

America

The background of the cover is a photograph of a desolate, arid landscape. The ground is parched and cracked into a network of dark, irregular lines. On the left, a single, leafless tree stands as a stark silhouette against the sky. In the lower right foreground, a young child in a red shirt and shorts is riding a blue bicycle away from the viewer. The sky is filled with heavy, grey clouds, suggesting an overcast and oppressive atmosphere.

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Climate For Change

ELIZABETH GROPPE

Engaging
The Spirituals

DREW CHRISTIANSEN

DENNIS O'BRIEN ON CHARLES TAYLOR

OF MANY THINGS

Is Rick Santorum right about John F. Kennedy?

The Republican presidential candidate was widely criticized for his unscripted remark that after reading Kennedy's famous 1960 speech on religion and politics, he "almost threw up." Santorum objected to what he took to be Kennedy's argument that religion is a private matter and should not influence political decisions.

For many in the media, Kennedy's stand on church and state has become, well, an article of faith. The New York Times called Santorum's response to Kennedy's "remarkable" speech to the Houston Ministerial Association "one of the lowest points of modern day electoral politics."

Yet there was one man who knew that Kennedy's thoughts on religion and politics would be controversial, and in fact, could cause gastro-intestinal distress. That man was Kennedy himself.

"It is hard for a Harvard man to answer questions on theology," Kennedy quipped following a controversial 1959 interview with *Look* magazine. "I imagine my answers will cause heartburn at Fordham and B.C."

In that interview, Kennedy sought to distance his role as a public servant from his private identity as a Catholic. His speech drew sharp criticism, and as a result he was better prepared for his September 1960 speech in Houston. Commonweal's John Cogley and John Courtney Murray, S.J., tutored him before the talk.

The legacy and content of the Houston speech is still pored over in Catholic circles, notably at a symposium at Fordham University in 2008 in advance of the 50th anniversary of the speech. A review of the transcript of that event reveals why Kennedy's remarks generate strong responses from readers like Senator Santorum.

Part of what rankles Kennedy's critics, surely, is what appears to be a less than enthusiastic embrace of the Catholic faith. At Fordham, the social

scientist William Galston quoted Arthur Schlesinger: "Kennedy's religion was humane rather than doctrinal. He was a Catholic as Franklin Roosevelt was an Episcopalian...." Kennedy was not publicly Catholic in the way Santorum is publicly Catholic. In fact, in his public approach to his faith, Kennedy is closer to Mitt Romney than any contemporary Catholic politician.

Galston argued that Kennedy was in favor of a kind of "triple separation." The first separation, between church and state, is largely uncontroversial today, though it is often conflated with the second—between religion and politics. The third separation concerned democracy and God.

Was Kennedy arguing that religion had no place in the public sphere? Kennedy called his faith a "private affair" and said it did not influence his public views. "There is no indication that JFK regarded the church as having any rightful authority over his public conduct," Galston said.

Another panelist, the ethicist Shaun Casey, found a clearer connection between Kennedy's faith and his public office. Casey cited the question and answer session following the Houston talk. "The exchanges there...helped knock down the argument that somehow Kennedy was declaring his Catholicism to be purely private, and hence irrelevant," Casey said. Kennedy mentioned more than once that his views represented "the great majority of American Catholics."

So 50 years later ambiguity persists. Santorum's remarks, though crude, were a visceral display of a debate that remains unsettled. At the Fordham gathering, the Rev. J. Bryan Hehir explained why, on the question of religion and politics, a delicate hand is required: "Religion has a place in the larger political argument, but it is not the totality of the argument, and how you define it and articulate it then becomes crucial."

MAURICE TIMOTHY REIDY

America

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CONTENTS



ARTICLES

13 CLIMATE FOR CHANGE

What the church can do about global warming
Elizabeth Groppe

17 ENGAGING THE SPIRITUALS

The secular challenge to the New Evangelization
Drew Christiansen



COLUMNS & DEPARTMENTS

4 Current Comment

5 Editorial Democracy and Stability

6 Signs of the Times

9 Column Time to Cool Down *Thomas Massaro*

29 Letters

31 The Word Darkness and Faith *Peter Feldmeier*



BOOKS & CULTURE

21 NEW MEDIA Praying in the Internet age **BOOKS** Thornton Wilder and Amos Wilder; *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience*

ON THE WEB

A podcast remembering the Christian Pakistani minister **Shahbaz Bhatti**, right, one year after his murder. Plus, Rev. Terrance W. Klein reviews the TV show "Smash" and additional video reflections for **Lent**. All at americamagazine.org.



Government's Task

In our March 5 editorial “Policy, Not Liberty,” we commented on the objections of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to President Obama’s accommodation on the health insurance mandate. We identified, by way of example, “the needs of self-insured institutions” as an obvious problem needing correction. In the weeks since that editorial appeared, the bishops have raised anew serious issues that need attention. A key issue, which we regret we failed to identify in that editorial, is the narrowness of the underlying Department of Health and Human Services regulation maintaining a limited definition of religious institutions, a formula to which the bishops, as well as **America** in an earlier editorial (“Taking Liberties,” 2/15), objected.

This is not an issue for the United States alone. Archbishop Silvio Tomasi, representing the Holy See, observed when speaking to the U.N. Human Rights Council on March 1 on the issue of religious liberty worldwide: “The task of government is not to define religion...but to confer upon faith communities a juridical personality so they can function peacefully within a legal framework.” The church cannot function peacefully in the United States under the current regulatory framework. The existing regulation demands reworking.

There are conflicting reports about how seriously the two sides are engaged with one another at this time. We hope that in the weeks ahead, as the bishops and the administration attempt to resolve their differences over the H.H.S. mandate, the legal definition of religious institutions will take a top priority. We trust that, with good faith efforts, this potentially explosive issue will be defused, and we support the bishops in that effort.

Women at Work

It is particularly worth noting now, during Women’s History Month, that the sluggish U.S. economy has led many young women to pursue higher education. In fact, in 2010 and 2011 the number of women between the ages of 18 and 24 in college or university rose by 130,000, compared with just 53,000 for men that age. Will a record number of college-educated women finally close the male-female pay gap?

Wage parity has proved an elusive goal, even though the education gap between men and women has shrunk markedly since President John F. Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act in 1963. That year women earned 59 cents for every dollar men earned. Pay gaps by gender still characterize all occupations; female plumbers (nurses, execu-

tives...) earn less than male plumbers (nurses, executives...). The dollar difference often stings. A comparison of the 2010 median earnings of workers in full-time management, professional and related occupations shows that the men received \$1,256 a week, the women \$923. Over a year, the women got \$17,316 less. Women, it is often explained, (1) experience more career “interruptions” than men do—time off for pregnancies and child/elder care, (2) work part time more often, (3) cluster in low-paying jobs and (4) have fewer mentors. Prejudice is seldom noted as an obstacle in the hiring, pay and promotion of women.

Wage parity requires changed attitudes and policies. Women ought not be penalized for giving birth or providing care. Uniform family care policies could equalize the load for men and women. And mentoring both male and female workers would help. Justice is always the best way to achieve equal opportunity.

Televangelism

For thoughtful conversation about religion, television is often the last place to look. Discussions about religious topics often devolve into debates between two extremes or, worse, into shouting matches. But once in a while television reveals its potential as an important tool for the New Evangelization.

Two recent appearances made Catholics watch, and watch carefully. M. Cathleen Kaveny, a professor of law and theology at Notre Dame, appeared on “The Daily Show With Jon Stewart,” to explicate issues surrounding the bishops’ opposition to insurance companies covering contraception in employee health plans. Professor Kaveny patiently and clearly explained the role of the bishops as teachers, pointed out the wide scope of the church’s social teaching and even touched upon some of the more subtle topics in moral theology, like “cooperation with evil.” At the close of the interview, she summed up why she stays in the church: “Because every human being matters.”

A few days later, Diarmuid Martin, the archbishop of Dublin, was interviewed on “60 Minutes” about sexual abuse in Ireland, which the archbishop has worked tirelessly to combat. Toward the end of the segment, the archbishop told of hearing of the rape (the right word) of an 8-year-old boy by a priest. To get a sense of the age of the child, he visited a nearby Catholic school and asked to see the 8-year-old students. As Archbishop Martin recalled seeing their youthful innocence, he wept. It was an open, honest and welcome picture of a compassionate man trying to address sin. Both Professor Kaveny and Archbishop Martin brought the Gospel into people’s living rooms by saying yes when the television producer called.

Democracy and Stability



Vladimir Putin has been re-elected to the Russian presidency. While there were irregularities in the election, support from the vast Russian hinterland would have delivered “the strongman” an outright victory in any case. The country is enjoying unprecedented prosperity, and it remembers too well the chaos of the Yeltsin years and the pains of moving “cold turkey” from communism to the free market only to see the oligarchs steal state enterprises and natural resources for their personal enrichment. The people chose Putin and stability over more decisive democratic change.

