

VOCATIONS

America

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A Saint for Our Time

THE AMAZING PILGRIMAGE OF WALTER CISZEK

JOHN LEVKO

DO YOU HEAR
THE PEOPLE SING?

Michael V. Tueth and
Charles Klamut on
'Les Misérables'

OF MANY THINGS

Ciszek Hall is a converted six-story tenement, a plain pre-war building barely distinguishable from most of its neighbors in the Belmont section of the Bronx. The building is now home to 25 or so Jesuit scholastics who study at nearby Fordham University. The place is named for Walter Ciszek, S.J., who lived in the house following his return from Russia, where he had served as a missionary; in fact, Father Ciszek died in what is now the dining room.

Every day on their way to breakfast, the Jesuit scholastics pass by a framed copy of Father Ciszek's vow formula, a declaration, handwritten in Latin, of his Jesuit commitment to poverty, chastity and obedience. Every Jesuit makes his vows in the same words, which are addressed to God the Father: "By your boundless goodness and mercy," each man says in conclusion, "and through the blood of Jesus Christ, I humbly ask that you judge this total commitment of myself acceptable; and, as you have freely given me the desire to make this offering, so also may you give me the abundant grace to fulfill it."

We couldn't imagine a better centerpiece for our 2013 vocations issue than the amazing story of Father Ciszek's "total commitment." John Levko, S.J., gives us a sense of how Father Ciszek found "the abundant grace" to make his unlikely pilgrimage. It is quite a tale, one in which *America* also played a role: On Oct. 26, 1963, Thurston N. Davis, S.J., my predecessor as editor in chief (1955-68), recounted in this column, reprinted below, how the editors of *America* became a part of Father Ciszek's story.

MATT MALONE, S.J.

Early in the morning, on October 12, we headed through light pre-dawn traffic for a rendezvous at Idlewild [now John F. Kennedy International Airport] with an old Jesuit friend. Fr. Walter Ciszek

had just been released from the Soviet Union after almost 23 years of prison, hard labor and forcible detention. His relatives had a card from the Pennsylvania-born priest in 1940. Then nothing. World War II raged on and passed. No word from him. It was assumed he was dead, and his name was inscribed in the official list of the Society's departed members. Then, in 1955, came a letter. He had finished a 15-year prison term, had worked as a miner in Norilsk, within the Arctic Circle. Books and an overcoat reached him and were acknowledged. More letters. Appeals multiplied for his release.

On Monday, October 7, in Abakan, where he was working as a garage mechanic while carrying on his priestly work as best he could, he was told to go to Moscow and thence to the United States. So we were on our way, on Columbus Day, 1963, to greet him when he touched down at 6:55 a.m. on this strange voyage of rediscovery of America.

We stood on the airway apron as BOAC Flight 551 from London blocked to discharge its human cargo. Down the steps he came with slim, young Marvin W. Makinen, an American student who had been held for two years as a prisoner in the Soviet Union. In his green raincoat, grey suit, and big-brimmed Russian felt hat, Fr. Ciszek looked like the movie version of a stocky little Soviet member of an agricultural mission. As though by reflex, he and Makinen at once fell into step with ten New York policemen who formed a cordon around them. Off they marched. A reporter yelled "Hi, Father!" Ex-prisoner Ciszek looked up and smiled his first smile. Later we drove him to AMERICA for Mass and breakfast. We tried to shake an unknown man in a cab who tailed us. But he followed us to our door and then drove away. Thus began a day in AMERICA's history that we shall not forget. T.N.D.

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Cover: Walter Ciszek, S.J., on Oct. 12, 1963, the morning he returned from the Soviet Union. From *America's* archives.

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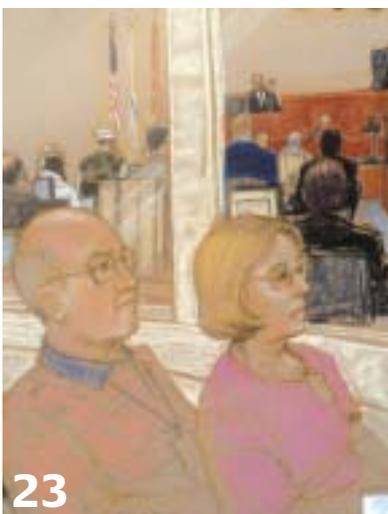
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Slaughter of Innocents

The horror and outrage provoked by the massacre in Newtown, Conn., offers the hope that the Sandy Hook Elementary School victims could be among the final victims of America's gun culture; but past experience, sadly, suggests otherwise. The familiar rebuttals to common sense responses to contain gun violence are already in play.

Some suggest the answer to a weaponized society is more weapons, as if the 283 million guns in circulation in the United States were not already a major component of the problem. The focus, others argue, should not be on gun restrictions but on improving the nation's mental health services. Fair enough. Surely more resources need to be devoted to diagnosing at-risk young people and to treatment. But no mental health system, however well resourced, will be foolproof. In China, on the same day that Adam Lanza launched his assault with a semiautomatic weapon, another disturbed man rampaged against schoolchildren. Although 22 were wounded in that incident, no fatalities were reported. The school attacker there did not have access to a firearm.

If we cannot control violence in the world, we can try to limit the damage. We can require training and liability insurance for gun owners, as well as trigger-lock mechanisms that prevent a non-owner from firing a weapon. We can control the nature of the weapons and ammunition we allow. We can simply reread that part of the Second Amendment that acknowledges the collective responsibility to maintain a "well-regulated" militia and ask, after Columbine, after Virginia Tech, after Aurora and now after Newtown, how well regulated the nation's self-appointed citizen militia appears.

We can also ask God and these children to forgive our indifference and fatigue in what has become a grueling civic fight over gun control.

Missed Opportunity to Lead

In December a minority of 38 senators defeated a proposal to ratify an international treaty called the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, based on the Americans With Disabilities Act. The convention would promote full equality before the law for disabled persons everywhere. To Senator John Kerry, this was a moral issue, an opportunity to lead other nations to treat the disabled as well as America does.

A treaty requires a simple two-thirds majority. The vote was 61 to 38—five short of victory. Two of the senators who had promised support switched to no at the last minute. The treaty had bipartisan support, particularly

from three Republican war veterans, President George H. W. Bush, Senator John McCain and Senator Bob Dole, who at 89 was wheeled in from Walter Reed Medical Center by his wife, Elizabeth, to bolster the cause and later wheeled out before the humiliating defeat.

Leading the opposition was the former presidential candidate Rick Santorum, father of a disabled child, who phoned in to "The Glenn Beck Program" and called another senator's reasoning "a big joke." Opponents feared that a U.N. committee could threaten American sovereignty and intrude on the parental rights of Americans to educate their own children.

The fight is not over. The bill will come before the Senate again in early 2013. This is a moral issue because it protects the most vulnerable; it is a bipartisan opportunity to do the right thing; and it is an ecumenical opportunity for the leadership of many faiths to call for justice with one voice. It deserves broad public support.

Undervalued

Work can be dignifying, but only when workers are treated with dignity. Unfortunately, more and more workers find themselves in jobs that neither pay well nor offer them hope for advancement or a career. In addition to poor benefits, including the almost complete disappearance of pension accounts, workers must now contend with a for-profit sector that prefers to hire temporary workers in lieu of permanent employees, who might demand higher wages and better benefits packages.

Underemployment is one of the saddest stories of this Great Recession. In addition to the unemployed workers in the United States (almost 8 percent), there are many more people who are underpaid and dissatisfied with the jobs they hold. Stores like Jamba Juice would prefer to hire a worker at 25 hours a week, even when she is available and willing to do more, because a full-time worker is more expensive. In this poor job market, employers can choose to be picky. In the United States, where the social safety net is fraying, the loss of permanent jobs threatens devastating effects.

The disappearance of full-time jobs is especially damaging to families and young people. When a job is temporary, termination always seems just around the corner, a state of affairs that only serves to weaken the family. And the enthusiasm of college graduates wanes quickly when they cannot find a permanent job, let alone a path to a satisfying career. Even the most menial of jobs can be satisfying if a worker knows she is working for the good of her family. For too many Americans, a paying job no longer offers hope for a better tomorrow.

Conflict of Interest

What could be more attractive to an American politician than the chance to appear both tough on crime and fiscally responsible? At a time when U.S. society faces the problem of overcrowded jails and prisons while also facing budget crises at every level of government, politicians are being offered a tempting solution to both problems: privatization of the nation's jails and prisons. The private, for-profit prison industry is eager to capitalize on the opportunity.

In early 2012 the Corrections Corporation of America, the largest private prison operator in the United States, sent a letter to officials in 48 states announcing its \$250-million business plan to purchase and manage local, state and federal prisons. Of course, there are strings attached. The minimum contract term is 20 years; facilities must have at least 1,000 beds; and these beds must remain at least 90 percent occupied for the entire term of the contract.

C.C.A. knows how to run a successful business. In 2011 alone it generated an impressive \$1.7 billion in total revenue—turning a profit of about \$160 million. And who foots the bill for contracts with private prisons? Taxpayers, of course. A coalition of faith organizations sent a letter to the 48 governors encouraging them to reject C.C.A.'s offer, calling it “dangerous and costly,” not just in terms of dollars and cents, but also “costly to the moral strength of your state.”

The United States currently imprisons more than 2.3 million of its citizens, the highest per capita incarceration rate in the world, and states alone spend about \$50 billion annually on corrections. As the nation's prison population increased steadily in recent decades (up from 250,000 in 1972), so did reliance on private prisons, which today hold nearly 130,000 inmates, many of them detained immigrants.

Of the practical and moral dangers associated with transferring incarceration responsibilities to private, for-profit companies, the most obvious is the conflict of interest. C.C.A. is accountable to shareholders, who expect a return on their investment. Good business means keeping the beds full. And since government is the only customer, C.C.A. alone has invested \$19.3 million in the past decade in lobbying and campaigning for candidates who favor stricter sentencing laws like mandatory minimum sentences, “three strikes” laws, harsher enforcement of immigration laws and “truth in sentencing.” Such laws keep more people in prison for longer amounts of time. The profit motive may also deter efforts to reduce recidivism, which should be a primary goal for any “correctional” facility.

Depriving a person of liberty in order to safeguard the common good is one of the most serious actions a government can take. This practice, which should be rare, requires maximum public accountability. There is, then, a seemingly irresolvable tension here between public accountability and private interest. At a minimum, if the government contracts with companies to run private prisons, then these must maintain high standards of transparency and accountability to taxpayers. In 2007 Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut introduced a bill that would have required private prisons to comply with the Freedom of Information Act. This bill should be reintroduced in the 113th Congress.



As for the economic benefits of privatization, studies reveal that private prisons offer few savings, if any. Arizona's State Department of Corrections reported in 2011 that inmates in private prison can in fact cost \$1,600 more per person per year. Private prisons can appear to be saving money because contracts typically shield them from having to accept inmates who are more expensive to house, whether for security or health reasons.

In 2000 the U.S. bishops issued a statement on crime and criminal justice that offered a compelling moral vision of justice and mercy, punishment and rehabilitation, accountability and forgiveness. It remains relevant today. “We call upon government,” wrote the bishops, “to redirect the vast amount of public resources away from building more and more prisons and toward better and more effective programs aimed at crime prevention, rehabilitation, education efforts, substance abuse treatment, and programs of probation, parole, and reintegration.” Such measures are long-term investments that will help avoid the extraordinarily high costs associated with mass incarceration.

The bishops also addressed the use of private prisons, questioning their efficacy. “The profit motive may lead to reduced efforts to change behaviors, treat substance abuse, and offer skills necessary for reintegration into the community,” the bishops wrote.

In a time of overcrowded prisons and budget constraints, governments must reject the misguided solution of privatization. Instead of embracing a system with an incentive to keep prisons full, the nation should focus on reducing recidivism through effective preventive and rehabilitative programs that are more in tune with our nation's values.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

GUN VIOLENCE

Church Responds in Aftermath of Newtown Tragedy

Little Olivia Engel was one of the victims of the horrific shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., on Dec. 14. Msgr. Robert Weiss, pastor of St. Rose of Lima Church in Newtown, said the 6-year-old was to have been an angel in the church's live Nativity pageant that night.

After the violence, the Nativity play was canceled and a special evening Mass celebrated instead. "Now she's an angel up in heaven," he said. The church remained open all night for prayer. On the weekend after the incident, which claimed 28 lives—20 children, six Sandy Hook teachers and administrators, the gunman's mother and the shooter himself, Adam Lanza—residents were flocking to the church for the parish's four Sunday Masses, seeking solace in the aftermath of the violence.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Vatican's secretary of state, sent a message on Dec. 14 to the Diocese of Bridgeport, which includes Newtown, saying Pope Benedict XVI had asked the cardinal "to convey his heartfelt grief" and his prayers to the victims, their families and "all affected by the shocking event."

A front-page article on Dec. 15 in *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper, said the people of the United States must look at ways to

"stem the violence that strikes them from within, heinous violence that is increased by easy access to increasingly lethal weapons and this time struck

children in an elementary school.

