews the film “Poetry.” americamagazine.org/culture

Gothic towers and choiring strings playing on by the North Atlantic day and night, sleepless and spanning the river of time below.

"How many dawns, chill from his rippling rest," Crane would write from his rooms facing the East River and the bridge itself, rising like Rip Van Winkle from his long sleep into the vision of those white buildings down in Manhattan's business district, transfigured by the morning light reflecting back across the river, the Woolworth skyscraper rising into the heavens like a vision of some New Jerusalem:

*How many dawns, chill from his
rippling rest
The seagull's wings shall dip and
pivot him,
Shedding white rings of tumult,
building high
Over the chained bay waters
Liberty—*

A new day, a new dawn, a new era, a brave announcement more than a question, shaped by this gull, this joke, this sod, this Charlie Chaplin figure in baggy pants and bowler, who would either prevail or die trying.

This energy, this promise, this brilliance, this tragic dance that was Hart Crane's short life, I have learned to my amazement, is what the young James Franco, now 32, has captured in his filming of *The Broken Tower*. Franco is a brilliant young actor who seems to have modeled himself after that icon of

the 1950s, James Dean, even to the point of taking his first name and rendering Dean in a biopic. His portrayal of that tragic actor, who died in a car crash on a highway in central California back in 1955, still awes me.

"If James says he's going to do something," Miles Levy, his agent, told me one August morning 20 months ago in a hotel down in Soho, "he does it." I took that statement with a New Yorker's grain of salt, but the truth is that—if James says he is going to do something, he does it. I've been lucky enough to work with him and his good friend Vince Jolivette, often via Blackberry and e-mails back and forth, forth and back, about every conceivable question under the sun, such as poets and biographers don't normally deal with, but which actors and directors do—everything from translations of Catullus's salty language (in the original Latin) to the Danish accent of Hart Crane's lover, Emil Opffer, to the music Crane would have heard in Taxco as he beat the ancient Aztec drums in the broken tower of the Catholic cathedral there.

The Searching Heart

James recently flew into Boston's Logan Airport on the red-eye out of Los Angeles, where he was picked up in a black limo by his driver and deposited at the Crowne Plaza in Newton, Mass., where I waited for him with three pots of coffee, skim milk, granola and fresh fruit. We sat

down at once to business. We went over the most recent cut of the film—black and white, 100 minutes—that had been delivered to me the night before at my home 90 miles to the west. What about Robert Lowell's take on the poet in his "Words for Hart Crane"? What was Lowell's take on Crane's homosexuality? What was Hart Crane's vision of America, coming as it did 70 years after Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and the bloodletting of the Civil War and the Spanish-American War and World War I?


What about Allen Ginsberg's take on Hart Crane? After all, James had rendered Ginsberg in his film adaptation of the legal proceedings that stemmed from the publication of his long poem, "Howl," back in the late '50s. What about the pacing of the film he was creating in what he calls *Twelve Voyages*—named after Crane's own "Voyages" sequence? What about the voiceovers? What about the flamboyance of Crane's lifestyle, wolfing down sailors in Brooklyn or Paris or Cuba or Mexico? How to reconcile that with the almost mystical sensibility of the man?

What about the juxtaposition of 1920s jazz pieces against the recurrent "Dona nobis pacem" one hears? Or the crash of waves against the shore, the wind brushing against the trees along the Seine in the Paris sequence James filmed months ago? Or the low bellow of a cow in a field somewhere on the Isle of Pines off Cuba? Or—even more poignantly—the long, ineluctable silence of the heart in search of answers?

It is the search that holds, I have come to see over these past months, Hart Crane and James Franco and the biographer together as one.

PAUL MARIANI, poet, biographer and memoirist, former poetry editor of *America*, is the University Professor of English at Boston College, where James Franco's adaptation of Mariani's biography of Hart Crane, *The Broken Tower*, was screened before a large audience of students on April 15.