After a year of uprising and harsh repression, the Syrian opposition has not yet drawn large parts of the country to join its protests against the rule of President Bashar al-Assad. For the business class, Assad’s liberalization has been a boon. For minorities like the Alawites and Christians, Assad’s rule represents protection from religious oppression. The Arab Spring has not flourished in Syria in part, at least, because stability serves the interests of many and the outlook for any other future in Syria is unclear, or even worse, chaotic.

For generations, liberal internationalists criticized U.S. foreign policy for favoring stability over democracy. Over time that changed in democracy’s favor: in Latin America and East Asia, and following the collapse of the Soviet Union in Eastern Europe. The National Endowment for Democracy, a federally funded agency that is part of the State Department, and other nongovernmental organizations associated with the two major U.S. political parties played an important role in transitions in Ukraine, Georgia, Slovakia, Serbia and elsewhere.

President Obama’s speech to the Muslim world in Cairo in 2009 and his selective support for the Arab Spring seem to have extended that policy still further. The administration also seems for now to have defused a dispute over the arrest and trial of U.S. democracy workers in Egypt. But presented with the opportunity to bring popular democratic movements to power, citizens in a number of countries, like Russia, now seem to be opting for stability. Outsiders should not complain too loudly when insiders, who have known suffering, choose the status quo. They also have the most to lose when a political transition results in years of disorder followed by renewed oppression.

There are some counterexamples, of course. Tunisia, the birthplace of the Arab Spring, has made the smoothest transition to democracy, with the moderate Muslim Renaissance (Ennahda) Party winning a plurality in the

2011 elections. Morocco’s King Mohammed VI instituted limited democratic reforms by royal decree, and they were approved by popular referendum last July.

Compared with Russia, Egypt and Syria, Tunisia and Morocco are small, more compact countries with fewer political crosscurrents, which makes it easier for them to achieve political consensus. In addition, the legitimacy of the transition seems to ease the move to democracy. For years, the oppressed Renaissance Party was the opposition in exile with broad internal support. In Morocco King Mohammed’s standing, as well as his agile efforts to get ahead of the Arab Spring, gave the transition some legitimacy. Elsewhere the move to democracy will go more slowly and face more difficulties.

The arrest and trial of American activists in Egypt illustrate how U.S. efforts to promote democracy are facing setbacks. Democracy and human rights activists, as well as foreign nongovernmental organizations, need to fall back and reassess their vulnerabilities and their untried opportunities. New ways need to be found to link promoters of democracy to local activists. Education, broadly speaking, provides a proven way to promote change. Post-9/11 immigration barriers have made it difficult for students to pursue higher education in the United States. Educators should work with the Department of Homeland Security to make the United States once again the favored destination of foreign students. Cultural exchanges should also be expanded. To that end, the Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, formerly the U.S. Information Agency, ought to be cut free from the restraints of the State Department’s short-term agenda and allowed to build up, over the long term, knowledge of the United States at the grass-roots level among foreign populations.

Trade is also vital to the democratic agenda. China has proven that free trade does not always lead to democracy, and Russia shows how strong government can distort business development. But in many cases, improved economies will give countries in transition greater opportunity for political change. The development of an independent business sector can create domestic leverage for change. Increased trade and professional exchanges also stimulate familiarity among countries, leading to greater openness to experiment. Stability does not have to be the enemy of democracy. It can sometimes be its friend.

SYRIA CRISIS

Caritas Lebanon Shelters Families Fleeing Violence

Even as former U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan rushed to Damascus to meet Syria's President Bashar al-Assad on March 10 in a futile effort to achieve a ceasefire, church aid workers were scrambling to find housing for hundreds of Syrian refugees fleeing the increasing violence. About 200 families made their way to the border town of Qaa in the Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon on March 5 and were struggling in the region's near-freezing temperatures.

The Rev. Simon Faddoul, president of Caritas Lebanon, said that "women and children and the elderly are coming out in the cold with nothing but the clothes on their backs." The United Nations reported that as many as 2,000 Syrians crossed into Lebanon on March 5 and 6 to escape violence that has claimed hundreds of lives as President al-Assad continues a brutal crackdown on resistance to his regime.

Father Faddoul said most of the refugees arrived on foot from areas near the besieged city of Homs. "They are leaving the young men behind in Syria to guard their houses" from attack, Father Faddoul said. "These are people fleeing from war, their homes under bombardment." Before the latest surge, about 100 families had fled to Lebanon and were receiving assistance from Caritas, the priest said. Father Faddoul estimated that about 40 of the newly arrived families were Christian; the rest were Muslim.

"This has nothing to do with religion. Whenever there is suffering, we have to be there with them and to help them," he said. Father Faddoul said the availability of adequate housing in the poverty-stricken town of Qaa is limited. About 35 refugees are currently crammed into small rooms, but Caritas is collaborating with municipal officials to locate homes that three or four families could share.

Caritas Lebanon has had a regular presence in the Bekaa Valley, coordinating programs in agriculture to address the region's poverty. "Now we have so many [new] concerns—how to find shelters, especially if the situation [in Syria] drags on," Faddoul said. "We hope the situation doesn't deteriorate further," he added.

In Ottawa, Ontario, Carl Hetu, national director of the Catholic Near

East Welfare Association, said his agency was monitoring the situation of Christians in Syria. "Right now," he said, "there are thousands of people who are displaced. Among them are Christians, but that has been because of the conflict, not because of direct attacks on them." Many fear that as the uprising among Syria's primarily Sunni majority persists, minority groups, like the politically powerful Alawites and the nation's Christian communities, could become targets for sectarian reprisals.

"Christians are stuck between a rock and a hard place," Hetu said. "They cannot show approval of the Assad government, but they have to be careful, because they can't be seen to be supporting the rebels, either."

Mr. Hetu said his agency was preparing for a possible massive influx of Syrian refugees to neighboring

A Syrian boy and other refugees who fled violence in Syria find temporary shelter in a school in the Wadi Khaled area of northern Lebanon on March 7.



Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, should the already tense situation grow worse. "Our offices in Jordan and Beirut are expecting the worst if the country goes into wide civil war or the Assad government falls," he said.

A CHANGING CHURCH

Reaching Across Generational Divides

The adult face of the Catholic Church in the United States has changed markedly over the last 25 years. Demographic data show the U.S. church is younger and more ethnically diverse, though increasingly Latino. "That the Catholic Church crosses all lines of



gender, race, social class and generation is a gift, a strength,” said Mary Johnson, a Sister of Notre Dame de Namur and professor of sociology and religious studies at Emmanuel College in Boston.

“Do church organizations reflect these demographic changes?” Sister Johnson asked during her keynote address at the Catholic Common Ground Initiative’s annual Bernardin Conference, titled “Ecclesial Communion in Light of Generational Diversity.” Sister Johnson was speaking to an ethnically diverse mix of student leaders, professors, theologians and other professionals, mostly under age 50, an audience that indeed reflected some of these changes. The event was held this year on March 2 to 4 at Mundelein Seminary near Chicago.

Sister Johnson presented new demographic findings that illustrate

the church’s tectonic shift. In 1987 the two oldest generations, known as pre-Vatican II (born before 1941) and Vatican II (born between 1941 and 1960), made up more than three-quarters of Catholics. By 2011, those generations had shrunk to 43 percent. The current majority (at 57 percent), according to data gathered in the American Catholic Laity Survey, is made up of the two youngest adult groups: the Post-Vatican II generation (born between 1961 and 1978) and the millennial generation (born between 1979 and 1987).

Reviewing the data, Sister Johnson suggested that within the church there remain fertile possibilities for cross-generational ministry, prayer, service and decision-making. She also said that the geographical migration of some Catholics away from the Northeast and upper Midwest to the South and West explains why parishes and schools are being closed and merged in the former areas and newly built in the latter two regions. That migration also contributes to “regional differences in optimism and despair,” said Sister Johnson.

Some conference attendees noted that structures to foster the cross-generational church are not yet in place and worried that the generations do not have enough opportunities to get to know each other. Younger members expressed a yearning to be mentored and “to share the podium” of leadership, rather than being relegated merely to youth activities.

Dylan Corbett, a millennial who works for the U.S. bishops’

Campaign for Human Development, spoke of the young being threatened by a “consumerist” understanding of communion. “We see the church as a product or service that we can select to ‘purchase,’ use and discard at will,” he said.

Members of the post-Vatican II cohort spoke of a “middle child” syndrome. “There is a lot of attention given to the millennials for their new energy and needs,” said Kevin Ahern, a doctoral candidate in theological ethics at Boston College. “There is also still a lot of attention on the Vatican II generation, who lead the church now. But what about those of us in between?”