"The Newtown massacre is destined to reopen the debate about the free circulation of guns," it said. While



PORTRAIT OF GRIEF: Sandy Hook School on Dec. 14

CHINA-VATICAN RELATIONS

'Patriotic' Church Revokes Shanghai Bishop's Appointment

The government-sanctioned Catholic bishops' conference in China has revoked the appointment of Thaddeus Ma Daqin as auxiliary bishop of Shanghai, saying he violated their rules for episcopal ordinations. Joseph Liu Yuanlong, a vice chair of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, confirmed on Dec. 12 that the association and the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China had decided to revoke Bishop Ma's approval letter as "coadjutor" bishop and dismiss him from all posts in the

association and conference. They also called on the Shanghai Diocese to "deal with Ma in a serious manner," he said.

At his ordination on July 7, the Vatican-approved bishop became the first to publicly quit the Patriotic Association, saying he wanted to devote himself to his ministry. His announcement, which occurred during his ordination, provoked a standing ovation from worshippers at the Mass. Since then, Bishop Ma has been in "retreat" at the Sheshan Regional Seminary in a Shanghai suburb.

The Patriotic Association and the bishops' conference—neither of which is approved by the Vatican—accused Bishop Ma of deliberately preventing an illegitimate bishop and two other participating bishops from laying hands on his head during his ordination and forbidding them from receiving Communion.

"They also charged him with not publicly distinguishing whether he is coadjutor or auxiliary bishop, a title given by the pope" and said his oath "was incomplete as a result of deliberate damage to the sound system," according to sources in China. In addition, they blamed him for the absence of many diocesan priests and nuns at the ordination and determined the declaration he made in his thanksgiving speech would



many individuals and groups called for more stringent gun-control measures in the immediate aftermath of the shooting, “the National Rifle

Association...entrenched itself behind an embarrassing silence,” according to the Vatican newspaper.

The editorial continued, “In a pure coincidence, the massacre of the Connecticut children occurred on the eve of the anniversary of the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.... It was ratified Dec. 15, 1791, and was made to measure for the United States as it was 221 years ago.”

Kathy Saile, director of the U.S. bishops’ Office of Domestic Social Development, said, “The church’s position on gun control remains the same.” The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops have in the past called for the control of the use and sale of firearms, supported efforts to protect the public from easy access to deadly weapons and called for sensible restrictions on the use of handguns. Citing documents issued by the bishops over decades that have urged tighter controls, Saile said, “Sadly

these statements still make perfect sense today.” She added, “The church’s teaching and position on gun control are rooted firmly in a principle of Catholic moral teaching that calls us to protect and respect the inherent value and dignity of all human life.”

According to a survey by the Public Religion Research Institute released in August 2012, 62 percent of Catholics said they were in favor of stricter gun control laws in the United States. Internationally the church has long sought stronger controls on the small arms trade. In “Responsibility, Rehabilitation and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice,” released in November 2000, the U.S. bishops said, “We support measures that control the sale and use of firearms and make them safer—especially efforts that prevent their unsupervised use by children or anyone other than the owner—and we reiterate our call for sensible regulation of handguns.”

have a damaging influence on others.

In a statement released at the Vatican on Dec. 13, Archbishop Savio Hon Tai-Fai, secretary of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, said even legitimately established and Vatican-recognized bishops’ conferences “do not have the power to name or approve a bishop, to revoke his mandate or to impose sanctions on him.” The Chinese government-sanctioned bishops’ conference, which is not recognized by the Vatican, has even less power, and the decision regarding Bishop Ma “lacks any juridical value,” he said.

The only thing the decision does, Archbishop Hon said, is “create division.” The archbishop said Bishop Ma “acted with laudatory fidelity to the church and professed his sincere love

for his country.”

In addition, he said, Catholics from around the world have written to the Vatican “to demonstrate their sadness over the abuse committed by the so-called bishops’ conference of Catholic bishops of China and by the patriotic association.

“That abuse is even more painful because it attacks the communion and discipline of the Catholic Church precisely during the Year of Faith,” he said.

Archbishop Hon called on Catholics around the world to pray and join prayer services organized in their dioceses to demonstrate their solidarity “with Bishop Ma and those in China living in similar situations.”

According to internal sources, Bishop Ma can meet people and update

his blog occasionally during his “retreat.” He currently posts his reflections on the daily Gospel on Weibo, a Twitter-like microblog, every morning. However, he has not been allowed to concelebrate with other priests at the seminary since Dec. 4.



PRE-ORDAINED CONFLICT? Bishop Thaddeus Ma Daqin in Shanghai, July 7.

Spirited Preaching

Incorrect interpretations of the Second Vatican Council are rooted in a denial or a misunderstanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church, said Raniero Cantalamessa, the Capuchin priest who is the preacher of the papal household. His reflection on Dec. 14 for Pope Benedict XVI and top Vatican officials offered a look at how to interpret the council. “The insufficient attention paid to the role of the Holy Spirit explains many of the difficulties that arose in the reception of the Second Vatican Council,” Father Cantalamessa said. There have been two opposing interpretations, he said, while the position of Pope Benedict—that of “renewal in continuity”—has stood between the two extremes. Traditionalist groups that reject the council represent “a tradition wherein the Holy Spirit played no role at all. It was a collection of beliefs and practices fixed once and for all,” he said. “To freeze the tradition by making it begin, or end, at a certain fixed moment means making it a dead tradition.” The other extreme willingly speaks of “the ‘spirit of the council,’ but unfortunately it was not the Holy Spirit,” he said.

Attacks on Christians

Christians renewed an appeal to the Sri Lankan government to defend religious freedom after the nation’s minority Christian community was shocked by an attack on a Protestant church. The attack occurred on Dec. 9, in Weeraketiya, an area in the southern province of Sri Lanka. A crowd of about 1,000 people, including many Buddhist monks, stormed the church building and injured its pastor. The crowd destroyed the church, sacred furnishings and parked

NEWS BRIEFS

Pope Benedict XVI’s Twitter account, **@Pontifex**, attracted more than a million-and-a-half followers by the end of Dec. 12, its first day active. • **Justice Magazine** (www.justicemagazine.org), which covers national and international issues relating to the Catholic Church’s social teaching, was launched in December. • Johan Hubers, a Dutch construction engineer, has launched a **full-scale replica of Noah’s Ark**, moored in Dordrecht, Holland, based on his interpretation of measurements listed in the Book of Genesis. • The Illinois attorney general’s office decided in early December that it will not appeal a court decision last September that sided with two pharmacists who cited conscientious convictions for refusing to fill prescriptions for the so-called **morning-after pill**, in defiance of a 2005 executive order. • Louisiana’s Gov. Bobby Jindal, a potential 2016 Republican presidential candidate, called for **oral contraceptives to be made available** over the counter in an op-ed for *The Wall Street Journal* published on Dec. 13.



Bobby Jindal

cars. The day before the incident a group of Buddhists and monks had visited the pastor, warning him that without the permission of the Buddhist clergy, he could not carry out Christian worship in Weeraketiya. In 2012, the Christian communities in Sri Lanka of different denominations reported about 50 attacks by Buddhists. Over 70 percent of Sri Lanka’s population of 20.4 million are Buddhists. Christians are estimated to be 8.4 percent of the population; 40 percent of them belong to the Tamil ethnic minority. The Buddhist Power Force (Bodu Bala Sena), one of the violent Buddhist groups, recently asked its followers to “defend the country” from Muslims and Christians.

Syrian End Game?

European media are reporting that Russia and the United States are

preparing a joint ultimatum to President Bashar al-Assad through the special envoy of the United Nations and the Arab League, Lakhdar Brahimi, to encourage Assad to leave power “with dignity.” Washington and Moscow reportedly have “exchanged the names” of acceptable leaders who could appear in the transitional government. As reported by a member of the Syrian opposition, a realistic political solution could be that “the Assad family leaves Syria and a transitional government is created with representatives of both parties, the government and the opposition coalition, that have not participated in the violence.” National dialogue would establish a cease-fire with the prospect of “free and transparent elections within six months” and “compensation to the families of the dead and wounded.”

From CNS and other sources.



The Essential Question

The aftermath of Hurricane Sandy brought us the eerily familiar image of ordinary Americans sifting through the rubble of their former homes, trying desperately to salvage a few items of monetary or emotional value. We have seen this sad scene time and again: in the Great Plains after tornadoes, in the high country after forest fires, along shorelines after fierce tropical storms.

In the last days of October, New Yorkers tasted the full range of home-destroying tragedies. Wind-swept fires destroyed much of Breezy Point, Queens (the borough I happen to know best). Long Beach residents and Staten Islanders endured severe flooding due to the storm surge. High winds tore roofs off homes, turning household furnishings and prized possessions into so much soggy and scattered debris.

Although I long ago moved away from my New York roots, I found myself by chance in the city when Sandy visited with such fury. I was struck by how much of the media coverage in the immediate aftermath of the storm focused on the traumatic experience of families returning to their ruined homes and rummaging to salvage what they could before the bulldozers arrived. The sad scene I associate with wind-swept Kansas, forest fire-prone Colorado and below-sea-level New Orleans was now playing out in neighborhoods I used to bike through as a boy. I won't think of this type of scene, which is always in danger of falling into cliché, in quite

THOMAS MASSARO, S.J., is the dean of the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University, in Berkeley, Calif.

the same way again.

As far as I could tell, the keenest desire of those storm victims was not to locate their lost high-tech electronic gadgets or fancy silver-plated flatware or even expensive jewelry that might have survived the wind and rain and fire. Instead, it was caches of lovingly preserved family photographs that they most eagerly sought to salvage. Squeals of delight could be heard in storm-ravaged neighborhoods when someone came upon a scrapbook or framed photo of loved ones—irreplaceable reminders of good times past and of people who played a special role in their lives. The photos might have become tattered or faded or soggy, but they were still dear.

I recount these events not simply to invoke a “feel good” or even a “feel deep” story, but in a way to pay tribute to my late Jesuit confrere and fellow columnist John Kavanaugh. One of my deep regrets is that, despite common academic interests in ethics and common pursuits in religious life, we never met. But if you have even on rare occasions read his wise counsel in this space or in his numerous books and articles on such topics as the perils of consumerism and the dignity of all human life, you surely appreciate the profound ethical concerns he raised and the probing questions he relentlessly posed.

If I may dare to summarize the life work of one of my absolute heroes, let me venture the claim that Father Kavanaugh spent his life pursuing one

pivotal question: What are the most real and valuable things in life?

The people of Staten Island, Queens and Long Beach join anew the billions around the world who experience deeper, more far-reaching and long-persisting problems that have forced them to ponder this question. Beyond the distractions of our materialistic, media-soaked and celebrity-

Beyond the distractions of our materialistic age, what really counts?

obsessed age, what really counts? In times of war and conflict, under threat of oppression and natural disasters, we seem to rediscover the answers: our loved ones. Homes can be rebuilt, possessions can be replaced, but our love of people endures. And our photos certainly have a unique

way of sparking memories of family and friends. Every picture does tell a story; snapshots, posed or candid, can capture a relationship.

Where, then, is God in this reflection on life's essentials? We hardly need to invoke the Deity here, for God stands behind and within all the human relationships we value. To speak of human dignity, as John Kavanaugh did so often and so eloquently, is to point to the majesty of the very author of life. The link between love of God and love of neighbor should by now be transparent in all Christian circles. And when love of Christ grows, all of humanity becomes that much more lovable.

Hurricane Sandy surely accomplished great destruction, but it also offers some valuable instruction.



JESUITS



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sociologists, carpenters, mechanics, biologists, parish priests, linguists, journalists, writers, social workers, teachers, artists, ethicists, doctors, lecturers, lawyers, nurses, engineers, editors, photographers, accountants, cooks, youth workers, retreat leaders, administrators, **Yes, we do that.** anthropologists, infirmarians, counselors, musicians, spiritual directors, beekeepers, poets, professors, scientists, chaplains, winemakers, filmmakers, composers, prison chaplains veterinarians, brothers, activists, aid workers, astronomers, theologians, liturgists, canon lawyers, refugee advocates, sacristans, confessors...

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How the new evangelization
can encourage vocations
in a changing church



Culture Shift

BY ROBERT J. CARLSON

When I told my teachers in grade school that I thought I wanted to become a priest, they beamed and did everything possible to encourage me. Their enthusiasm was matched, if not surpassed, by my supportive parents and siblings, my parish priest and even my neighbors. My entire world (as I knew it then) was united in support of my choice of a vocation—even the non-Catholics. And this wasn't the case only for me. Catholic parents and family members very often found pride in the daughter who chose a life consecrated to Jesus or the son who gave himself to serve the church as a priest. It was an honor for the average Catholic family to have a priest, sister or brother in the family. It was commonplace to find respect for men and women who answered the call to witness

CNS PHOTO BY FERNANDO LUNA ARGE

ALTAR CALL: The Seminary of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico City.

MOST REV. ROBERT J. CARLSON *is the archbishop of St. Louis.*

Christ in consecrated life; everyone knew that they were among those who helped to make the world a better place to live.