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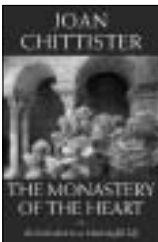
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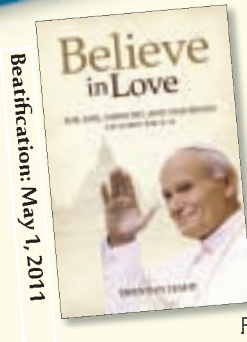
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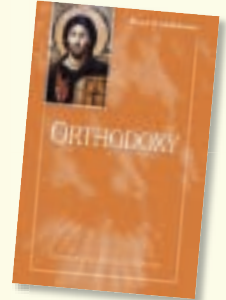


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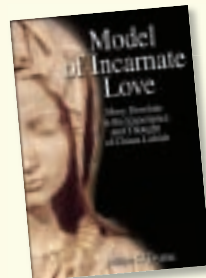
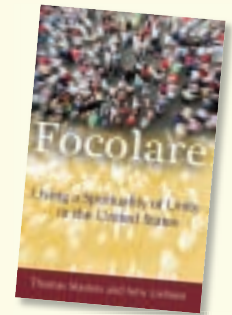
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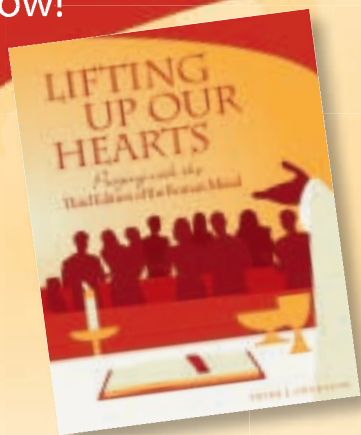
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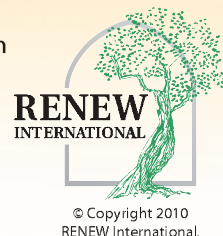
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LETTERS

Both Call It Home

Rabbi Daniel E. Polish's "A Spiritual Home" (4/11) puts in perspective the historical/spiritual roots of Judaism. As the author points out, there is much more than politics at work in Israel; but it appears to me that his argument could equally be made about the Palestinians. With both groups (along with Christians) laying claim to the land, I wonder how Jews, Palestinians and Christians (to a lesser degree) will resolve this morass. But the violence only perpetuates more violence, and another generation grows up feeling persecuted. May Jerusalem (Israel) find a true path to peace.

SCOTT HILL
Oakland, Calif.

Both Off to a Bad Start

As an American citizen, I support an Israeli state. I do so realizing, as Rabbi

Daniel F. Polish hints in "A Spiritual Home" (4/11), that I do not fully grasp the essential meaning of an Israeli state for the Jewish people. However, neither do I adhere to the anthropocentric view that God takes sides in military conflicts. The problem with the original, biblical Promised Land is that it was already occupied, requiring a military campaign of conquest and expansion.

But before we throw stones at the Israeli government, we should look at our own historical backyard. The idea of "manifest destiny" was used to exterminate the Native Americans and make room for us. Now the descendants of the original Native Americans are relegated to isolation and poverty. The beginnings of both Israel and the United States are mired in the concept of a God-given right to resort to military violence. The outcome is always short-lived and ineffective.

CHARLES HAMMOND
Sandusky, Mich.

Not Much Choice

Signs of the Times (4/4) reports questions about the ethics of nuclear energy. Oil is finite, and burning it to produce electricity pollutes the air. Nuclear energy can irradiate the surrounding area and, to a lesser extent, the world. Natural gas might have to be mined by "fracking," which you mention in the same issue's editorial, and that contaminates water and air. Hydroelectric power involves a dam, and dams are bad because the artificial lakes created are shallow and heat up too easily, so the fish die.