Members of the pre-Vatican II group wanted to know from the others: What is your dream for the church? What are you willing to do to see it through, and how can we help? That offer appeared to draw the generations in the room closer together. “The energy of the young, together with the wisdom of the older leaders, could really vitalize a lot of our exhausted church leaders and programs,” said Dee Bernhardt, a pastoral associate and director of campus ministry for St. Augustine University Parish in Platteville, Wis.



The face of the church is younger and more ethnically diverse. Mico Gorres, 14, left, and Brenna Zsebedics, 16, belong to a youth group at St. Martin of Tours Church in Gaithersburg, Md.

Mandate Standoff?

In a strongly worded letter to his fellow bishops, released on March 2, Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York charged that White House officials failed to consider the U.S. bishops' concerns that the federal mandate governing employer coverage of contraception and sterilization violated principles of religious freedom. An invitation from the White House to "work out the wrinkles" regarding the mandate failed to reach an agreement, and the effort "seems to be stalled," he said. Cardinal Dolan, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, complained that during a recent meeting with White House officials, U.S.C.C.B. staff members were told that "broader concerns of religious freedom" are "off the table." A White House source denied that appraisal and complained that some bishops and U.S.C.C.B. staff members seemed more "interested in the politics of this thing" than in a negotiated end to the standoff.

U.S. Budget Priorities

In a letter to Congress on March 6, Bishop Stephen Blaire of Stockton, Calif., and Bishop Richard Pates of Des Moines, Iowa, supported moves to strengthen programs that help the poor and vulnerable at home and abroad. The two U.S. bishops, who lead the justice and peace efforts of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, advised Congress to base federal budget decisions on whether they protect human life and dignity, whether they put the needs of the hungry, the homeless and the unemployed first and whether they reflect the shared responsibility of government and other institutions to promote the common good of all. Especially "workers

NEWS BRIEFS

On March 5 St. Francis Xavier Church in Henryville, Ind., became the main aid center for local victims of a devastating **chain of tornadoes** that left 39 dead in five states. + After 22 years of service to the Maryknoll Society, **Marie Dennis** resigned in January to devote herself to Pax Christi International, which she serves as co-president. + Legalization of **same-sex marriage** could obscure the "real meaning" of marriage for generations to come, the bishops of England and Wales told parishioners in a letter read at Masses on the weekend of March 11. + Vice President **Joe Biden prayed** at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City on March 5, remembering how his mother "impressed upon her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren that they must seek the intercession of the Blessed Mother." + Catholics have a duty to **bring faith-inspired convictions to politics** and can never allow politics to trump principles articulated by the bishops, said Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York during a speech on March 3. + The **Vatican's official Web site** suffered an attack by the computer hacker coalition "Anonymous," which cut off access by users for several hours on March 7.



Indiana storm response

and families who struggle to live in dignity in difficult economic times," they added. "The moral measure of this budget debate is not which party wins or which powerful interests prevail," they wrote, "but rather how those who are jobless, hungry, homeless or poor are treated. Their voices are too often missing in these debates, but they have the most compelling moral claim on our consciences and our common resources."

Attacks on Christians

Archbishop Silvio M. Tomasi, the Holy See's permanent observer to U.N. offices in Geneva, told the U.N. Human Rights Council that attacks on Christians in Africa, the Middle East and Asia more than tripled between 2003 and 2010. He said on

March 1, "Approximately 70 percent of the world's population lives in countries with high restrictions on religious beliefs and practices, and religious minorities pay the highest price." He added that rising restrictions on religion affect more than 2.2 billion people. Archbishop Tomasi denounced "intolerance that leads to violence and to the killing of many innocent people...simply because of their religious convictions." The international community must work, he said, "to sustain mutual tolerance and respect of human rights and a greater equality among citizens of different religions...to achieve a healthy democracy, where the public role of religion and the distinction between religious and temporal spheres are recognized."

From CNS and other sources.

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Time to Cool Down

Olympia Snowe, explaining her decision last month to retire from the Senate, cited political “polarization and ‘my way or the highway’ ideologies” as prominent reasons for her departure. After 33 years in Washington, Snowe, a Republican from Maine, found herself one of the few moderates left in Congress. Her laudable pragmatic streak had been frustrated far too often by the hyper-partisanship that glows white hot these days, from the halls of Congress to church life.

Something inside me envies Senator Snowe. Her retirement affords her an honorable exit strategy to escape an overheated situation. The Catholic community in the United States enjoys no such luxury. The controversy stemming from new regulations that mandate contraception coverage for employees even of religiously affiliated institutions appears bottomless. You need not have scrolled through blogs, trolled Web sites and digested media coverage as much as I have in recent weeks to know the bitter landscape. Tempers have flared and angry words have been exchanged, targeted at those with variant opinions, questioning their good will, their prudence, even their intelligence.

I have no novel opinion or particular expertise to share on the divisive topic of whether Catholic institutions should accept the Obama administration’s compromise on conscience clause provisions. I wish simply to relate my fear that we as a religious community are choosing to walk the

wrong path. I am addressing not the outcome of the policy debate, but the regrettable style of our recent engagement of this issue.

One option would be to keep ratcheting up the inflammatory rhetoric. Portray those with divergent opinions as insolent enemies who must be defeated in a pitched battle. Take no prisoners; make no concessions. We were on this path already before Rush Limbaugh used his broadcast on Feb. 29 to attack Sandra Fluke, a Georgetown University law student and vocal supporter of broader contraception coverage, in the most scurrilous of ways. By then, the echo chamber of vituperation was in full operation. Bloviating media pundits are the most obvious offenders, but my unscientific sampling of Web posts reveals lamentable excess coming from all points of the political compass and all segments of the Catholic community.

A superior option would be to trade the culture warrior agenda for one of diplomacy. Turn away from invectives, jeremiads, hyperbole and hurtful name-calling. De-escalate the overblown rhetoric that paints opponents with the brush of idiocy, poor judgment or willful deception. Exercise the kind of magnanimity that refuses to demonize anyone. Invite others into civil conversations that emphasize mutual respect and a willingness to listen, even when that proves uncomfortable.

Why is the path of civility and fair-minded patience better? Why is it imperative that we tone down the

harsh rhetoric? Because members of our religious community who might seem like fierce opponents today are going to be with us long after the flame of today’s controversy eventually settles down. Whatever policy outcomes unfold this year or next or further down the line, those of us lucky enough to be given a longer span of life by our Creator will find ourselves sharing the Eucharist (and much else)

We must trade the culture warrior agenda for one of diplomacy.

with thousands of those with whom we are not currently seeing eye to eye. Should our future sharing of the bread of salvation be compromised by our current failure to share a modicum of civility? Let us not give such power to present disagreements that it will be impossible to forge a decent *modus vivendi* afterward.

This advice may strike some as indulging in an overly milquetoast approach to important issues that resist compromise. There are many matters of conscience for which a hard struggle is justified. But to advocate civility in discourse is not to urge capitulation.

Regrettably, election years like this one have usually shed more heat than light on complex church-state issues. The 2012 campaign trail is proving once again to be a crucible of inflammatory rhetoric and repeated appeals to our fears about religion in public life, not of nuanced analysis. When religion becomes a wedge issue, we have all lost. Maybe Senator Snow was wise to look for the nearest exit. I hope that Catholics still have a chance to cool down the rhetoric.

THOMAS MASSARO, S.J., teaches social ethics at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, Chestnut Hill, Mass.



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Dead fish pile up in Taal Lake, Batangas Province, Philippines, in May 2011. The cause of death was a sudden change in the climate.



PHOTO: REUTERS/ERIK DE CASTRO

WHAT THE CHURCH CAN DO
ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING

Climate For Change

BY ELIZABETH GROPPE

‘**W**e are here in Panama,” said Naderev Sano, “to tell the world that climate change is a matter of life and death for the Philippines.” Mr. Sano, a member of the Climate Change Commission of the Philippines, was speaking at an October 2011 meeting in Panama City in preparation for the U.N. conference on climate change that convened in Durban, South Africa, the following month.

“Millions of Filipinos are already suffering, yet we are only seeing initial climate change impacts,” Mr. Sano said. “Progress must be made in the climate treaty negotiations.” An archipelago of more than 7,000 islands, the Philippines is regularly battered by typhoons that many believe are growing in intensity because of climate change. A December storm, Typhoon Washi, left more than 1,200 dead and thousands homeless.

Although Catholics may not think of climate stabilization as a pro-life issue, it is increasingly clear that protecting the sanctity of life entails not only working to end abortion and the death penalty but also acting to conserve the earth’s climate and biosphere. The world’s most prestigious scientific bodies are in agreement that global warming is caused primarily by human beings and that its effects on our environment and economy will be far-reaching. In the short term, climate change will bring an increase in extreme weather events that threaten human populations and agricultural production. In the long term, it may be that the very viability of human civilization is at stake.