These days there is more skepticism surrounding the prospect of a son or daughter, pupil or friend becoming a priest or religious sister. It sometimes seems that a culture of discouragement has set in, strengthened by scandals in the church. Therefore, one of the tasks of the new evangelization is to build—or better put, rebuild—a culture of vocations in the church. A culture of vocations is one that provides the necessary social supports for each person to hear and respond to the call of God in his or her life. It helps youth and young adults embrace the priesthood or the consecrated life with great enthusiasm and joy.

Much of the emphasis now is rightfully placed on new ways to bring people back into participation in the life and mission of the church. But the new evangelization requires good and effective leadership in the church to achieve its goal—the proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As we observe National Vocation Awareness Week during the Year of Faith, it would be good to ask ourselves: How do we rebuild a culture of vocations for the new evangelization?

This past September, the Secretariat of Clergy, Consecrated Life and Vocations of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops released the findings of a major survey of Catholic youth and young adults on their consideration of a vocation—a survey that produced some very telling conclusions. The study, titled “Consideration of Priesthood and Religious Life Among Never-Married U.S. Catholics,” was conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate and was partially funded by a generous grant from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. The survey and analysis by CARA provide helpful information for religious communities, dioceses, parishes, schools and families to encourage a culture of vocations.

A Serious Consideration

The good news from the study is that there is no shortage of interest in religious vocations in the United States. Among all the respondents to the scientific survey, 12 percent of never-married Catholic men age 14 and older had considered priesthood or religious life at least “a little seriously.” Similarly, 10 percent of never-married Catholic women of the same age had considered religious life at least “a little seriously.” In raw numbers, that extrapolates to almost 2.7 million people. More significantly, 3 percent and 2 percent of the respondents (men and women) had “very seriously” considered a religious vocation, the highest possible category respondents could choose. This represents more than 600,000 youth and young adults in the U.S. Catholic population. This is encouraging news,

perhaps even surprising, when one considers all of the negative press about the church.

The study was designed to discover key factors for the consideration of a vocation among our Catholic youth and young adult population today. In the survey data four key correlations strongly emerge.

1. *Catholic education.* Among male respondents, those who attended Catholic secondary school (grades 9-12) were more than six times more likely to have considered becoming a priest or a religious than those who did not attend a Catholic secondary school. For women it was attendance in a Catholic primary school that was important. Female respondents who attended Catholic primary school were more than three times more likely to consider being a religious sister than those who did not.

2. *Participation in parish religious education programs, youth and young adult groups.* Women who participated in a parish high school youth group were more than nine times more likely to consider a religious vocation. For men, the

key age was participation in a parish youth group during their primary school years (grades K-8). Those men who participated were more than five times more likely to consider becoming a priest or religious than those who did not.

3. *Encouragement from others.* Having even one person encourage an individual to consider a religious vocation doubles the likelihood that they will do so, for both men and women. Furthermore, the effect is additive. If three persons offered encouragement, respondents were more than five times more likely to consider a religious vocation.

4. *Knowing someone who is a priest, religious sister or brother or seminarian.* Individuals who had a personal connection to someone in religious life were one and a half times more likely to consider this vocation for themselves compared to those who did not have this connection. Here, too, the effect was additive. The more religious one knew, the more consideration was given to the religious life.

What is striking here is that in all four key areas that correlated with a greater likelihood of consideration of a vocation, personal relationships are key. The positive influences for a vocation identified in the survey results seem to be more affective than cognitive. This provides an important fact to remember as we continue to promote a culture of vocations in our church.

Cultivating Cultural Sensitivity

Recent surveys show that Hispanics make up about one third of the Catholic population in the United States and that the proportion of Hispanics will continue to grow in the near future. Already, 48 percent of U.S. Catholics under the age of 31 are Hispanic. These figures tell us that the

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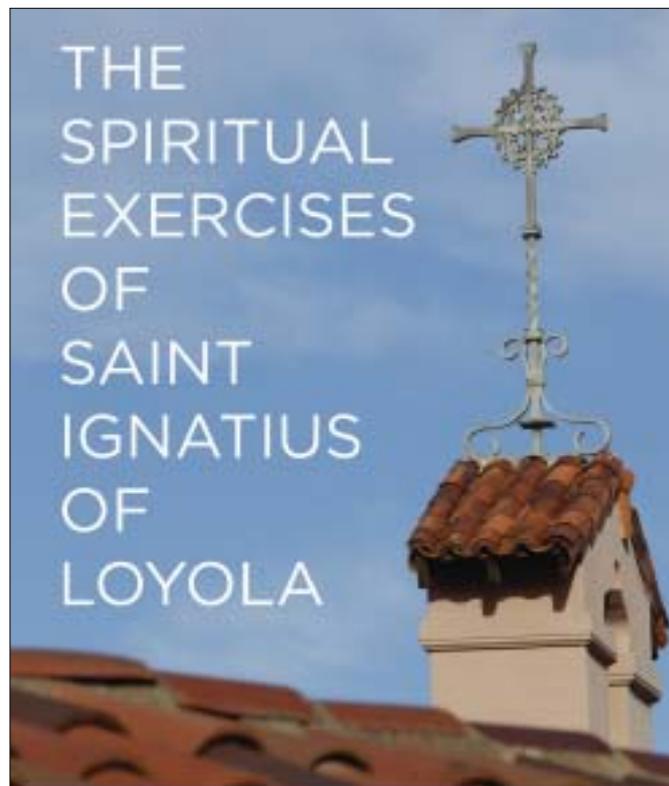
faith and rich culture of Hispanics are and will continue to be a great blessing for the church in our country. But while the vocation survey shows that Hispanic respondents—both male and female—are no less likely than others to say they have considered a vocation at one time or another, the results also highlight some of the serious challenges the church faces when it comes to fostering the call to religious life among our Hispanic population and giving this group the tools they need to succeed.

Simply put, only 3 percent of all Catholic priests in the United States today are Hispanic, according to the book *Same Call, Different Men*. This low number mirrors the percentage of Hispanic men and women in religious life, which is also at about 3 percent. While the number of Hispanics in the U.S. church's recent ordination and profession classes is an improvement, much more still needs to be done. Roughly 15 percent of the newly ordained priests in 2012 were Hispanic, but fewer than 5 percent of these men were U.S. born, even though U.S. born (and English-speaking) Hispanics in this age group far outnumber those who immigrated to the United States. This should serve as a wake-up call. Our young, English-speaking, Hispanic population is very much an untapped, rich source of vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. If more is not done to encourage vocations among this intensely rich ethnic group that makes up nearly half of our young adult Catholic population, the religious vocation picture in the United States will become increasingly cloudy.

The bishops of our country understand this and have made Hispanic vocations a priority. As we develop strategies in this area, I think it is important to highlight once again the four key areas the CARA study found to be correlated to openness to a vocation in our youth. If we desire to strengthen a culture of vocations within our Hispanic communities, the following are the areas indicated by the vocation survey that are in need of some major strategic development:

Catholic Schools. Only 3 percent of Hispanic children and teens attend Catholic grade schools or high schools. There is need for a concerted effort to increase Hispanic involvement in our Catholic schools. In this effort, I draw attention to the University of Notre Dame's Task Force on the Participation of Latino Children and Families in Catholic Schools. The task force is working to develop demand, access and the necessary leadership to increase Hispanic enrollment in Catholic schools. More efforts like these are needed.

Participation. Studies show that Hispanics have lower participation rates in religious education and parish youth groups. We have to ask ourselves, "Why is this?" Is it because priests, religious sisters, catechists and other key leaders don't speak Spanish? Not likely, as the vast majority of our Hispanic youth prefer to speak English with their



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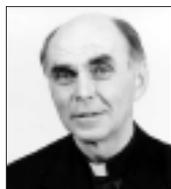


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peers. Language does not seem to be the primary obstacle; rather, it is a lack of familiarity with the various Latino cultures that may inadvertently give the impression to our young Hispanics that they are not welcome or should not expect to feel at home in our "integrated" parishes and schools. How do we better incorporate cultural activities, devotions and symbols into our regular programming for parish and campus youth and young adult ministry?

Encouragement. One of the richest blessings in Hispanic culture is the importance and strength of the home and the extended family. Studies show, however, that there is lower encouragement in Hispanic homes for children to consider a vocation to the priesthood or religious life. How do we encourage families—a clear strength in Hispanic culture—to help in building a culture of vocations?

Knowing someone in religious life. In comparison with other ethnic groups, Hispanic teens show similar or even higher percentages of personal familiarity with a religious sister within or outside the family. Hispanics are less likely, however, to know personally a priest either within or outside the family. Perhaps we need to think more carefully about how to help our non-Hispanic priests to become more familiar, more comfortable and more culturally competent, so that they can be truly present to our Hispanic and Latino youth and young adults.

In Search of Joy

The priority on relationship with Christ in the church has great resonance in the new evangelization for which Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have called. The modern world seeks precisely this: to see the faith tangible in genuine Christians. Our deepest poverty, especially in our own country, is not the lack of material means but rather of spiritual riches. Before his election as pope, our Holy Father made this point in an address to catechists and religion teachers. Pope Benedict XVI said that the most profound type of poverty is "the inability of joy, the tediousness of a life considered absurd and contradictory. This poverty is widespread today, in very different forms in the materially rich as well as the poor countries. The inability of joy presupposes and produces the inability to love.... This is why we are in need of a new evangelization."

In many ways, the CARA study on the consideration of a vocation by Catholic youth and young adults shows that the new evangelization is the basic foundation for a healthy culture of vocations in the church. Catechesis and good instruction are essential, but evangelization demands more. It is relational. It asks that we, as a church, focus on inviting people, especially our young people, to respond in love to the God who is love itself. It means that we accept and revel in the good news of Jesus Christ and radiate a Christian joy that is attractive and infectious. **A**

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Sign of God

What Catholics can learn from deafness

BY MARLANA PORTOLANO

When Moses received his call to lead the people of Israel out of slavery, he said, “Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent.... I am slow of speech and tongue” (Ex 4:10). But God was not deterred. God supplied Moses with miraculous visual signs and appointed his brother Aaron as a voice interpreter for orations.

God, it seems, wanted Moses to preach to his people, so God made some special accommodations. This story is often on my mind when I attend St. Francis of Assisi, a predominantly deaf congregation in Landover, Md., where Joseph Bruce, S.J., one of the first priests in the world who has been deaf since childhood, signs the Masses. It is also where my daughter attends catechism classes in sign language. In order to embrace the Catholic faith, my daughter needed to receive direct communication in a language she could see and understand. In signing the Mass, Father Joe, as he is known, opened my daughter’s eyes to essential practices of Catholicism. Every week Father Joe is able to hold the rapt attention of the entire congregation, even when he does not speak at all.

Since I have long been interested in both eloquence and deafness, I decided to ask Father Joe about his call to the priesthood and his celebration of the Eucharist. In the process I discovered that deafness is an opportunity for all Catholics to learn about the Mass and the priesthood in profound and unexpected ways.

Hearing a Call

Like most boys in his Springfield, Mass., neighborhood, Joe wanted to be an altar boy. But he could not hear the Latin words of the Mass and even reading them was difficult. Deaf children require significant early intervention and persistent work to have the academic success of their peers in spoken and written languages. By the time Joe was 6, in 1953, he had moved away from his family. He lived at The Clarke School, a boarding school for the deaf that emphasized mainstreaming and used an oral/aural method of communication instead of American Sign Language. When he came home for holidays, Joe was eager for his younger

MARLANA PORTOLANO is associate professor of rhetoric at Towson University in Maryland. She is writing a book on deaf ministries and eloquence in deaf preaching.



PEACE SIGN: The National Deaf Cursillo Retreat, Edmonton, Alberta.

brother Andy to teach him the Latin responses so that he, too, could become an acolyte. After two years of hard work, Joe reached his goal.

Later Joe enrolled in mainstream classes at Cathedral High School in Springfield and then attended the College of the Holy Cross, a Jesuit institution in Worcester, Mass. He wanted to major in Spanish, but the department would not allow it because he “could not hear Spanish.” The choice to study Spanish was a strategic one for Joe, since memorizing words and writing responses on the board was an easier way for a deaf student to get a good grade. For the same reason Joe could have studied math, but numbers were not his strong suit. He ultimately decided to major in English, which proved difficult because of the sheer quantity of reading and writing required. He also felt anxiety about what might happen when the English department found out he could not hear English.

Joe showed dedication to his studies, and his faith life remained strong, yet it was isolating to be the only deaf student at Holy Cross. He wished for someone who under-

ONS PHOTO/GREGORY A. SHEMITZ, LONG ISLAND CATHOLIC

stood his experience, even hoping one of his Jesuit teachers might be deaf. One man, however, understood Joe's experience on a deeper level. Joseph LaBran, S.J., a chaplain at the college, asked him, "Why not become a Jesuit priest?" Joe responded with hesitation, much like Moses: "But the church does not allow deaf men to be ordained." Father LaBran responded that God is full of surprises.



Christ himself
succinctly
used story and
visual signs in
abundance.