Let's face it—any other so-called benign forms of energy (solar, wind, whatever) are years if not decades off, even if the market were competitive. We will have to fine-tune and come up with better ways of using conventional energy sources for the time being. The alternative is to regress 100 years or more in destructive ways. Yes, safety and ethics should rule, just not to the

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point of paralysis.

Had we been doing this all along, in small, modest, well-reviewed bits, by now we would be in a much more energy-friendly environment and less dependent on foreign nations. So the foes of the current forms of energy should continue to point out the dangers honestly, but they should drop the ideological commitment many seem to have against them.

PETER M. BLASCUCCI
North Baldwin, N.Y.

Priests and Nurses, Stay Home

With regard to “Nursing Shift,” (3/28): For 10 years I’ve been listening to foreign-born priests struggle to pray and preach in English. I know they are here in part to help the church avoid ordaining women and married men, but I have wondered who is preaching to their own people back home. Have we created a kind of spiritual brain drain from third world countries in an effort to fill our own pulpits? Meanwhile, qualified leaders sit in the pews. I welcome the cultural exchange and service to immigrant communities these priests represent, but I hope this will be balanced by the kind of recruitment Gary Chamberlain advocates for nurses. The developed countries should redouble their efforts to train priests and nurses of their own.

CATHERINE MARESCA
Washington, D.C.

Too Old for Young Priests

“Bless Me, Father...” by Frank Moan, S.J. (4/4), reminds me that I have not been in the confessional for decades and it is unlikely that I ever will be. This is hubris, perhaps, or sins too great to acknowledge and share with anyone. And I am too old to speak to

the young, conservative priests, who are all very provincial and speak in the patois of the 19th century following the First Vatican Council. None grasp the relation of the social problems of today—poverty, disaster, corporate sin and war—to the weekly Scripture lessons read rapidly without drama or persuasion by a select group of weak voices that never look up at the congregation. Presumption and despair!

THOMAS CHISHOLM
Chippewa Falls, Wis.

Colonialism Is Back

Re “Air Campaign Broadens: Bishops Apprehensive” (Signs of the Times, 4/11): Europe and the United States are playing fast and loose with human rights issues that make military intervention and wide expansion of a U.N. resolution appear “humanitarian” in Libya but not in the rest of Africa or the Middle East. Certainly this will ultimately be seen—probably is already seen—as a neocolonialist approach and an attempt to establish an African beachhead. Shame!

DAVID PASINSKI
Fayetteville, N.Y.

The Irish Are Not Stupid

In “The Irish Question” (Current Comment, 4/4), it appears that **America’s** editors agree with Fintan O’Toole in calling the Irish stupid. Nice that. But the facts are different from the way you present them and people now imagine them. No bank held a gun to the head of anybody to make anybody take a loan. I have

friends who have houses and paid over the odds. When I told them this, they laughed at me and called me a “scaremonger.” Now it is all the banks’ fault. But everybody is to blame, not just politicians and bankers. The Irish government took the same route as Obama; but I do not recall **America** taking the U.S. president to task. Nor should you. If he avoided the depression, how is that different from what the Irish government did? Populism is popular in the short run but meets with reality sooner or later.

DAVID POWER
London, U.K.

Not Forgotten

Thank you for Christopher Pramuk’s “A Hidden Sorrow” (4/11), a tender, heartfelt and faith-filled reflection that is at once prayerful and poetic in the best sense of the word. As I read this and cried, I remembered my own mother sharing with me as a boy that she had lost a child before I was born. (He was stillborn at 5 months, misdiagnosed as a tumor.) When she lost him, my dad was in Germany during World War II. When I was 3 years old, my mother lost another child, a beautiful little girl born three months premature. It was 1949, and they could not save those babies then. My father remembered that little girl all his life, till his death at 81. Through my tears as I write this, I look forward to the Great Day, when we will all be reunited in the home where there is no more death.

KEN LOVASIK
Pittsburgh, Pa.