The climate is changing because of the greenhouse effect: heat-trapping gases in the atmosphere retain the emitted heat radiation reflected when the sun’s rays touch the earth’s surface. Were it not for some level of atmospheric greenhouse gases, the planet would be too cold to support life as we know it. But our burn-

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ing of fossil fuels, our razing of forests and our agricultural practices have elevated the atmospheric concentrations of the greenhouse gases carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide. Prior to the industrial revolution, atmospheric carbon dioxide was 280 parts per million. Today it is 391 ppm and rising by about two ppm each year. Between 1900 and 2009 the global average surface temperature rose 1.3 degrees Fahrenheit.

This increase may appear negligible. But the global climate is a complex reality. A small change in average temperature has ripple effects on ocean currents, precipitation patterns and other climate systems. A small temperature rise is already destabilizing the energy balance of the climate and spawning changes adverse to human beings and other species.

The effects of climate change can be seen in many areas, including the following:

Agriculture. Plants are very sensitive to changes in temperature and precipitation patterns. Between 1980 and 2008, rising temperatures reduced total global wheat production by 5.5 percent. According to a study published by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, every 1.8 degree Fahrenheit rise in average temperature will reduce the global yields of wheat, rice and corn by an additional 10 percent. Some regions will be affected more severely than others. Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, projects that as early as 2020 grain yields in some African countries could be reduced by half.

Water. Around the world, sources of the fresh water necessary for life are diminishing. Last May, a working group commissioned by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences published a report on the retreat of the world's mountain glaciers. The water flowing gradually from these majestic ice formations sustains rivers that bring life to valley ecosystems and human communities. But the European Alps have already lost 50 percent of their glacial mass, and thousands of small glaciers in the Himalayan-Tibetan region are also disintegrating. In Asia alone, over one billion people are in danger of losing their primary source of life-giving water.

Rising sea level. Melting glaciers and thermal expansion of ocean waters are contributing to a rise in sea level already documented by scientists. According to one estimate, over the course of this century we can expect a rise of three to six

feet. At just three feet, half of the rice fields in Bangladesh would be submerged. Portions of major coastal cities including New Orleans, Tampa and Miami would be inundated.

Ocean decline. The oceans absorb more than a quarter of the carbon we emit through the combustion of fossil fuels; they thus become more acidic. This contributes to the decline of the coral reefs that provide habitat for a diverse array of sea creatures, including fish that are a source of protein for nearly one billion people. The warming of ocean waters has also been linked to a decline in the population of phytoplankton. These microscopic creatures produce oxygen, remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and form the base of the entire marine food web.

Extreme weather events. There has been a marked increase in floods, droughts and other extreme weather events related to climate change. The increase in the intensi-

ty and duration of hurricanes, for example, has been correlated with rising sea surface temperature by Kerry Emanuel, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Mass extinctions. Species already suffering from habitat loss in a world dominated by humanity may not be able to adapt to a rapidly changing climate. A report published in *Nature* in 2004 concluded that a climate warming in the mid-range of current projections will by the year 2050 lead to the extinction of 15 percent to 37 percent of the species examined in the study. Biodiversity is essential to ecosystem resilience. And as St. Thomas Aquinas noted, the rich diversity of earthly creatures gives humanity a glimpse of the beauty and glory of God.

Tipping Point

People who are fortunate enough to live in homes with central heating can quickly adjust their thermostats to raise or lower temperature. One might imagine that at some future point, we could cease our greenhouse gas emissions and similarly return the planet to its prior state. The global climate, however, cannot be so easily moderated. The carbon dioxide we have already added to the atmosphere and oceans will affect the earth for generations. Moreover, the earth's climate is not a simple mechanical system but a complex of many interlocking, nonlinear relationships, including phenomena known by climate scientists as "positive feed-

A small temperature rise is already destabilizing the energy balance of the climate and spawning changes adverse to human beings and other species.

backs”—processes that take a small change in temperature and amplify it to exponential effect.

Consider, for example, the melting Arctic ice caps. These enormous white crests deflect solar radiation back into space, just as white clothing protects people from summer heat. As the ice caps melt, dark seawater that absorbs solar warmth is exposed. This elevates the temperature of the ocean water, which increases the melting of the ice caps, which decreases the polar deflection of solar radiation, and on it goes.

This kind of feedback process is also evident in the decline of the world's forests. Forests absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and play an essential role in regulating global climate. Across the globe, forests are dying back. The underlying cause appears to be stress from rising temperatures and altered precipitation patterns. When trees die, they stop the photosynthesis that removes carbon from the atmosphere, and as they decompose they release the carbon they have absorbed. This intensifies global warming, which increases the stress to forests, which kills more trees, which release more carbon and so forth.

Another feedback process is at work in Siberia, where an enormous expanse of frozen tundra is beginning to thaw. The tundra holds an estimated 70 billion tons of carbon, much of which would be released as methane, a gas 25 times more powerful in its heat-trapping effect than carbon dioxide.

These positive feedbacks are one reason that climate change is progressing more rapidly than first projected by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The rate of sea-ice melt in the Arctic, for example, is 30 years ahead of a prediction the I.P.C.C. made in 2007. Using both current observable reality and data from paleoclimate studies, an international group of scientists has recommended that to preserve a climate hospitable to life, carbon levels must be at no more than 350 ppm.

But atmospheric carbon dioxide is already at 391 ppm and rising. If we are to have at least a fighting chance of returning carbon dioxide levels to 350 ppm, an unprecedented level of global cooperation will be required to transform our sprawling fossil-fuel global economy to a network of efficient regional economies powered by noncarbon sources of energy. We must preserve surviving forests and replant denuded lands, replace agricultural practices that release methane and carbon into the atmosphere with practices that restore soils and sequester carbon, and intensify research and development of other means of removing carbon from the atmosphere.

The urgency of the transition to a new form of human civilization cannot be overstated. The warming generated by our own greenhouse gas emissions and accelerated by nonlinear feedback processes is pushing us ever closer to what scientists call “runaway climate change.” This ultimate-

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ly could elevate atmospheric greenhouse gases to the level of the Cenozoic Era (65 million years B.C.), when the planet was ice-free and Homo sapiens did not exist. "We are interfering," concludes science writer Fred Pearce, "with the fundamental processes that make Earth habitable."

A U.N. Human Development Report in 2007-8 concluded: "There is now overwhelming scientific evidence that the world is moving towards the point at which irreversible ecological catastrophe becomes unavoidable.... There is a window of opportunity for avoiding the most damaging climate change impacts, but that window is closing."

A Climate for Life

Unlike abortion and the death penalty, climate change is not an intentional act that ends the life of another human being. It is the unintended outcome of the industrial and agricultural processes that have accompanied our economic development. As early as 1979, however, scientists testified to Congress about the possible consequences of climate change, and our inaction is already taking the lives of vulnerable human beings. In 2009, a study conducted by the Global Humanitarian Forum found that climate change was already responsible for 300,000 deaths a year, the suffering of 325 million people and economic losses of over \$100 billion. Over 90 percent of those persons most severely affect-

ed were in developing countries that have contributed least to global carbon emissions.

In the coming decades, climate change can bring deadly famine, displacement and disease to large sectors of the human population and spawn mass extinctions of other species. In the long term, the climate could change so radically that the earth could no longer support human civilization. In this sense, caring for the climate and the biosphere is a paramount pro-life issue.

"How long will countless people have to go on dying," lamented Cardinal Óscar Rodríguez Maradiaga in a homily at a Mass during the U.N. conference in Durban, "before adequate decisions are taken?" The cardinal is president of Caritas Internationalis and a native of Honduras, where extreme weather events have already decimated the crops, livestock and homes of many. According to a Caritas spokesperson, Patrick Nicholson, the agreement in Durban to extend the 1997 Kyoto Protocol falls far short of the actions that scientists believe are necessary to prevent widespread droughts and the mass migrations of peoples who will be displaced from regions where food production has collapsed.

The failure of the governments represented at Durban to reach a stronger agreement makes ecclesial action even more urgent. The Vatican has installed solar panels on the roof of the Paul VI auditorium and declared the intention to make Vatican City the first carbon-neutral state. In the United States, the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change is supported by the bishops' conference and other Catholic bodies. The coalition is leading multiple initiatives, including the Catholic Climate Covenant, which emphasize the importance of solidarity with those whose lives are threatened or diminished by climate change.

Participants in this covenant pledge, in the spirit of St. Francis, to educate themselves, pray, change energy-intensive patterns of living and lobby for policies that will address the climate crisis. These essential initiatives can be strengthened by recognizing that climate change is a life issue that merits our attention and inclusion in the annual Respect Life programs in October and the National Prayer Vigil for Life in January. We should also pursue new pro-life initiatives specific to the climate crisis, like legal action to hold our government accountable for its repeated failure to protect the earth for generations unborn.