For the time being, Joe set his mind on a master's degree in deaf education from Canisius College, another Jesuit school. There he learned sign language and mentored deaf youths hungry for knowledge and communication. But he began to feel a call to the priesthood and applied to enter the seminary. Others were deaf to his call. His diocese said no. The Dominicans did not answer. Finally the religious order that educated Joe accepted him, and Joe went on to become the first deaf Jesuit priest.

Catholic Signs

Joe is one of eight deaf priests in the United States today and one of only 13 worldwide who had childhood hearing loss that influenced language development. The Pontifical Council on Healthcare Ministry reports there are more than 278 million deaf people in the world, including at least 1.3 million Catholics. Considering that deafness is a language difference and physical condition that will not go away anytime soon, the church needs more priests who can minister to this group. Receiving religious education and

accessible services can be a major challenge for deaf children and their families, since many parishes cannot afford interpreters for sacramental preparation. A child or adult who has been deaf since birth necessarily requires a different way of learning than hearing people, who can communicate easily in spoken languages.

Catholics who are learning the new translation of the Mass might consider what can be learned from parishioners who are intelligent and desire to participate but who cannot hear the Mass and may have trouble reading the texts. Catholics are deeply versed in signs: signs revealed in Scripture, the sign of the cross, liturgical colors and other seasonal symbols, relics and of course the sacraments themselves, to name only a few. The Eucharist is certainly the sign of signs, and Christ, the Logos, is both a sign and the One he represents. But what exactly is a Catholic sign and what makes a sign acceptable for use in the Mass? St. Augustine in *De Doctrina Christiana* describes a sign as "something which, offering itself to the senses, conveys something other to the intellect." In other words, a sign represents something else to the mind through the senses. For Catholics, it is essential to understand that human beings themselves can be signs of God—in the story of their lives and in the way they communicate. Christ himself succinctly used story and visual signs in abundance.

When Father Joe presides at Mass, I am often moved to wonder by the bodily—one might say fleshy—quality of his language. At St. Francis of Assisi, Masses are simultaneously spoken and signed by Father Joe, and lectors often interpret the Scripture readings in American Sign Language. In the eucharistic prayer, Father Joe allows the visual sign language to lead the pacing and diction of the spoken English. The point of vernacular Masses is to communicate in ways that make it possible for people to understand. This is especially important for the deaf, who often have difficulty processing written language at the same speed as hearing people. Attending a signed Mass, however, is instructive for all Catholics. All 20 or 30 St. Francis parishioners follow every word with the rapt attention demanded by a visual, signed language. The interpersonal connection between the priest and the people is palpable.

Father Joe's signed vocabulary provides the congregation a feeling of visceral involvement in the celebration. "Look not upon our sins" he says in long-trained but undeniably deaf pronunciation. At the same time, he stretches one hand far above his head with two fingers pointing down to represent the eyes of God and wags the other hand's index finger "no" from below. Sign language is indexical, pointing and using space in ways that make the audience identify their physical bodies with the acts of celebration and prayer. Facial expressions and body language are drawn in as essential elements of meaning. In a signed Mass the words of

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worship feel more like a state of being than a spoken string of words.

For a priest who never heard a homily growing up, and who claims he has no models for style other than his inner intention to communicate the faith, Father Joe is a master homilist. He is eloquent. He can strike a chord that perhaps can be struck only by a deaf priest addressing an audience that includes deaf listeners. "How many senses do you have?" he asks. Most have four, and a couple of deaf-blind individuals have only three and use tactile interpreters. "What do you think is the most important sense?" he continues. People respond "Hearing!" or "Seeing!" But "touch," Father Joe preaches, "is the most important sense." His poetic signs amply demonstrate the point. The baby (rocking motion of the arms) feels the closeness of the mother's body (hands touch his torso). The touch of Jesus heals the blind man (hands wipe the eyes and show us "open"). The body of Christ is broken, and we receive it in an unexpected form. In sign language, Christ's body is physically associated with the listener's body, something immediately accessible through human touch. Father Joe's delivery is more interactive, reminding priests and congregations alike that the intimate communicative function of a homily is to bring divine meaning to the mundane lives of listeners. 

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Chained, but Free

How Walter Ciszek gained spiritual liberation in Lubyanka prison

BY JOHN LEVKO

The spiritual journey of every Christian is a journey of conversion that involves inward maturing, openness to the spirit and a developed prayer life. For Walter Ciszek, S.J., a small, stocky Polish-American, this spiritual journey was tested in the fire of Moscow's dreaded Lubyanka prison, where he spent five years in solitary confinement. "Lubyanka, in many ways, was a school of prayer for me," he later wrote.

In October 1963 Father Ciszek returned to the United States from 23 years in Soviet confinement. Having returned home, he was amazed at the wastefulness he found, and he quickly noticed that people's spiritual lives focused on personal needs rather than gratitude. It had taken him 59 years of life experience to realize that progress in the spiritual life correlates with risk and challenge. A person has to be willing to let go, to invoke an inner freedom. Father Ciszek's two books, *With God in Russia* and *He Leadeth Me*, give witness to the victory of his spiritual life

JOHN LEVKO, S.J., of Scranton University, met Father Ciszek in 1964 and began a friendship that lasted until Father Ciszek's death 20 years later. Father Levko served as the first postulator for Father Ciszek's cause for canonization. This article was adapted from the author's book *Cassian's Prayer for the 21st Century*.

over the powers of evil by demonstrating his inner transformation into Christ's likeness and through Christ's cross.

From Darkness to Light

In any spiritual journey concerned with growth in prayer, there is always a purification process. In *He Leadeth Me*, Father Ciszek described the "sinking feeling of helplessness and powerlessness" that overcame him after his arrest in Russia in 1941. He had lost total control of his life and felt "completely cut off from everything and everyone who might conceivably help" him. The Soviets accused him of being a Vatican spy and transferred him to Lubyanka prison, where men were reportedly broken in body and spirit. As he had done in every crisis in the past when there was no person to turn to, he turned to God in prayer.

While an interior voice helped focus his faith, Father Ciszek's faith in prayer sustained him, served as his principle of life and always made him God-conscious. This same faith also made him conscious of his readiness and natural competency to handle whatever came along. "I was naturally stubborn and strong-willed," he wrote, crediting these



GULAG NATION: Walter Ciszek, S.J., right; below, the Lubyanka.



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ALEXANDER CHAIKIN. INSET: CNS PHOTO/AD. TIMES

characteristics to many years of “developing willpower and training the will.” The tension between persistence and stubbornness, developed early in his life, gradually helped him become aware of God’s patience and his own need to become a patient pupil. Because he realized early that self-control was not itself sufficient in his struggle against depression, fear and insecurity, spiritual growth was contingent on the depth of his personal relationship with God. The quality of his prayer life, finely honed from an early age by ascetical practices, revealed the depth of his relationship with God.

WALTER CISZEK, S.J.

Born Nov. 4, 1904, Shenandoah, Pa.; entered the Society of Jesus, 1928; ordained priest, 1937. Arrested, 1941, while serving as a missionary in Russia, and charged with spying for the Vatican; imprisoned in Russia from 1941 to 1963; released Oct. 12, 1963, and returned to the United States. Died Dec. 8, 1984.

Father Ciszek’s cause for canonization is currently under investigation by the Vatican.

Statement by Walter Ciszek, S.J. (first published in **America**, Oct. 26, 1963):

I went into the interior of Russia of my own free will, spurred by my conscience and a desire to do good in the line of my vocation. In spite of seeming failures, I cherish no resentment or regrets for what has transpired in the past years. I have the highest regard for the Russian people, because they are a good and hospitable folk who are very sincere and hearty in their relations with others who truly live and labor among them. Having lived so many years with the working class, as one of them, I have not experienced anything antagonistic on their part toward me.

His asceticism in Lubyanka became a life of prayer and humble faith in God. In prayer he began a self-conversion that continued throughout his life. The absolute silence of God during solitary confinement tempted him to give in to his interrogators. Instead, he turned to prayer and persevered in it until the temptation vanished. His perseverance in prayer countered loneliness, confusion and worthlessness. Patient suffering in prayer helped Father Ciszek to receive loneliness as a grace in that moment. He deeply sensed the frustrating pains of loneliness, confusion and worthlessness, but he also accepted these in the spirit of faith and continued to serve God without change or compromise. He learned, by the light of grace, the need for personal purification—an interior process manifest in humbly begging God’s

mercy, trustful fear of the Lord and a readiness to do whatever the divine will proposed at any time. And in prison there was a great deal of time.

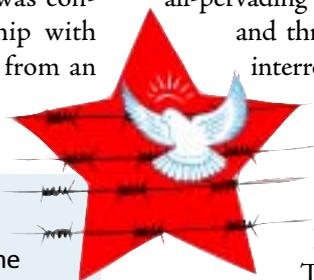
For some in Lubyanka the time passed quickly. For others the seconds passed like minutes and even hours. The one constant in Lubyanka, Father Ciszek wrote, was the “total and all-pervading silence that seemed to close in around you and threaten you constantly.” After each session of interrogation, “agonizing afterthoughts that filled the hours in my silent cell...began to have their effect and eat away at my morale.” The interrogators drugged him and shocked him with an electrode—and Father Ciszek finally broke.

The experience in Lubyanka tempered and purified his soul. In one year of interrogations, Father Ciszek “underwent a purging” of self that left him “cleansed to the bone.” The mental blackness in which he found himself allowed him no options but fear of self. In this inner darkness he experienced despair, lost hope and sight of God, and even for a moment lost the last shreds of his faith in God. Nevertheless, he instinctively turned to prayer and almost immediately felt consoled by our Lord’s agony in the garden. He had gone from “total blackness” to “an experience of blinding light,” a conversion experience that changed his life. From that moment he completely abandoned himself into God’s hands with a readiness to let Christ fully transform him.

While the shock of Lubyanka left him horrified, he instinctively turned to God—after he failed to manage alone—and began to live the psalmist’s words: “My days are in thy hands” (31:16). There was never too little time because it was God alone who had given him the exact time needed to work out his salvation. “Even in moments of human discouragement,” Father Ciszek wrote, “the consciousness that I was fulfilling God’s will in all that happened to me would serve to dispel all doubt and desolation.” In the silence of his cell, he began to realize that it was not self-will or willpower that mattered in the spiritual realm. Rather it was the consciousness of God’s grace working within oneself, demanding full conformity of one’s natural powers in whatever way grace was given in concrete circumstances. The interrogations convinced him of this.

Discernment: A Seeing Soul

The interrogators of Lubyanka could be both kind and deceptive. Father Ciszek knew that the devil often took on the appearance of an angel of light while sowing deceit and confusion, especially in the inner struggle during the journey in prayer. Interior moods, feelings and movements had to be sifted out and discerned so that he could recognize the Lord’s call at the intimate core of his being. He knew that if he failed to recollect God, temptation would soon follow. So for him, his



eye of discernment became “the lamp of the body” (Mt 6:22).

The final four years in Lubyanka allowed our Lord to continue fine-tuning Father Ciszek’s soul. If anything, Lubyanka gave him the spirit of prayer, courage, trust in God and a deep appreciation of grace, even when he seemed worthless. He realized he needed to order his life according to the truths found in the Lord’s Prayer and especially the principal truth of doing the will of God the Father. Like earlier spiritual writers, Father Ciszek believed that this prayer, given to us by Christ, contained the fullness of prayer—an invitation to lift the mind and heart to God the Father with a concern not only for the words of the prayer but also for an appreciation of the mode of silence in which our Lord prayed, which he had now experienced. As the result of direct grace and enlightened discretion, he immediately realized the full effect of his Lubyanka conversion. He now had a single vision of Christ in all things and the desire to discern his will in every situation.

Father Ciszek felt he had to rise “from the tomb of Lubyanka” before our Lord could use him, and before he could really appreciate the Lord’s words, “Behold, I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves” (Mt 10:16). As in his Jesuit novitiate experience, in Lubyanka he had been “alone with God, as it were on the mountaintop” and able to develop the habit of recollection. But the prison experience did not prepare him for life after the period of forced silence.

Although from early childhood Father Ciszek had a propensity to a life of prayer, his habit of recollection immediately broke down after his release from Lubyanka. He was “continuously distracted,” he wrote, by the “rough and ready realities of life.” He describes traveling to labor camps on prison trains with hardcore criminals who thought nothing of killing at the slightest provocation. The first thing Father Ciszek discovered after release from Lubyanka was the presence of evil. He came face-to-face with the criminal world. “For the first time,” he wrote, “I palpably experienced the power of evil and how completely it could overshadow the power of good.”