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America (ISSN 0002-7049) is published weekly (except for 12 combined issues: Jan. 3-10-17, 24-31, May 2-9, June 6-13, 20-27, July 4-11, 18-25, Aug. 1-8, 15-22, Aug. 29-Sept. 5, Nov. 28-Dec. 5, Dec. 19-26) 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 U.S.A.

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Conspiratory Faith

SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER (A), MAY 1, 2011

Readings: Acts 2:42-47; Ps 118:2-24; 1 Pt 1:3-9; Jn 20:19-31

“He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (Jn 20:22)

An ancient way of determining when a person had died was to hold a mirror under the person’s nostrils to detect any trace of moist air indicating that there was still some breath of life. Before modern methods of cardiopulmonary resuscitation, a person who had stopped breathing was simply allowed to slip away. In today’s Gospel, the risen Christ reinfuses the breath of life into the constricted lungs of the believing community, releasing them from the fear that choked their ability to breathe together and to live fully for his mission.

The frightened disciples are gathered behind locked doors “for fear of the Jews.” In the aftermath of Jesus’ execution, their fear is understandable—will they be next? In the fourth Gospel, “the Jews” is code language for anyone who does not believe in and who opposes Jesus, even though Jesus himself and all his first disciples are Jews. The object of their fear is those who are like them in heritage yet not like them in terms of belief in Jesus.

Sometimes what we fear most is seeing that which we do not want to face in ourselves reflected in “the other.” Into the midst of this fearful space Jesus enters, inviting his disciples to accept the peace he desires for them. It is not a peace that ignores the brutality inflicted on him, as he shows them the

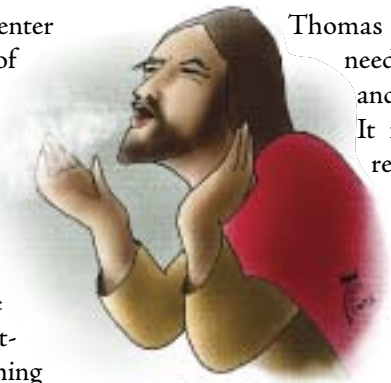
still visible wounds. It is a peace that recognizes full well the horror of what has occurred and results from a willingness to enter into processes of healing, forgiveness and reconciliation rather than retaliatory violence. An ability to see the wounds differently, not as something that needed to be avenged but as something that Christ was already able to heal with his peace and his spirit, enables the disciples to let their fear give way to joy.

What results is a rebirth of the community. Just as the Creator brings to life the first human being by breathing into its nostrils (Gn 2:7), so the risen Christ brings back to life the frightened community of his followers. This is not a painless process.

Recently, a friend suffered a collapsed lung. The intense pain he experienced when the lung was reinflated may be akin to the difficult process of transformation that Jesus’ disciples had to undergo. Before his death, Jesus spoke to them about this pain as birthpangs that would give way to joy when the new life emerged (Jn 16:20-22).

For some this rebirth takes place on the first day of the week after the resurrection. But not all are present and not all are moving to the same rhythm. The next week there are still some who

are locked in their fear and who set up what may appear impossible conditions before they will come to believe. Thomas voices their doubts: They need to see with their own eyes and touch with their own hands. It is not so much a stubborn resistance to believe what others have experienced that Thomas expresses as it is the necessity for each one to come to faith through a direct, personal encounter with Christ.



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- As you pray, focus on your breath, welcoming the divine breath of life that dissolves fear.
- What do you need to see and touch to come to greater belief?
- How do you “conspire,” or “breathe together,” with others in your believing community?

There can be no secondhand faith. The testimony of other believers leads one to Jesus, but it does not substitute for the tangible experience of Christ needed by each one. The Gospel also allows that there are different ways that people come to faith: some through seeing, some without. Both are blessed. No matter how one comes to believe, it is with a “conspiratory” faith community—people who “breathe together” through the Spirit, who dissolves fear by the use of peace, forgiveness and reconciliation.

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.

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