Our imperiled planet needs the distinctive paschal witness the Catholic community can offer. In an Easter address in 2009, Pope Benedict XVI stated that at this time of ecological and economic crisis, "it is urgent to rediscover grounds for hope.... Christ is looking for men and women who will help him to affirm his victory using his own weapons: the weapons of justice and truth, mercy, forgiveness and love." **A**

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Engaging the Spirituals

The secular challenge to the New Evangelization

BY DREW CHRISTIANSEN

Three events recently awakened me to the weighty reality of our secular age and why the church's New Evangelization is both timely and crucial.

The first took place one Sunday afternoon as I watched "Higher Ground," Vera Farmiga's film about an evangelical woman's struggle with faith. The reviews I read had praised the film for giving an honest view of contemporary faith. I kept waiting for the moment of revelation to come, but the epiphany that takes place in the last sequence is no revelation at all. We are left with Corinne Walker, Ms. Farmiga's lead character, still aching for God to break into her life. If the reviewers are to be believed, the icon of faith for the people of our day is a woman beating on her car for God to break the silence. There are hints that "Higher Ground" wants to be about maturing in faith, but the story at best depicts the impossibility of finding a mature faith in the contemporary world.

The second event occurred the same evening, as I took in one of my guilty pleasures, an episode of "Inspector Lewis" on PBS's Masterpiece Mysteries series. In these stories the title character, a world-weary widower, is paired with Detective Sergeant James Hathaway, an intellectual former Catholic seminarian. Like so much in cinema and on television, this series shows a certain fascination with Catholicism. In an unbelieving world, Catholic rites, Catholic family piety and individual Catholic belief are still talismans for a forgotten world of faith. The murders to be solved that evening took place at an Oxford friary, Saint Gerard's. During the investigation, one of the suspects asks Lewis whether he believes. Lewis answers he used to, intimating that his faith died with his wife in a hit-and-run accident some years before.

Later, the murder solved, Lewis and Hathaway share a beer while contemplating a natural mystery, a Turneresque

sunset. Lewis asks Hathaway why the setting sun is not enough for him, as it is for Lewis. Hathaway deflects the question by asking Lewis about his plans to retire. When Lewis replies that his retirement will open the way for a promotion for Hathaway, the younger detective responds that should Lewis retire, he will leave the police. The viewer understands Hathaway may be considering returning to the



ministry or taking the junior lectureship in theology offered him in the course of the episode.

Yet Hathaway, the image of the mature, educated, even sophisticated postmodern believer, holds his faith a closely guarded secret. The series requires that he share theological trivia, translate Latin and Greek and insinuate himself into clerical circles. The most viewers know about him is that he left the seminary guilty over the orthodox but ultimately deadly advice he gave a gay friend about coping with his homosexuality. We see his occasional acts of devotion: he furtively lights a candle, stops to contemplate a Nativity scene in a chapel. But we have not a hint of what or why Sergeant Hathaway believes. His is a thoroughly private, unspoken faith.

The third event came the next morning. A culture report during a National Public Radio newscast reviewed a two-millennial-old classic, Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura*, "On the Nature of Things," a first-century essay in cosmology best

DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J., is editor in chief of *America*. This essay is excerpted from a presentation to the priests of Des Moines on the centenary of the diocese.

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known for its speculation about the atomic nature of matter. What was the news? That *De Rerum Natura* is an atheistic text. As Stephen Greenblatt writes in his new novel, *The Swerve*, in Lucretius “there is no master plan, no divine architect, no intelligent design.” Two millennia before Inspector Lewis, Lucretius found the complexity, diversity and beauty of nature enough for him. He did not ask, “Is that all there is?” This world was enough to delight him.

Lucretius was the reporter’s stand-in for Richard Dawkins and the scientific naturalists in the creationist-evolution debate. But in the radio report there was no debate, no philosophers or theologians to comment or put Lucretius in historical context; there was just Mr. Greenblatt celebrating his atheistic predecessor. Secular naturalism, it seems, is the currency of the culture.

One, two, three, things fell into place: Ours is a secular age: an evangelical woman confronting the silence of God, Detective Hathaway mute about his faith, atheists celebrating their idols without apology and without challenge. These are by no means the only signs of our times, but they are signs symptomatic of the culture in which the church undertakes the New Evangelization.

Top Priority

Pope Benedict XVI has made the challenge to secularism a major theme of his pontificate and singled it out as the number one problem facing the church in the Western world. To meet the challenge, he established the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization and appointed one of the rising stars of the curia, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, to head it.

In a parallel move, the Pontifical Council for Culture is moving ahead with a new program for dialogue with secular thinkers, especially scientists, called The Court of the Gentiles, after the outer court of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. “There should be a dialogue,” Pope Benedict said, “with those for whom religion is something foreign, to whom God is unknown yet who do not wish to be left utterly without God, but rather to draw near to him, even as if to the Unknown.”

Last March in Paris the pope praised a mixed crowd of young believers and nonbelievers who had come together in a model court before the cathedral of Notre Dame “to discuss the great questions of existence.” He continued, “Those of you who are unbelievers challenge believers in a particular way to live in a way consistent with the faith they profess and [you challenge them] by your rejection of any distortion of religion which would make it unworthy of man. You who are believers,” he went on, “long to tell your friends that the treasure dwelling within you is meant to be shared....”

Pope Benedict not only respects unbelievers but also appreciates them in ways that should confound self-appointed

watchdogs of orthodoxy. He understands, for example, that many among them would like to discuss “the great questions of existence.” He senses “the immortal longings” that make them restless, and he perceives their justified antipathy to the hypocrisy of lax Christians and how their rejection of “the distortions of religion” contributes to the purification of the church. In this he is a son of the Second Vatican Council, which confessed, “Indeed the Church admits she has greatly profited and still profits from the antagonism of those who oppose or persecute her” (“Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” No. 44).

Emergence of the Spirituals

In the last decade a major development in the religious demography of the United States has been the growth of a segment of the population whom the pollsters call “the spirituals.” Many people, especially young people, report themselves as “spiritual, but not religious.” In general, that means they are unchurched, not necessarily formally uninitiated but often disaffected from the church. Eventually the spirituals may find themselves in a congregation of their own choosing. Their standard for belonging, however, is not the religious authority of any church as a repository of revelation but rather the satisfaction of their own often inarticulate searching.

The subjective, unaffiliated character of the spirituals’ choices does not mean they are shallow. Many regularly carry out disciplined spiritual practices: meditating daily, fasting at special times, serving the hungry in soup kitchens, doing spiritual reading, seeking out spiritual guides. What they reject is conformity in a rules-bound institution. They do not understand why they need to marry in a church building rather than under the vault of heaven. They resist the reinforcement of ritual distinctions between the ordinary faithful and the ordained. They want to explore the world of faith and plumb the depths of the spirit in the company of like-minded people. They welcome the company of the officially religious who can help them but balk at rigid orthodoxies, imagined or prescribed in the name of tradition. They want to converse with men and women of other denominations, and with those of other faiths, like Muslims and Buddhists, and to learn from them.

I think of St. Francis of Assisi in conversation with the Sultan Malik al-Kamil. The seekers and the saints find one another; they understand one another; they grow together and spur one another on in the quest for God.

Consider the lay movement Focolare. Its charism of unity inspires an extraordinary inclusiveness that embraces people of many faiths and no faith at all. All are drawn by the alluring power of the movement’s charity. Where the self-appointed inquisitors of the day seek to put distance

ON THE WEB

Rev. Brendan Leahy talks
about the lay movement Focolare.
americamagazine.org/podcast

between Catholics and non-Catholics and even between themselves and some Catholics who are insufficiently orthodox by some narrow sectarian standard, Focolare's genius is to invite everyone to the table, just as Jesus did. The Focolarini are a community that lives Pope Benedict's maxim in "Deus Caritas Est," "A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak" (No. 31).

The Mustard Tree Church

Pope Benedict XVI, in his book *Without Roots* (2006), showed appreciation for spiritual kinships beyond formal church structures. Drawing on the parable of the mustard seed (Mt 13:31-32), he argued that the big church (my term), one larger than the organizational boundaries we routinely set for it, is like the great tree grown from the mustard seed, in which all the birds of the air find their home. The alliances that then-Cardinal Ratzinger was proposing were ties with Italian secularists who affirmed the Christian roots of Europe and took the side of the church on human life and other social issues. But his capacious image of the big tree is patient of expanding to include Catholics' engagement with "the spirituals" too.

Commenting last year on the parable of the two sons, Pope Benedict offered this paraphrase: "Agnostics who are constantly exercised by the question of God, those who long for a pure heart but suffer on account of our sin...are closer to the Kingdom of God than believers whose life of faith is 'routine' and who regard the Church merely as an institution, without letting their hearts be touched by faith."