Motivation to restrain himself from doing evil or to abandon evil practices already acquired during early years came not from reason but from his conscience. This interior and mysterious voice demanded correction, and yet his struggle with conscience lasted for years. In time, Father Ciszek grew in spiritual freedom, a process that requires “an attitude of acceptance and openness to the will of God,” he explained, “rather than some planned approach or calculated method.” After his release from Lubyanka, he wrote, “I was still a prisoner, but I felt free and liberated.” There was no anger or bitterness, but peace and a deep sense of internal freedom. The forced silence in Lubyanka was gone, and with it, the easy prayerful recollection. Now, to enter into a relationship with the living Lord, he needed to listen

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intently for the interior voice of conscience and discern God's will in every situation. The concentration and attention required in prayer did not deprive him of true freedom, but gradually led him to a fuller freedom in God. "I could testify from my own experiences, especially from my darkest hours in Lubyanka," he wrote, "that the greatest sense of freedom, along with peace of soul and an abiding sense of security, comes when a man totally abandons his own will in order to follow the will of God."

In completely trusting in God, Father Cizek learned, "the soul must learn to act not on its own initiative, but in response to whatever demands were imposed by God in the concrete instances of each day." He experienced the need to sift the inner movements of his soul and respond to the constant question: Is the Lord revealing himself, and if so, what is he saying? The basic discernment between good and evil required that he grow in inner awareness and the ability to see clearly into himself. He knew the goal of discernment: to discover who Jesus is and where his reign is found. As he tested every spirit to see if it came from God, he began to develop a "seeing soul." His spiritual growth became intimately connected with the examination of anything that entered his heart to see if and how he should respond. With St. Paul he could say, "Every thought is our prisoner, cap-

tured to be brought into obedience to Christ" (2 Cor 10:5).

The Catholic Church is now taking an exhaustive look at the details of Father Cizek's spiritual journey—in connection with a cause for his canonization. Few of us will ever merit such close scrutiny of our lives. Many of us do not understand our own spiritual journey, let alone that of someone else. But most of us can identify with at least a modified form of the feelings of helplessness, powerlessness and despair Father Cizek experienced in the silence of Lubyanka. By abandoning himself to God's will, his journey in prayer echoed the spiritual journeys of many saints in the past. It was in the silence of his heart that he came to realize that the peak of human freedom is unselfish love, as Jesus taught: "You must love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Mt 22:37).

And yet there was uniqueness in Father Cizek's journey, and certainly in his cross, that makes him a model for many Christians today, especially in these troubled times. His conversion experience in a silent cell left him with an unconditional readiness to change his life and place everything in God's hands. Lubyanka provided the nails for his cross and the necessary purification for a saintly life of priestly service grounded in discernment and prayer. **A**

ON THE WEB

A short film about
Walter Cizek, S.J.
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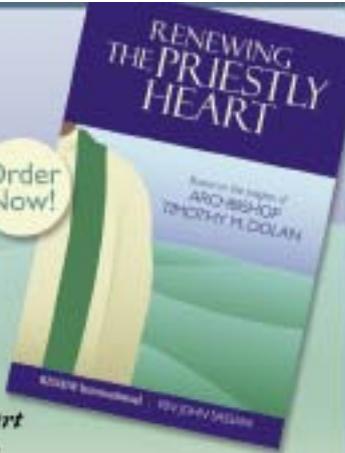


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Guantánamo Journal

A Jesuit's week at Camp Justice

BY LUKE HANSEN

The Pentagon's invitation to travel to Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, to report on military commission hearings captured my interest and imagination, but there was one problem: I had my own court date to deal with. I recently had been arrested at the Pentagon and was scheduled to appear before a judge in U.S. District Court the same week as the Guantánamo hearings. On the anniversary of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Japan, I knelt in prayer with five others outside the Pentagon in sackcloth and ashes, praying for our government to abolish nuclear weapons. Moments later, we were handcuffed.

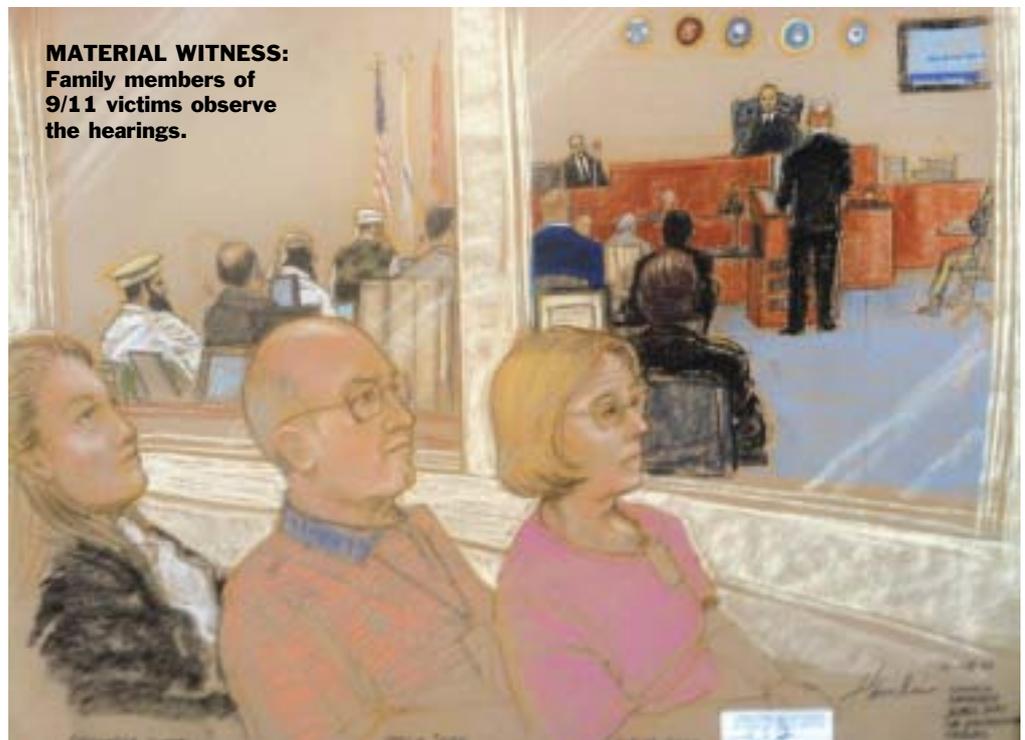
The case prosecutor, when I called him, said not to worry about requesting a delay for the hearing; he planned to drop the charges altogether. Then, like a concerned parent, he admonished me for stepping outside of the designated "free-speech zone" and failing to obey police orders. It was a merciful reprieve—an experience of "American justice" unrecognizable to Guantánamo detainees, some of whom, unlike me, had violated no law at all. Just two days after the prosecutor's de facto pardon, I boarded the plane for Guantánamo.

The purpose of the trip to Guantá-

namo Bay was not only to report on courtroom proceedings but to have a closer, more personal encounter with the people, place and legal system in which I am invested and for which I feel responsibility. For years I have studied U.S. detention policies at Guantánamo, become familiar with prisoners' names and stories, tried to speak out against prisoner abuse and torture and advocated for human rights and the closure of the prison. In 2010 four Uighur men, detained in Guantánamo for seven

depressed or hopeful that the prison will eventually close? I also worried about whether I could abide by all 10 pages of media rules. What if I made an innocent mistake or my conscience dictated otherwise?

As we approached the island, a small naval ship passed through the deep blue Caribbean waters and misty air below. Rocky cliffs, rugged green terrain and winding dirt roads came into view. A lone mountain set the background. The runway paralleled the coastline. As the



MATERIAL WITNESS:
Family members of 9/11 victims observe the hearings.

SKETCH: REUTERS/JANET HAMLIN

years, described their experience to me.

During the flight to Guantánamo, I felt a mix of fear and excitement, having no idea what to expect. Whom would I meet? What would I see and have access to? Would it make me angry,

plane touched down, the flight captain welcomed us: "Have a good time here in Cuba."

Seriously? I thought. Have a good time? It was hard to fathom how this experience could possibly be a "good

LUKE HANSEN, S.J., is an associate editor of *America*.

time,” or why anyone would even have this expectation. For 779 detainees, landing on the naval base—mostly during the prison’s first two years—was not nearly as idyllic or fortunate. They weren’t able to enjoy the beauty of the land or sea because, in transfer, they were subjected to sensory deprivation, a form of torture. Detainees arrived in Guantánamo wearing ear muffs and blacked-out goggles, leaving them dazed and confused.

Even worse: A flight to Guantánamo, in hindsight, was the final flight for nine detainees who later died in confinement. The most recent victim was Adnan Latif, who reportedly died from an overdose of psychiatric medication in September. (Questions remain as to what precipitated this.) Meanwhile, many of the remaining 166 prisoners face the prospect, at the current rate of transfers, of growing old and dying in Guantánamo. When they first landed here, did they ever imagine this possibility? While some of the prisoners claim membership in Al Qaeda, most do not; and most will never be charged in any military or civilian court.

As it turned out, members of the media were not allowed to see much of the naval base or visit the prison camps. Instead we spent most of our time in a tightly restricted place named Camp Justice, of all things—home to residential tents, the media center, a recently constructed \$12 million maximum-security legal complex and plenty of

bright orange barriers and chain-link, razor-wire fences to boot.

In the viewing area adjacent to the courtroom, we sat behind thick, sound-proof glass. My eyes darted between the silent scenes, unfolding live, and monitors broadcasting the sights and sounds of the proceedings with a 40-second delay. A conflicted chief prosecutor, Brig. Gen. Mark Martins, defended a system of justice that military personnel, he told *The New York Times*, “aren’t enamored of,” adding that he still believes “there is a narrow category of cases in which reformed military commissions are the best choice to achieve justice.” Military officers passionately defended the dignity and human rights of their clients—an unpopular cause, considering that the five defendants stand trial for helping plan the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, that killed nearly 3,000 Americans. And I also saw military police and defendants simply being kind to one another, at least in the courtroom.

But nothing touched me more deeply than talking with a group of family members who lost loved ones on Sept. 11. Before this trip, I focused mainly on detention policies and human rights, and I still firmly believe that each prisoner should be tried in federal court or immediately released; the prison in Guantánamo and its counterpart in Afghanistan need to close. But that is only the beginning.

In Guantánamo, my vision of justice expanded. There is a need for

healing and reconciliation that goes beyond the courtroom. Legal rights and humane treatment are important, but so is the pain and frustration experienced by family members who have waited more than a decade for this trial to commence.

Gordon Haberman, who lost his daughter Andrea in the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, expressed his desire to visit the prison camps and personally confront Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who has claimed responsibility for plotting no less than 30 acts of violence internationally, including the Sept. 11 attacks. Mr. Haberman’s request to talk with Mr. Mohammed, however, was turned down. But why?

Our system of justice needs to move beyond the functional tasks of simply identifying the crime, the culprit and the punishment. A framework of restorative justice, promoted by many faith-based groups and human rights organizations, poses a different set of concerns: Who has been harmed, what kind of healing needs to take place, and how can every person participate in reconciliation? This creates a space not only for lawyers and judges, but for victims and their loved ones.

There have been, no doubt, countless victims related to Guantánamo: the rule of law itself; those who died on Sept. 11; Muslim men, including Mr. Mohammed, tortured by the United States; soldiers and civilians killed or injured in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars; and even those who carry out acts of terrorism, war and torture—blind to the human cost of such violence.

Guantánamo afforded me the privilege of being in conversation with a few soldiers and family members, and being in close proximity to the prisoners. Now, back home, I better understand the need to create space to share our experiences, listen to one another, repent of wrongdoing and make amends. Together we can forge a path to healing and reconciliation. **A**

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'That Man Is Me'

My life-changing encounter with a fictional French bishop

BY CHARLES KLAMUT

Twenty years ago, I met an extraordinary man who changed my life. He softened my heart, awakened my imagination and opened new possibilities. He inspired me to think about life in a new way. He made me want to be a priest. Thanks to him, I am now in my 14th year of ministry. Remarkably, this man never really existed.

I speak of the incomparable Monseigneur Bienvenu, the bishop of Digne, from Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. The new movie has revived the old thrill, as I gratefully reflect on how this story once shook me to my core.

It was the early 1990s. I was at that threshold between boy and man, marked by the promise of so many paths and so much uncertainty, when a life can go anywhere or nowhere. I was a sophomore in college, awakening from the benign cluelessness of adolescence, still groggy but ready for destiny to come knocking, making me some irresistible offer.

It came knocking in the form of one Jean Valjean, on the humble door of an old cottage, after every other door refused him. It was answered by the warmth of one saintly country bishop, was repaid with treachery and, finally, was closed with mercy. Valjean was not the only one who left that day a different man. Like Valjean, my life was forever changed by that encounter.

My relationship with the bishop of

Digne and *Les Misérables* began on a grim March day. I was home for spring break, hanging out with my friend Brooks playing cards. At some point he went to call his girlfriend. Bored with the music we had on, I decided to give his "Les Misérables" soundtrack a listen. Back in high school, our class had gone to see the musical, but I'd missed it because I had been out sick. My classmates had raved about it, even the cool kids.

Guessing that Brooks would not soon return, I absently shuffled the cards. Every now and again, a line stood out. "He treated me like any other/ he gave me his trust/ he called me brother." "I dreamed a dream in time gone by/ when hope was high/ and life worth living." General outlines of the story emerged as I perused the libretto, my interest growing. Brooks returned. We went back to our card game.

Fast forward to the following summer. I had begun to suspect I had a mind and a soul, and I thought I needed a good read to test my theory. I went to the public library and kept returning to this enormous hardcover copy of *Les Misérables*. The book seemed to cry out, "Come, have a look,



won't you?" I objected to its rude length: "There is no way I am reading you."

Fortunately, the book won. I took it off the shelf and opened it timidly, with a shyness and shame I cannot explain, even to this day. Perhaps I was confounded by the disproportion between my mean and low ignorance and this great literary classic. Such books were not for the likes of me, I thought. Inside, though, were some glossy pictures from the Broadway musical, with pretty girls and interesting captions. "All right, I'll check you out," I grumbled. "But that doesn't

REV. CHARLES KLAMUT is a priest of the diocese of Peoria, Ill.

ART: DAN SALAMIDA

mean I'll read you!" I figured I'd flip through the pages, read some scenes and be done.

It started slowly, page after page describing the bishop's day-to-day life. "When does he meet Valjean?" I thought impatiently. Even so, I was fascinated. The bishop traded his mansion for the shack next door, which was being used as a hospital. He made house calls around the region, showing courtesy and honor to all, including the village atheist. He lovingly tended his garden, and to critics who called his work a waste of time he replied: "The beautiful is as useful as the useful. More so, perhaps." He arrived late for the cardinal's visit, due to a pastoral call, and rode up on his old donkey, begging the mortified prelate's forgiveness for having the effrontery to ride the same beast as our Lord rode into Jerusalem. By the time Valjean finally knocked on his door, I not only knew this Bienvenu; I loved him.

Valjean is wary of the welcome. Because of the humble trappings, he

mistakes the bishop for a simple country priest. Bienvenu offers him food and table fellowship. He repeatedly calls him "Monsieur," raising Valjean's head ever higher. "Ignominy thirsts for consideration," Hugo writes. When Valjean awakens to make off with the silver, he is nearly converted by the sight of the righteous man in his sleep. Nearly.

The cops catch him with his contraband cutlery and drag him before the bishop, who with a word can send Valjean back to prison for life. Instead, he gives truth to Valjean's lie that the silver was given and offers him the candlesticks too. Valjean is left gaping with a face that "no human tongue can describe." The police leave. Valjean stands before the merciful gaze of his benefactor. Bienvenu calls him his brother and tells him he has bought his soul for God with the silver; now he must go, using it to become an honest man.

Victor Hugo's masterful account of

Valjean and the bishop moved me almost as much as it moved Valjean. For the next thousand pages, Valjean strives to become what Bienvenu saw in him and to be faithful to what was given. Sacrificial love follows like concentric ripples from that first "stone" dropped in the water, the bishop's mercy toward Valjean.

I read *Les Misérables* in a week. It was the perfect book at the perfect time, with soul-shaking impact. For a long time afterward, I went over and over it in my mind and in my heart.

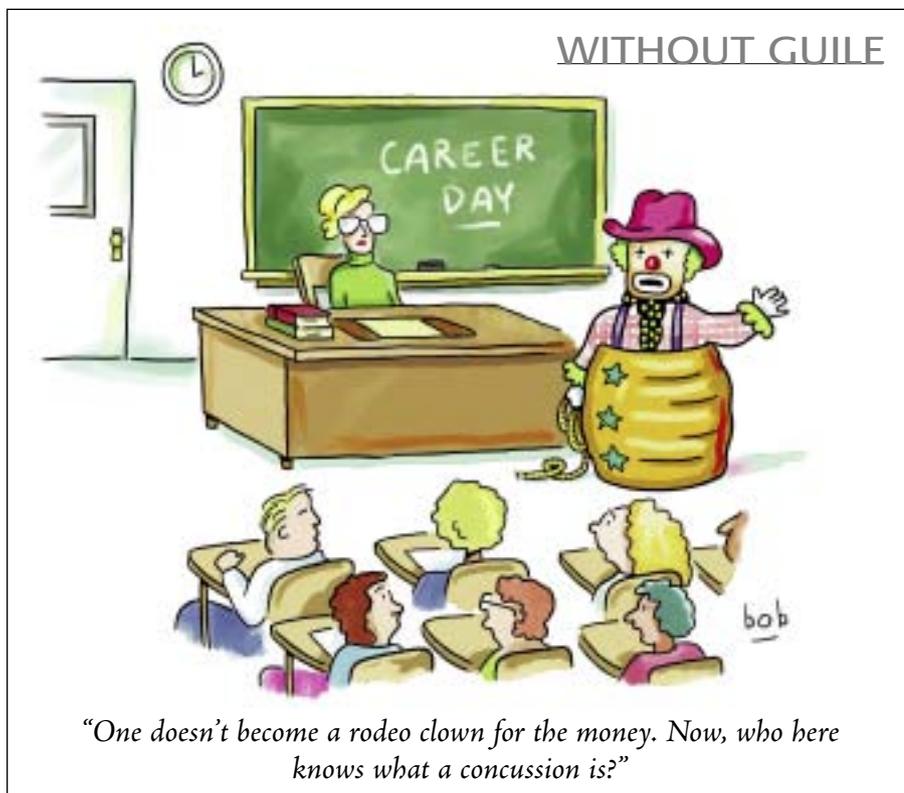
One day I had a revelation: Monseigneur Bienvenu never knew! The heroism of Valjean's subsequent life was unknown to the bishop. Fantine, Cosette, Marius, Eponine, the Thénardiens, Gavroche, Javert, the barricades, the students, the wedding—all unknown. The bishop sent Valjean off with his silver and a promise, never to see or hear from him again. For all he knew, Valjean went back to his old ways. And yet it did not seem to matter. He treated Valjean as he treated everyone: as Christ would. Bienvenu was the unknowing mover of all that was to follow. But for his act of mercy toward Valjean, the whole beautiful story would not have been.

This was when it hit me. I thought of the bishop, and the impact he made and what his priesthood meant. I can remember praying, "Lord, if that's what it's about, if my life can do that...sign me up." And the rest, as they say, is history.

A later scene describes a man kneeling reverently in the night outside the bishop's home. We are made to guess that it is Valjean, paying his respects. Twenty years later, may this humble telling of my own encounter with the bishop of Digne serve as my reverent bow, a token of my gratitude and love. **A**

ON THE WEB

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"One doesn't become a rodeo clown for the money. Now, who here knows what a concussion is?"

BOOKS & CULTURE

FILM | MICHAEL V. TUETH

THE STORY OF A SOUL

Fate and forgiveness in 'Les Misérables'

Scenes from "Les Misérables"



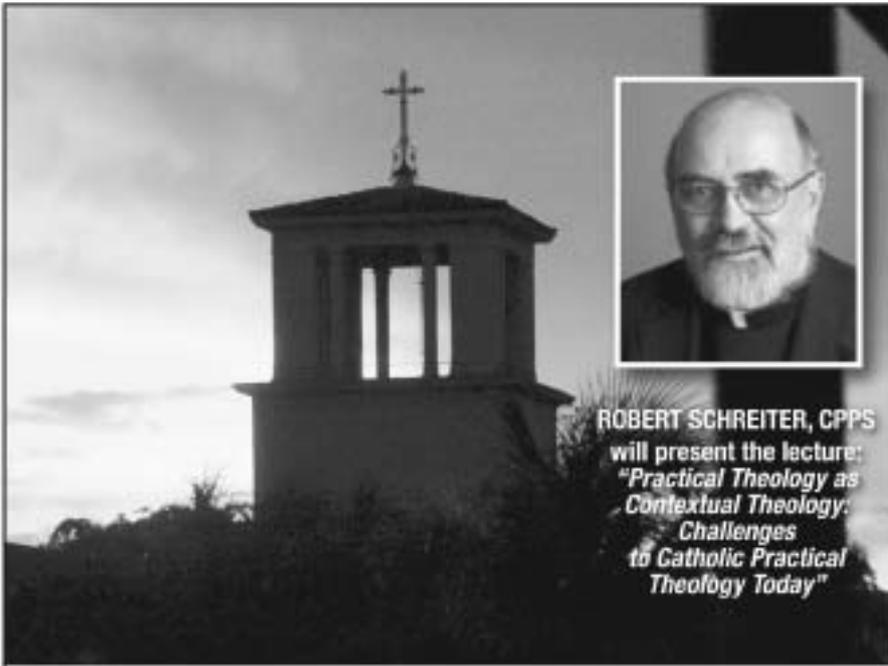
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Les Misérables arrives in theaters this Christmas bearing a distinguished lineage as one of the most beloved novels and certainly one of the most popular theatrical musicals of all time. Since the English-language adaptation premiered in London in 1985, it has played to over 60 million theatergoers around the world. Its Broadway production ran for 16 years, and its various touring companies traveled the country for 18 years. The Hollywood version seems long overdue. Under the direction of Tom Hooper, an Academy Award winner for "The King's Speech," the film dares to retain its sung-through structure with almost every bit of dialogue set to music and every scene lavishly visualized.

Hollywood has successfully adapted many a popular Broadway musical—think of the splendor of "The King and I," the energy and romance of "West Side Story," the wit and glamour of "My Fair Lady," the sentimental charm of "The Sound of Music" and the cynical sass of "Chicago"—in many cases even garnering Oscars for best film. Will this musical adaptation of such a beloved novel and theatrical



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phenomenon work the same magic for moviegoers? Maybe. Or, for various reasons, maybe not.

The story is built around the heroic Jean Valjean, who, after 19 years in prison for stealing a loaf of bread, is finally released on parole. In his first night of freedom, he steals silver objects from a kindly bishop who has provided him with a place to stay. When he is caught and doomed to return to prison for his crime, the bishop saves him by telling the gendarmerie that he had given Valjean the silver. This generous act transforms the embittered Valjean and prompts him to dedicate the rest of his life to similar acts of mercy and kindness to the poor. In the course of the film, he saves one of his factory workers, Fantine, from a prison sentence; adopts and raises her illegitimate daughter, Cosette; saves the life of Cosette's lover, Marius; and even manages to forgive his nemesis, the police official, Javert.

The film boasts some all-star casting. Moviegoers who know Hugh Hackman only as Wolverine in the "X-Men" films or Anne Hathaway as Catwoman in "The Dark Knight Rises" should be pleasantly surprised by their impressive musical talent. Jackman, who appears in almost every scene of the film, even rises to the vocal demands of the double-octave prayer, "Bring Him Home." Amanda Seyfried, who made a charming musical-film debut a couple of years ago in "Mamma Mia," is a lovely and lyrical Cosette. Eddie Redmayne, who attracted attention last year as the shy companion of Marilyn Monroe in "My Week With Marilyn," delivers a far more passionate dramatic and musical performance as the revolutionary leader and lovelorn hero, Marius—especially in his lament for his fallen comrades in the song "Empty Chairs at Empty Tables." Samantha Banks, a newcomer in the relatively minor role of Eponine, the unrequited lover, offers a heartbreaking rendition of the ballad "On My Own."

Another newcomer, Aaron Tveit, brings passion and pathos as Marius's companion in leading the student revolt.

The decision to have the performers sing directly on camera rather than lip-synch to their recorded performances enhances every musical number. This is especially effective in Hathaway's anguished delivery of "I Dreamed a Dream," filmed in one take, which creates an intimacy between the actress and the audience that is usually achieved only in a live stage performance. Only Russell Crowe, as Javert, the official who obsessively pursues Valjean because he broke his prison parole, is disappointing. With none of the passion and complexity he brought to his characters in "A Beautiful Mind" and "Gladiator," Crowe's performance is dramatically understated and musically reserved.

The lush orchestrations add to the intensity of every number, especially the revolutionary anthems, "One Day More" and "Do You Hear the People Sing?" The major musical moments, however, are in danger of being buried in the sung-through structure of the film, with most of the dialogue, even the most conversational lines, set to music. Opera lovers are accustomed to continuous recitative between arias and chorus numbers; film audiences are not. They might welcome more moments of spoken conversation. Many of the musical numbers tend to blend into a vague mix of passion, anger, rebellion and piety. Most of the musical numbers are filmed with tight close-ups of the actor singing directly into the camera. This creates a certain sameness of mood and sentiment throughout. The only major departure from the pattern comes in "Master of the House," the jaunty ballad of the disreputable innkeepers, Monsieur and Madame Thenardier. Sacha Baron Cohen and Helena Bonham Carter make the most of their grotesque characters, but as the

only bit of comic relief in the grim narrative, their appearances seem out of place.

In general, while "Les Misérables" obviously has inspired millions of people through its portrayal of courageous resistance to injustice, forgiveness instead of revenge and sympathy for the downtrodden, little background is provided for the various episodes (explained more fully, of course, in the 1,500 pages of Victor Hugo's novel). As it stands, the film offers very little explanation for Javert's decision, in his relentless devotion to justice, to focus on Valjean; nor does it make clear how Valjean managed to become a factory

owner and mayor of a provincial town. Is it fate or coincidence that causes Javert to keep appearing in Valjean's life? What specific injustices prompted the student uprising that comprises the second half of the narrative?

The audience may not worry about such details and will be carried

away by the film's visual excitement and heartrending songs. Maybe the faults of this version of "Les Misérables"—like the theft of the bishop's silver—will be forgiven.