So the New Evangelization is not just about rebutting aggressive European secularists but more about engaging the spirituals among them, even as Catholics are called to a new, fully conscious, self-appropriated faith.

The first challenge for U.S. Catholics in the New Evangelization is to engage the spirituals, to befriend them. They are not "low-hanging fruit" for proselytizing nor erring sheep to be brought back to the fold. Those who are serious challenge us as to the degree of our own spiritual discipline. Those who may appear to be no more than spiritual vagabonds test our willingness and ability to express and share our faith with them. We cannot afford to be mute about what we believe.

But spirituals will not be interested in hearing correct answers hedged about with all sorts of protective cautions. Rather, they want to hear us speak from the heart about "the hope that is within [us]" (1 Pt 3:15). Careful answers are the residue of history. The spirituals are not interested in answers to past controversies. They want to know what men and women they respect believe, to learn why they believe it and to discuss with them what difference it makes in their lives and for our common life together. **A**

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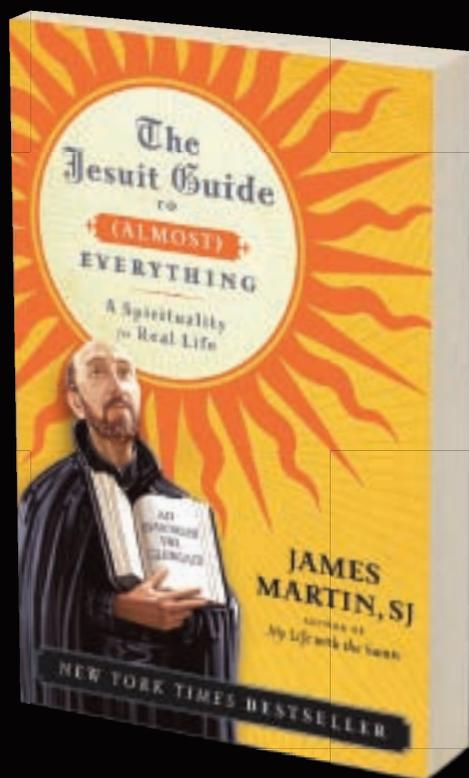


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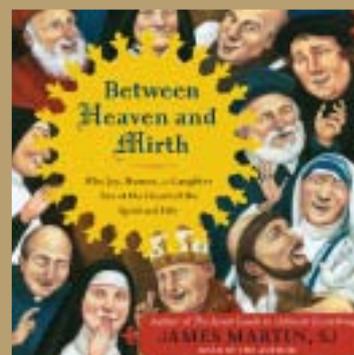
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DIGITAL OFFERINGS

Praying in the Internet age



PHOTO: REUTERS/GIL COHEN MASEN

Alon Nir prepares prayers for placement in the Western Wall, in his apartment in Tel Aviv in August 2009. The Israeli university student operates a Twitter feed (twitter.com/thekotel) to which prayers can be sent for placement in the wall, a holy site in Jerusalem.

Connor, who is 4 years old, has a tumor. A Facebook post asks for prayers for a successful M.R.I. test, which will show if the tumors have grown or remained the same since his last test. After the test his parents posted the following: “Your prayers worked!!! The tumor has not grown or has grown very little!”

Every day on Facebook, Twitter and other Web sites, people ask for prayers for their loved ones. Others spread the message on their personal status updates and Twitter feeds. A search for the term “prayer request” on Twitter brings up multiple entries of people seeking prayers through #prayerrequests. What might this turn toward the Web say about our culture? What might it say about our faith?

Andrew Alexander, S.J., works with the Online Ministries program of the Collaborative Ministry Office at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb. “We offer many online resources to people, and we find that people turn to the Web because they are hungry and this technology brings people to ‘places’ they can easily reach without travel or money,” he told me. “So people come here for comfort, formation, support for their life and vocation. And they ask us to pray for them as well.”

While submitting prayers online may be a different form of prayer than in the past, Father Alexander believes that the practice is not as novel as it may seem. “Ultimately, it is what we’ve been doing for centuries in the Mass,” he said. “We bring our petitions to the altar with the gifts.”

Donald Ford, a retired freelance writer who lives in Manlius, N.Y., shared his own story of responding to a prayer request on Facebook. “After receiving a request for prayer from McAllen, Tex., I suggested to my wife

that we should send a handkerchief after we prayed over it. If you recall, the first-century Christians did something similar with St. Paul's clothing for those who were ill or infirm. They recovered from their sicknesses."

Ford offered to send the handkerchief to Robert, a Native American who makes part of his living from "fancy dancing" at pow-wows. He had hurt his knees and was in excruciating pain, according to Ford. Robert responded, "Send the rag!" "He put it on his own knee and prayed. The suffering ended, and he has been able to dance since," said Ford. "A friend of ours who lived on the Akwesasne reservation was visiting Robert in Texas and claimed he was in good spirits and his knees were not hurting as they were the day before." Ford added, "I have never done anything like this before and was grateful to God for answering his and our prayer in such a manner."

'Little Flower in This Hour'

Mary Zacharias is the director of Internet services for the Society of the Little Flower, based in Darien, Ill. Its Web site, littleflower.org, provides

people the opportunity to leave prayer requests and notes of prayers answered by St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the Carmelite saint. Those who leave prayer requests are assured that they will be remembered and prayed for at Mass and in community prayer by Carmelites throughout the world.

The Society of the Little Flower Web site began taking prayer requests at its initial launching in 1997. Zacharias said it can be difficult to be on the receiving end of the Web site. "It can be very upsetting and emotionally draining when reading people's tragedies, very sad and desperate situations and the outpouring of their hearts." But those who have used the Web site seem more than satisfied.

"Having a place where they can share their hopes and fears and prayers, and without having to leave their homes, is very comforting to them," Zacharias said. "Friends of St. Thérèse also know that she is bringing their intentions to the heart of God to be answered."

Traffic to the site has increased over the years, jumping from around 500 requests per month in the early days to 1,000 to 1,200 requests. "The Little

Flower...is a very popular, powerful, extremely well known and loved saint of the modern world," said Zacharias. "She continues to gain popularity and 'friends' on all continents! She has an incredible 'little way' of doing small things with great love and interceding for millions of people—bringing their prayers to God."

A New Place for Prayer

Mary Charles Mayer, R.S.M., is the director of the Office of Consecrated Life for the Archdiocese of St. Louis. Since at least 2005, the archdiocese has maintained a Web site dedicated to taking requests. Those who take the prayer requests are members of several religious orders. "We provide them with the opportunity to post their request publicly for others to see or have them sent privately to the contemplative nuns only to pray for their intentions," said Sister Mayer. "There are eight orders of contemplative nuns in St. Louis and Belleville, Ill., who pray for people."

The prayers on the site show the great variety of suffering people face. "Please pray for my little niece who had surgery a couple of weeks ago and now she is having difficulty breathing and problems with her heart. Thank you." "Please pray for a friend who is facing some serious health problems. Thank you." "Please pray that the underwriter approves my loan modification. In Jesus' holy name, please pray that I keep my home, heavenly father."

The community of believers seems to be finding a new place for prayer. "It may build Catholic community to a degree, but for sure it seems to be building a community in cyberspace," said Sister Mayer. She believes people have turned to the Web for prayers partly because of the anonymity. "The Web provides a level of anonymity for people, a large viewing audience that might also pray for their needs and a level of impersonal contact where people are safe in communicating their



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vulnerability or that of another person," she said. "Some people may also just be oriented to using technology rather than more traditional ways of communicating."

On a recent trip, I visited the House of Mary in Ephesus, Turkey. There, a short distance from the chapel, was a wall

with hundreds of tissues and pieces of paper with prayers written for Mary's intercession. It moved me to see how many people requested prayers in this way and to witness their evident trust that their prayer would be heard. I myself left a note on the wall.

Modern technology may offer expansive versions of the prayer chain; a practice that once relied on physical gatherings and word of mouth, letters

and phone calls can now send petitions around the world in just a few words with the click of a button. New technologies also provide a voice or an outlet for those who are afraid to ask loved

ones for prayers. The anonymity of Internet sites can provide a safe place.

"Where two or three are gathered..."

takes on new meaning when hundreds or thousands of people see your prayer request and offer their own prayer on your behalf. Perhaps posting prayers on Web sites and Facebook allows people who feel that no one is praying for or with them to be heard.

ON THE WEB

Rev. Terrance W. Klein reviews the television show "Smash."
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ELIZABETH ELLIOTT is a freelance writer in Omaha, Neb., who majored in music and journalism at Creighton University.