ON THE WEB

Matt Stewart, S.J., reviews
"The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey."
americamagazine.org/culture

MICHAEL V. TUETH, S.J., is associate professor of communication and media studies at Fordham University in New York.

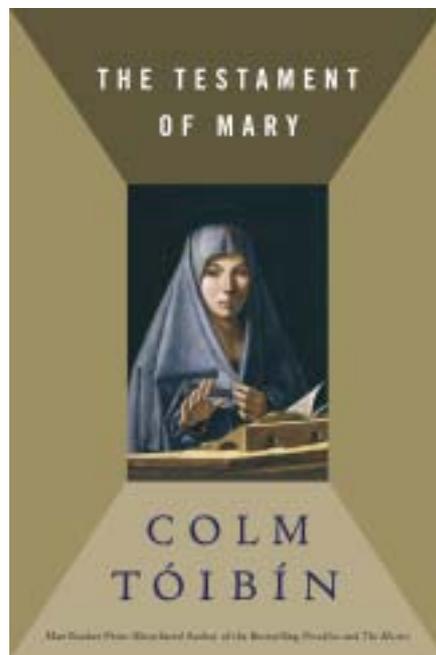
BOOKS | DIANE SCHARPER A MOTHER'S TALE

THE TESTAMENT OF MARY

By Colm Tóibín
Scribner. 96p \$19.99

Colm Tóibín's *The Testament of Mary* tells an intriguing, though not always convincing story. Its main character, and to an extent its only character, is an old woman fretting about her past as she tries to get the facts straight. Given the book's title and story line, one assumes that the woman is Mary, the mother of Jesus of Nazareth, although the identity of the characters is not clearly defined. If this were just any old woman, the book would probably garner no interest. But since this old woman is central to Christianity, she is inherently interesting.

So who is Tóibín's Mary? She's like no Mary ever seen. She is not the Mary of Luke as found in the story of the annunciation or the Magnificat. Neither is she John's Mary, who stands weeping at the cross. Tóibín's Mary



doesn't get it. At the very least, her son was a visionary with grandiose notions, but she is a simple, somewhat shallow woman who prefers easy solutions. She's a Jew and keeps the Sabbath but has no problem honoring the Greek

goddess Artemis. She is a mother but apparently ran away from her son's crucifixion because she wanted to save her own skin.

Yet she suffers. She loved her son; but, one feels, he was too much for her. She won't even name him, saying, "...something will break in me if I say the name." Every line is imbued with her pain. The book is a dramatic monologue that puts readers inside her head, so we feel for her when she tells us that she tried to persuade her son to come home and he refused. Tóibín embellishes his story with exquisite metaphors as in Mary's perception of her caretakers: "...they think I do not...notice the cruel shadow...that comes hooded in their faces or hidden in their voices..."

As the story opens, Mary lives alone in Ephesus, watched over by her son's (unidentified) friends. These friends want to invent a new religion that would establish her son as divine. But Mary won't accept that.

Mary spends most of her time wondering whether she ever knew her son. When he was little, they were close, but then he fell in with a crowd of misfits. He became emotionally distant. She heard rumors that he healed a cripple and walked on water, but she can't believe that such actions could be performed by the boy she raised.

As the story ends, she complains about feeling duped and refuses to cooperate with her caretakers. In an act possibly of rebellion, she visits a pagan temple, then buys a statue of Artemis. She decides to set the matter straight, to reveal the truth of her son's life—with the testimony (of this book). The problem is, she does not know what that truth is.

An award-winning Irish writer twice shortlisted for the Man Booker prize, Tóibín explored similar territory in his well-received recent book, *New Ways to Kill Your Mother: Writers and Their Families*, which examines family dynamics as they have influenced literature.

With his latest book, the stakes are

higher. Tóibín attempts to decipher a mother's complex feelings regarding her son. (The biblical aspect of the story multiplies the complexity.) If Tóibín were looking at this issue from a son's perspective, it would be hard enough. But from a mother's perspective, it's nearly impossible, even for a writer of Tóibín's stature.

Tóibín tries to compensate for the problem by cloaking Mary's feelings in ambiguity. She thinks she dreamed sections of her life—especially her son's crucifixion, burial and supposed resurrection. "What happened in our dreams," Mary says, "took on more flesh...than our lives when we were conscious." But how real can this statement be, especially under such dire circumstances? She believes she ran away when her son was nailed to the cross. But some say that she held him before

his entombment. What happened? What really happened? Mary doesn't know, and readers are left with questions whose answers are crucial to a valid response to the narrative.

It is worth knowing that the story was first written as a play. A live actor recounting Mary's life would help to bring the story alive. Costumes, lighting, gestures, facial expressions, posture, bodily presence and tone of voice would make Tóibín's Mary more believable and understandable. As it is, despite Tóibín's poetic writing, Mary never quite comes across in her role as mother of Christ, which is what this story is or should be all about.

DIANE SCHARPER is a member of the National Book Critics Circle. Her latest book is *Reading Lips and Other Ways to Overcome a Disability*, which she co-edited with her son, Philip H. Scharper Jr., M.D.

JEROME DONNELLY

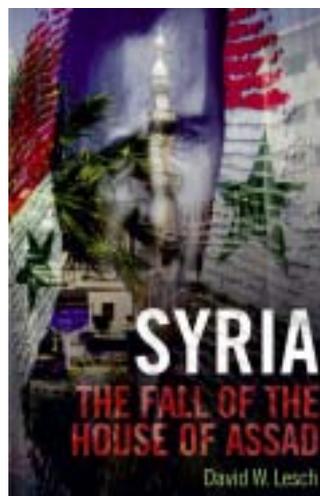
ARAB WINTER

SYRIA

The Fall of the House of Assad

By David W. Lesch
Yale University Press. 288p \$28

David Lesch, a recognized specialist in Syrian politics, is the author of an earlier book on Syria's President Bashar al Assad, with whom he has conducted several interviews. His latest book traces the fortunes—mostly misfortunes—of Assad, his government's off-and-on relationship with the United States and the events leading up to the current Syrian civil war. The book's last chapters rush to keep up with unfolding events and include citations from as

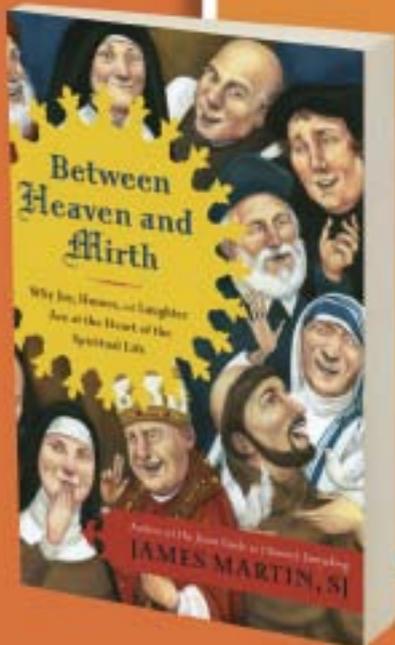


late as July 2012.

Bashar al Assad became an accidental president when his brother Basil, who had been groomed to take the position, was killed in an auto accident

in 1994. Bashar's early days in the role, when he seemed prepared to initiate sweeping reforms, gave way to disappointment when the reforms fell short of expectations. Lesch found a new "smugness" in Assad after his 2007 re-election. An opposition grew until protests turned to rebellion and the civil war that up to now has failed to achieve the "regime change sought by the right-wing Arab League and the U.S."

Assad, Lesch argues, mistakenly



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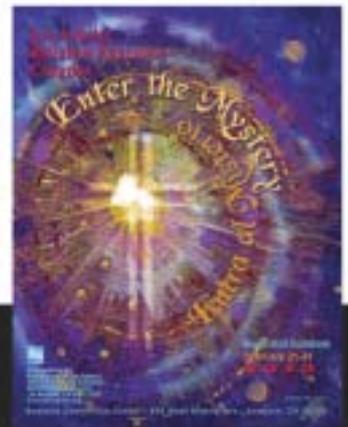
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believed that Syria was immune to the unrest that spawned the Arab Spring and has now become embroiled in an unexpected civil war whose outcome is far from certain. Lesch, disappointed in Assad and sympathetic to the opposition, nonetheless sees that a rebel victory might not bring a spring cleaning of the sort its Western supporters hoped for.

Assad liberalized (that is, privatized) part of the economy, including limited banking and a stock exchange. Privatization led to new forms of corruption in Syria's new military-industrial complex. Lesch implies that the changes amounted to too little too late, even as he sees that too sudden a reform can result in "economic instability."

A book like this very much needs an explanation of the Baath Party's economic views in relation to the market economy advocated by the United States as well as by an opposition which has a strong foreign-based Syrian component. This would help to show just what Assad faced as a

reformer, yet Lesch does not provide one. To imagine a Syrian official telling Assad, "Hey kid, this is not how we do things here" does not explain a complex situation.

This book comes up short in other ways as well. Fleeting references to local movements and persons call for more explanations than Lesch supplies. Lesch refers, for example, to a "neo-conservative straight jacket" that kept the Bush II administration from dialogue about Islamic terrorism and Israel; Israel's continued occupation of Syrian territory (the Golan Heights); the long-standing U.S. sanctions against Syria; "foreign conspiracies in Syria over the decades"—without clarifying details that might sharpen an understanding of the hostility that Syria and Assad have faced.

Lesch appropriately calls attention to the influence of perceptions created and reinforced by worldwide media, including this book: "If the perception of a regime is that it is ordering or condoning the torture and murder of chil-

dren, it is often well-nigh impossible to rehabilitate such a tarnished image." Media in the United States, both left and right, have almost all implied or expressed the view trumpeted by the New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman: "Lord knows, I am rooting for the opposition forces in Syria to quickly prevail." And the book does not sufficiently free itself from that "tarnished image" expression.

Syria suffers from more than image problems; U.S. sanctions, about which Lesch has little to say, have damaged Syria. Only the veto of a resolution in the U.N. Security Council may have prevented even more damage—a coup de grâce. The refusal of Russia's President Putin to be fooled again by a U.N. Security Council vote for the protection of civilians that turned into a Western assault on Libya may have kept the death toll from soaring. Assad has often made claims about foreign interference, as Lesch observes, even if Assad has exaggerated them. They



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deserve more attention than given here.

Reports available since the book has appeared tend to corroborate reports available much earlier that Saudi Arabia and Qatar were supplying arms to Syrian rebels with C.I.A. assistance in coordinating war efforts from over the Turkish border. A recent U.S. appropriation of \$45 million to aid rebels in "logistics" now confirms those reports. Lesch makes repeated references to reports of torture and killing by government forces, while rebel car bombs, roadside bombs and suicide bombers receive only passing mention and are never characterized as terrorism. The Syrian government has no monopoly on brutality.

The possibility that violent sectarianism might follow an Assad fall becomes a growing concern. Lesch cites Henry Kissinger's dire warning: "If the objective is confined to deposing a specific ruler, a new civil war could follow in the resulting vacuum, as armed groups contest succession, and outside countries choose different sides." Retired C.I.A. agent Philip Giraldi, writing presciently last year, is even more explicit than Kissinger: "In the United States, many friends of Israel are on the Assad regime-change bandwagon, believing that a weakened Syria, divided by civil war, will present no threat to Tel Aviv. But they should think again, as these developments have a way of turning on their head. The best organized and funded opposition political movement in Syria is the Muslim Brotherhood." Direct talk like this from Lesch would have been welcome.

Only in recent weeks have the U.S. media damped down the level of vocal support for the rebels as more Islamic radicals alter the rebel matrix. Since the book's publication, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who had led in cheerleading the Syrian opposition, but who has recently been much quieter amid increasing concern about

growing jihadist ranks, organized a meeting in Doha to overhaul the rebel leadership on the grounds that "the opposition must include people from inside Syria," a tacit admission that further validates Assad's claims of outside (exile and foreign) interference. The conference replaced the Syrian National Council with a new Syrian National Coalition endorsed by Clinton and six Sunni countries as the "legitimate representative of the Syrian people."

The head of the new coalition, Ahmad Mouaz al-Khatib, a former Damascus imam and long-standing opponent of the Assad government, has been living recently in Qatar. Despite his strong sectarian (Sunni) views, Western supporters are counting on him both to advocate for pluralism and to counter the growing Salafist presence among the rebels and consequent jihadist character of the opposition. Moreover, the divisions for and against the Assad government among surrounding countries threaten to turn the civil war into a regional one.

The fact that in just over a year, elections could result in a new Syrian president and preclude the continuing slaughter does not stop the United States and others from insisting that Assad must go now. This fans the flames of war and the likelihood that fighting will continue. Khatib, to his credit, has called for an end to bloodshed, more of a fond hope, perhaps, than a likelihood. These recent developments, of course, are beyond the reach of Lesch's book, but a deeper critical look at the U.S. policy and activity toward bringing about the fall of Assad would have markedly contextualized these developments and improved this effect.