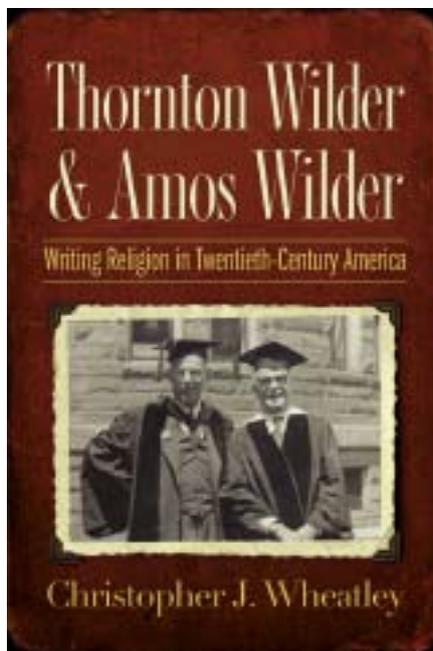
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BROTHERS' KEEPERS

THORNTON WILDER AND AMOS WILDER Writing Religion in Twentieth-Century America

By Christopher J. Wheatley
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Critics who attempt to explicate religious themes in literature that does not feature overtly religious content must tread very carefully. A scholar undertaking a theological reading of Milton's *Paradise Lost* or Eliot's *Four Quartets* walks safely on well-trod ground, but undertaking a similar analysis of the apparently secular novels of John Updike or the films of John Ford can be dangerous. An overly creative interpretation of the texts presents an ever-present risk of distortion. Such a study demands modesty, care and rigor.



These virtues abound in this work by Christopher J. Wheatley, Ordinary Professor of English at The Catholic University of America. For many con-

temporary readers, the name Thornton Wilder inevitably brings up recollections of countless productions of "Our Town," a play beloved by amateur theater companies because of its low-cost, bare-stage presentation and apparently simple, even sentimental message. Professor Wheatley corrects this distorted perception of a prolific novelist and playwright who, in a career that lasted over 50 years, received three Pulitzer Prizes—for the plays "Our Town" (1938) and "The Skin of Our Teeth" (1942) and the novel *The Bridge at San Luis Rey* (1927)—and a National Book Award for his novel *The Eighth Day* (1967). His play "The Matchmaker" (1954) became the basis of the Broadway musical "Hello, Dolly." Thornton's older brother Amos was equally productive. After serving as a ambulance driver in the First World War, he was ordained a Congregationalist minister, and after finishing his doctorate at Yale, he taught theology and wrote extensively at the University of Chicago and at Harvard.

The brothers receive equal billing in the title, but not in the book. Wheatley sets out to present a theological analysis of Thornton Wilder's vast and varied output, and he supports his conclusions by citing the scholarly essays of Amos and the correspondence between them. As Wheatley argues, both followed parallel tracks through the religious landscape of the 20th century, a journey marked by the horror of war and the Great Depression, which combined to challenge American optimism, and by the arrival of the historical-critical study of the Bible, which undermined the foundations of traditional American religious belief. In both realms, many of the anchors of the old order simply vanished.

The New England Puritanism of their heritage could not withstand the intellectual challenges of the 20th century. Both brothers grew skeptical of

organized religions, in particular what they saw as the superstition and authoritarianism of Catholicism. But while Amos took a path toward the fringes of liberal Protestantism, Thornton found personal belief altogether untenable and turned to fiction. Wheatley tries to show that these two paths did not really diverge as sharply as one might think. Thornton resolutely rejected the title of philosopher or, even more, theologian, but as his exchanges with Amos reveal, he kept alert to the intellectual ideas of his time, and these new ideas gave shape and texture to his work.

Examining exactly how these religious and philosophical currents of the time flowed into his plays and novels provides the core of this study. As the young Thornton began to turn away from religion, he concluded that the problem with the churches was their use of a language that had become so exhausted that it no longer made sense in the 20th century. Since he rejected the traditional doctrinal discourse of the churches, he explored his questions of morality and ultimate realities in terms of human interactions and metaphors. Amos and Thornton investigate the same questions, but their language for posing the questions and attempting to answer them is radically different.

Thornton ended his studies and began his literary career as theologians wrestled with the credibility of a benevolent God in a world that had endured the horrors of the Great War. He wrote of civilizations breaking down: Hellenic culture in *Woman of Andros* (1930), Baroque Catholicism and the Enlightenment in *The Bridge at San Luis Rey* (1927) and the classical heritage of reason in Catholicism and the possibility of a wisdom that surpasses reason in *The Cabala* (1926). His reflection on an end to religion finds its metaphor in each of these works. Wheatley maintains that Wilder concluded that true Christian

love must find its embodiment anew in each historical setting. In "Our Town" and "The Skin of Our Teeth" he struggles with the notion of permanence in a rapidly changing world. In *Heaven's My Destination* (1935) he questions American materialism and social responsibility in a collapsing economic order. These are theological essays in literary vesture.

Wheatley presents his case in scholarly fashion. The abundant documentation provides an invaluable resource for other scholars of American religious history and American literature. Non-scholars may find the thoroughness of the

work more of an obstacle than a help. The chapters presume a familiarity with the Wilders that may be beyond the capability of the casual reader. In his effort to provide a comprehensive study of both major and lesser known texts, he frequently cites characters and incidents from lesser known works without providing much context for the less scholarly. As an academic, though, Wheatley addresses a readership of peers, and he has served them quite admirably.

RICHARD A. BLAKE, S.J., former executive editor and film reviewer for *America*, is co-director of the film studies program at Boston College.

DENNIS O'BRIEN

FAITH ENTERS THE PUBLIC SQUARE

SECULARISM AND FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE

By Jocelyn Maclure
And Charles Taylor
Trans. by Jane Marie Todd
Harvard Univ. Press. 160p \$24.95

Secularism and Freedom of Conscience is a small book with a large thesis, an analysis initiated by local issues that culminates in a sweeping claim about cultural change. In 2007-8 Charles Taylor served as co-chair and Jocelyn Maclure as a member of the government of Quebec's Consultation

Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences. "At the time of the commission's creation, the place of religion in the public square and, in particular, of requests for accommodation based on religion had been prompting public debate in Quebec for nearly a year," the authors write.

In the current work, Taylor and

Maclure have collaborated to present a clear, compelling and common-sense analysis of the vexed issue of church and state in contemporary politics. They commend a "liberal-pluralist" approach to cultural difference.

The First Amendment of the U.S.

Constitution exemplifies the liberal-pluralist view of state and church: "the Congress shall pass no law regarding the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The amendment rests on two principles essential to governance in a

diverse society: the moral equality of individuals and the protection of freedom of conscience. In the authors' view, secular governance is inevitable and appropriate because there are no rational means for deciding "questions of the ultimate meaning of existence." Since ultimate questions are subject to "the fallibility of human reason," the state must be neutral toward belief

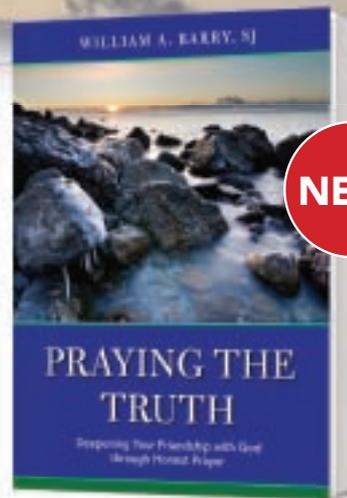


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whether religious, agnostic or atheistic.

States that accept moral pluralism are labeled by the authors as “regimes of secularism.”

They are not, for all that, morally vacuous; they rest on “constitutive values”: human dignity, basic human rights and popular sovereignty that all citizens must accept. It makes no difference whether we accept these constitutive values because we are all children of God, Kantian rational beings or practitioners of Buddhist nonviolence.

Regimes of secularism differ in practice according to the relative weight given either to “moral equality” or “freedom of conscience.” Rigid secularism tends to restrict free exercise of religion; open secularism gives greater weight to freedom of conscience. Liberal-pluralist governance is based on open secularism and so is more flexible in its interpretation of separation of church and state. Britain, for instance, has an established church but in specific law and practice is an open secular regime. A rigid secular regime will be wary of any confusion in the public mind between religion and the

state. For example, in the United States constitutional challenges have been mounted against “in God we trust” on coinage as a violation of the establishment clause.

Liberal-pluralist polity seeks to “balance” moral equality and freedom of conscience. Can a Muslim woman wear a hijab if she is a teacher? Does the prominence of this religious symbol suggest that non-Muslim students are second class? If the teacher is not allowed to wear the hijab, does that not violate her right to the exercise of her religious beliefs? The fact that France and Germany, facing this issue, have adopted opposing policies becomes a case in point for the authors, showing the difficulty of applying a once-and-for-all solution to the balance between equality and conscience. It is also a caution against what they label “the fetishism of means,” by which a specific policy or practice is elevated to the status of a constitutional demand.