JEROME DONNELLY, since his retirement from the English department of the University of Central Florida, has taught occasionally in the university's international studies program. He is co-author of *Human Rights: A User's Guide* (Kendall Hunt, 1989).



Poetry Contest

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LETTERS

Trust the Investigation

Re "Digging Deeper" (Current Comment, 12/10): The BP explosion was a tragedy, and the most serious consequences were borne by those who died, their families and the many who live and work along the Gulf coast. Whatever civil compensation is made will never replace the lost lives. But the editors speculate on criminal behavior, claiming the hefty fines "have the net effect of terminating investigations that might tease out the truly responsible parties."

In the aftermath of the explosion, BP had zero popular support. The Obama administration had no reason to shelter BP or its senior executives, and every political incentive to be aggressive. So I believe we are entitled to conclude that a thorough investigation was made. The editors' speculations about criminal behavior by additional individuals, without any supporting evidence or individual names, discredits both the government officials at every level who handled the case and individuals at BP who, after investigation, were not charged. At what point does such speculation become specious or slanderous?

Perfect justice may not be achieved in this or any other case, but we need to avoid speculations that serve no other purpose than to divide us.

JOSEPH J. DUNN
Conshohocken, Pa.

Self-Offering

Of Many Things, by Matt Malone, S.J. (12/10), reminded me that original sin is alive and well. I often describe this primordial evil like this: "How can I get the most by doing the least?" Father Malone identifies the sad reality of violence and injustice as the products of original sin. And so they are. Rational decision making is hard work and demands laying out our vulnerabilities to promote a higher good.

All of our difficulties find their root in: “What’s the least I have to do/contribute in order to get by, stay on top, be superior to others?” Arriving at the bottom line of a corporate income statement, putting in the hard work to maintain trusting human relationships and, yes, sitting down and rationally working out our differences on the world’s stage do not demand we do the least, but that we pour out our very selves in this worthwhile work.

The incarnation, which ultimately led to the passion, death and resurrection of the Savior, is our model for overcoming the consequences of original sin.

ED PRATT
East Greenbush, N.Y.

Post-Modern Conversion

“Facebook Apologetics,” by Brad Rothrock (12/10), demonstrates precisely why John Paul II’s new evangelization remains notable for its lack of success. Mr. Rothrock’s new apologetics is no less freighted with fear and distrust than his friend’s timid refrain of the common postmodern themes of jealous protection of personal autonomy and distrust of any authority figure or objective truth claim.

The suggestion that a new apologetics can be found in the undeniably brilliant but outmoded theology of Thomas Aquinas indicates a distrust of contemporary theologians and common human experience. The appeal to natural law amounts to psychological denial (in the sense of an unconscious defense mechanism against an emotionally painful reality) of any possibility of intellectual and religious conversion from within the postmodern mind-set.

The postmodern world will remain unevangelized until would-be evangelizers come to terms with the fact that they themselves are wholly the products of postmodernity’s fear and distrust. The first step toward such a realization might be to embrace graciously

human limitation and fallibility and admit to the unsatisfactory nature of giving propositional answers to existential questions.

(REV.) ALAN WEBER
Tampa, Fla.

The writer is the director of the Catholic student center at the University of South Florida.

Compassionate Chaplains

The letters to the editor from Ben Jimenez, S.J., and Joseph E. Mulligan, S.J., that condemned **America** for publishing advertisements seeking military chaplains (12/10) stunned and saddened me. For 32 years my husband served in the U.S. Air Force. We witnessed the lives and ministry of many hard-working, compassionate chaplains who baptized, married, buried, counseled, encouraged, consoled and comforted “those who handle the nuclear arsenal and operate the drones,” along with their families—even at the cost of their own lives.

They brought Christ to us amid our joys and deep sorrows. They dealt with every kind of spiritual, domestic, civil and even criminal problems imaginable. They could be found walking an icy flight line at 2 in the morning,

hearing confessions in a sweltering maintenance hangar, or arranging emergency leave, transportation and money to get an 18-year-old home to a dying parent. If that isn’t “nurturing life,” I don’t know what is. Nor do I understand what tortured logic twists the convictions of these Jesuit writers to a vision of chaplains “supporting idolatry” of any kind, or as accessories to “respectable murderers.”

MARY K. PICKITT
Lake Wylie, S.C.

Seeking Reconciliation

Thank you, Susan Windley-Daoust, for “Never Too Late” (11/26). It was in Mankato, Minn., on Dec. 26, 1862, that 38 Dakota were hanged as a consequence of their struggle to overcome the overwhelming injustices they suffered from the U.S. government and the overwhelming white culture.

Forty years ago citizens in Mankato decided it was “never too late,” and with the help of Dakota people, they celebrated their first Reconciliation Pow Wow in what is now known as Reconciliation Park. A stone buffalo now stands at this site in memory of those who died because of the injustices.

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A Place of Peace

The beautiful Minnesota River Valley, treasured by both Dakota people and the many white settlers, became a source of hatred, division and misunderstanding in 1862. Now, 150 years later, it is a community seeking peace and reconciliation, and many in Minnesota study and dialogue for mutual understanding of this clash of cultures that has been repeated so often in our nation and around the world. My prayer is that **America** readers, in their own locale, become part of this dialogue for reconciliation among all cultures.

TED HOTTINGER, S.J.
Mankato, Minn.

Works of Evangelization

Re "Accent on the 'New,'" by Kevin Clarke (Signs of the Times, 11/5): The bishops have plans regarding the new evangelization. Here are some additional thoughts from a senior priest.

First and foremost, engage our people to pray. We need God's help, and we need to involve our people in this effort. Second, we need concerted effort to promote the corporal works of mercy in every parish in the world.

From the day Jesus announced his mission in the synagogue in Nazareth, he not only preached the message of the Father, but he healed the sick, raised the dead and fed the hungry. This is evangelization, according to Jesus: "This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

St. Francis of Assisi, the story goes, received a call to rebuild Christ's church. At first Francis thought of a nearby church building in great need of repair. But he soon realized he was being called to repair the community of the body of Christ. In time, others came to follow him, and when he sent them out on mission he reportedly told them: "Preach the Gospel always. If necessary, use words."

(REV.) ED ESCHWEILER
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Life-Giving Waters

BAPTISM OF THE LORD (C), JAN. 13, 2013

Is 40:1–11; Ps 29:1–10; Ti 2:11–3:7; Lk 3:15–22

“He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Lk 3:16)

John the Baptist preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins as an anticipation of the messiah. Jesus himself was baptized by John, as were many others. Taking this as historical fact, what are we to make of it?

According to some secular historians, Jesus was a disciple of John before beginning his own independent ministry. Though the Gospels assure us that John regarded Jesus as his superior, they also reflect the potential oddity that Jesus was baptized by John. In Matthew’s account of Jesus’ baptism, John initially resists, telling Jesus, “I need to be baptized by you.” In John’s Gospel, Jesus’ baptism is unmentioned. Jesus simply appears to be in the vicinity when John tells the people: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29). In today’s Gospel reading from Luke, though we hear about John and his ministry, Luke does not explicitly indicate that John baptized Jesus; indeed, Luke almost seems to suggest that Herod had imprisoned John prior to Jesus’ baptism.

Why would the sinless one need to undergo a baptism of repentance or undergo a preparation for the coming of the messiah when he is the messiah? Luke gives us answers. Immediately after Jesus’ baptism and confirmation by the Father—“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased”—

Luke provides Jesus’ genealogy, from Joseph all the way back to Adam (3:23–38). Luke locates Jesus in the whole of human history, but now with the possibility for humanity to start anew. Jesus simultaneously both embodies the whole of humanity—in all its pain, sin and brokenness—and facilitates its transformation, making it possible for humanity to be purified by the Holy Spirit. Standing beside sinners, and even taking their place, is central to his mission of love. In this way, he anticipates the cross. It is striking that the next time Jesus mentions baptism he refers to his own crucifixion. “There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!” (Lk 12:50; see Mk 10:38).

Baptism is a complicated ritual. Water itself points in two different directions. On the one hand, water is a symbol of life. In a Middle Eastern milieu, the presence of water represents an oasis of refreshment, and rains are celebrated as great gifts from God. Bathing in water, especially in a ritual setting, is deeply cleansing. Baptism reflects this: our sins are washed away by this symbol of life. In ancient times, water also symbolized chaos and death. Think of the flood in Noah’s day or the words of the psalmist: “Deep calls to deep in the roar of your torrents./ All your waves

and breakers sweep over me” (42:8).

Paul understands baptism as entering into the very Passion of Christ: “We who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death” (Rom 6:3). Of course, baptism is not death alone, much less death for death’s sake. Rather, it is death that brings forth new life. Back to Paul: “Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). Our second reading from Titus reflects the dynamic: “He saved us through the bath of rebirth and renewal of the Holy Spirit.”

The baptism of Jesus is a death. Embodying us and our broken condition, the Son of God entered into the watery tomb. We follow our Savior into that same tomb in



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Reflect in gratitude for your own baptism.
- Pray for healing and refreshment for those who suffer.
- Ask God to open your heart to deeper transformation.

our own baptism; we recall it every time we bless ourselves with holy water; and we ritualize it when we offer ourselves in the Eucharist to the Father along with the original sacrifice of Christ. It is the Cross; it is death.

Jesus’ baptism gave life-giving water the power to heal and infuse us with the Holy Spirit. We emerge, as did the Lord, confirmed as beloved children of the Father. We who are children of mortal, sinful Adam are now children of God, co-heirs with Jesus our Lord and brother.

Thank God for the baptism of Jesus.

PETER FELDMIEIER is the Murray/Bacik Professor of Catholic Studies at the University of Toledo.

Signs of the Wedding

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), JAN. 20, 2013

Readings: Is 62:1-5; Ps 96:1-10; 1 Cor 12:4-11; Jn 2:1-11

“As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you” (Is 62:5)

The Old Testament is filled with metaphorical language depicting God and Israel as husband and wife. Ezekiel allegorized Israel as a young virgin married to Yahweh. So when Israel practiced idolatry, the prophet likened her to an unfaithful wife. Hosea was even called by God to marry a prostitute, creating a prophetic image of Israel’s unfaithful marriage. Yet God promised a healing reunion: “I will remember the covenant I made with you when you were young; I will set up an everlasting covenant with you” (Ez 16:60); “You shall call me ‘My Husband’” (Hos 2:18). Our first reading, from Isaiah, follows this imagery: “As a young man marries a virgin, your Builder shall marry you; and as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so shall your God rejoice in you.”

When did God actually establish this everlasting covenant that Ezekiel promised, one that promised a renewed marriage? The New Testament, and indeed the whole Christian tradition, saw this as a promise still waiting for the Messiah to fulfill. Now we see why weddings and wedding banquets were among Jesus’ favorite images of the kingdom. We also see why John the Baptist

referred to himself as the best man, who needs to step aside now that the bridegroom has arrived (Jn 3:29-30).

Reflecting on these wedding and marriage metaphors can help us more deeply understand the significance of the wedding at Cana, recounted in today’s Gospel reading from John. Recall the story: Jesus, his mother and his disciples are invited to a wedding. These wedding celebrations often lasted for days, and eventually the wine ran out. Mary tells him, “They have no wine.” Jesus seems dismissive: “Woman, how does your concern affect me?” She is undeterred, and he seems to acquiesce, having the servants fill washing jars with water, soon to be transformed into the finest wine.

Instead of describing the event as a miracle, Jesus calls it a sign: “Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana in Galilee and so revealed his glory, and his disciples began to believe in him.” Several factors make the event a particularly powerful sign. For instance, there had been prophecies that the messianic days would be marked by an abundance of wine (Am 9:13-14). More important, Jesus’ actions at Cana point toward the inauguration of the everlasting covenant between God and Israel, the covenant of which Ezekiel spoke. What better place to provide his first sign than a wedding?

In the Gospel of John, signs are powerful deeds, but they do not guarantee faith on the part of those who

witness them (12:37). To understand a sign, one must see through the event to its deeper meaning. This requires the eyes of faith.

Amid many countersigns in our lives, are there real signs of the kingdom, of the everlasting covenant? I see them in my students. At the end of the fall semester, my student Kevin confessed to the class that our course was overwhelming to him. “I don’t know what to think about the Bible anymore,” he said. “I no longer accept any of my easy answers, and I’m not sure what to think about my faith anymore. Yet, this semester has been the holiest period in my life, and I’ve never felt closer to Christ.” This young man will be a seminarian next year, and I can hardly wait until he enters ministry. I am convinced his intimacy with Christ freed him to unmoor himself from a

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- When were you recently most inspired?
- When did you recently feel deeply loved?
- Thank the Lord for his wedding gifts.

level of maturity no longer worthy of that intimacy.

Where are signs in your life? Are they not present in forgiveness freely given to you or by you? Are they not there in the constancy of love you’ve shown to or received from children or parents? Where have you experienced deep compassion in your life? If you look, there are signs of the gracious presence of the Lord around us. They are nothing less than wedding gifts from our divine spouse. “Alleluia! The Lord has established his reign.... For the wedding day of the Lamb has come, his bride has made herself ready” (Rv 19:6-7).

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