Why should “religious” belief have any special claim for accommodation? How far must the state go to accommodate special beliefs and practices of a religious faith or, for that matter, any

deeply held moral conviction whether religious or not? What, after all, is the difference between “belief” and personal preference? Is regime neutrality even possible? Doesn’t a secular regime make it more difficult for some religious or moral commitments to be expressed?

Maclure and Taylor offer thoughtful answers to these questions. Why do religious beliefs call specially for accommodation? Because they are the individual’s sincerely held governing moral principles. Sincere belief can be accommodated without adhering to any formal religion. Committed pacifism absent religious backing has been recognized by the U.S. Supreme Court as a ground for conscientious objector status. Personal preference, on the other hand, is rejected for accommodation because it is peripheral to the person’s deepest moral principles. You may be excused from work for religious holy days but not to pursue a personal passion, even one as worthy as playing the piano.

Regimes of secularism do, in fact, make it more difficult for some religious and moral practices. Countries need a common calendar, and that calendar in the West reflects Christian history. Accommodation is therefore limited for holy days in Jewish or Muslim calendars. Perfect “neutrality” is not possible for open secularism. “Perfect” neutrality is an illusion only of a rigid secularism where secularity becomes, as it were, established “civil religion.”

American readers familiar with the Constitution’s “separation of church and state” will be comfortable with the authors’ commending liberal-pluralist regimes of secularism. Catholic readers, however, may need to ponder the grand historical conclusion that underlies Maclure and Taylor’s justification of secularism.

The evolution of contemporary democratic societies suggests



**ASSOCIATION OF
US CATHOLIC PRIESTS**

Vatican II Lives

All priests are invited to a celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council hosted by the Association of US Catholic Priests (AUSCP) at St. Leo University, near Tampa FL, June 11-14, 2012. This inaugural assembly's theme is "Keeping Alive the Vision and Passion of Vatican II" with a major focus on the Council's first declaration, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy. Featured are keynote addresses by Dr. Richard Gaillardetz and Fr. Anthony Ruff, OSB, along with presentations by Fr. Donald Cozzens, Fr. Peter Fink, SJ, Fr. Patrick Collins, Fr. Mark Hobson, Dr. Michael Tkacik, the Saint Louis Jesuits, and others. More information and registration forms can be found at the website

www.uscatholicpriests.org or by contacting Evelyn Morisset, evelynmorisset@saintleo.edu. Information about membership in the AUSCP can be found at the same AUSCP website.

What does this journal say about this book?



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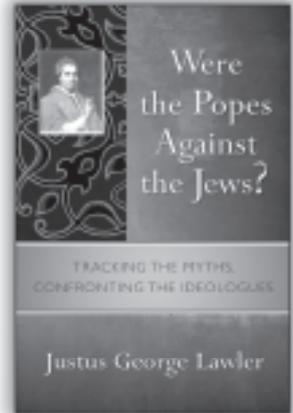
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that it is time to reconceptualize the meaning and ends of secularism. From the age of Saint Augustine to the modern period, the relationship between the temporal and spiritual powers was foremost, but the challenges of the present era are of a different nature.

Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) expressed the older clash of spiritual and temporal. Error 55: "The church ought to be separated from the state, and the state from the church." When the Second Vatican Council supported religious liberty, it seems to have accepted the contention that "the challenges of the present era are of a different nature" than expressed in the *Syllabus*.

Comfortable as Catholics may be with the political wisdom of "the separation of state and church," the fundamental philosophical claims of Maclure and Taylor should raise serious issues about how Catholicism presents itself within the age of secular modernity—a subject that Taylor has explored at length in his magisterial *A Secular Age*. If secularism must be reconceptualized, what should one make of the rather common Catholic polemic against secularism? The authors assert that open secularism accepts "the fallibility of human reason," the assumption that there are no rational means for deciding "questions of the ultimate meaning of existence." Lacking rational means for deciding the ultimate meaning of existence, how should one understand Catholic teaching when it enters the public square? Advancing the "truths of faith" in a secular age cannot be as straightforward and certain as Catholic pronouncements often appear. Unless these problems are addressed, modern secularism will, on principle, turn a deaf ear to faith.

DENNIS O'BRIEN is emeritus president of the University of Rochester, in New York.

LETTERS

First Amendment No Detail

Even if the editors of *America* have no problem ("Policy, Not Liberty, 3/5) with paying for abortion-inducing drugs with funds donated or paid by the faithful, they should jealously guard the rights endowed by our creator and guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. The First Amendment is not a detail. If the federal government can ignore the Constitution in this manner, how far away are we really from a state-run church?

JOHN J. SMITH
Olathe, Kans.

Civility Crisis

It is with great dismay and sadness that I read the editorial of March 5, which to me epitomizes the pejorative definition of the word Jesuitical—that is, "practicing casuistry or equivocation; using subtle or oversubtle reasoning; crafty, sly." I can only hope and pray that the rationale expressed by the editorial, in cautioning the bishops' conference to condone the subterfuge presented by the so-called accommodation of the Obama administration's most recent health mandate, does not reflect the official position of the Society of Jesus.

For the Catholic bishops of this nation are taking great risks, speaking boldly with clarity and no equivocation. I never thought of St. Ignatius Loyola as an apologist for Jesus Christ but rather as a most devoted disciple. Nor do I believe that he would be wooed by the state into conceding the truth for the sake of what? "Civility"?

MAUREEN KAVANAUGH
St. Louis, Mo.

Secular or Sacred?

We always get into nebulous areas when churches and religions want to extend their reach and influence. Some churches today, as in the past, provide medical care as a service, free of charge.

Perhaps that can be interpreted as charity, a religious function and a component of faith.

On the other hand, is a fee-for-service hospital really a religious function, or is it a secular business operated by a religious organization to extend their beliefs and values to others? Technically, I would argue that running a fee-for-service hospital is a business operated or managed by a church. As such, every employee's freedom of religion and civil rights are equal in importance to that of the institution.

Your editorial makes sense. I believe the church would lose a legal battle, were it to continue the fight.

JOE D'ANNA
Los Alamos, N.M.

Sticking With the Shepherds

I cannot believe the editors think the so-called accommodation solves the religious liberty problem. An accounting sleight of hand changes nothing regarding the moral issue. Any other interpretation is irrational. Thank God, the bishops quickly recognized Obama's magic trick.

We are living through a serious crisis involving the Catholic Church. On the clerical side, there is the homosex-

ual/pedophile scandal. On the laymen/women side, there is the rejection of traditional teaching on birth control, divorce, Sunday obligation, premarital sex, the Real Presence, abortion and homosexuality. The separation among Catholics is now wider than that between Luther and Calvin, etc., and Rome during the Reformation. But Christ will always be with the church, so I am sticking with our shepherds.

CHARLES SMITH
Pauma Valley, Calif.

Iraq in a Hard Place

When we dropped atomic bombs on Japan, one even targeting the Catholic cathedral of Nagasaki, the Catholic Church in the United States held its tongue. Peaceniks wondered, "If a million condoms had been dropped over Japanese cities, wouldn't the church have shouted?"

Conservative Catholics are repeating a narrowly focused moral outrage when they object to the Obama administration's openness to contraceptives for all women. Where was Catholic justified anger regarding the war with Iraq that has now ended at a cost of 450,000 to 600,000 Iraqis

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Conference

Eighth annual Summer Institute at Oblate School of Theology: "Give Reasons for Your Hope," June 18–20. Keynotes: Michael Paul Gallagher, S.J., "Getting in Touch With the Deeper Reasons We Believe"; Deborah Douglas, "C. S. Lewis and Our Hope of Heaven: The Deepest Thirst Within Us"; Ron Rolheiser, O.M.I., "Give Reasons for Your Hope." Whitley Theological Center, 285 Oblate Drive, San Antonio, TX 78216. For more information: www.ost.edu; Ph: (210) 341-1366 ext. 212 (Brenda).

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killed, with 2.5 million civilian refugees outside the country and 1.5 million within?

Unemployment there is 50 percent, malnutrition 28 percent, and there are untold numbers of orphans. Are our conservative clerics also “cafeteria Catholics”?

FRANK MCGINTY
Jenkintown, Pa.

Truth Before Dialogue

Re “Staying Civil,” by the Most Rev. Blase Cupich (3/5): Why not admit that the Obama administration is trying to force the church to act against conscience in the areas of abortion, sterilization and contraception?

We need a second civil rights movement, in which people are willing to lay down their lives for the defense of real religious liberty instead of searching aimlessly for a common ground that clearly does not exist.

MARILYN WALLACE, R.S.M.
Omaha, Neb.

Return Address Required

Editor’s note: Jim Belna of Claremont, Calif., responds in kind to the fictional letter to a bishop from his old pals Mary and Joe in Of Many Things, 1/16, by Raymond A. Schroth, S.J.

Dear Mary and Joe,
There are few things in this life more pleasurable than hearing from old friends, and I truly enjoyed your recent letter. As you have noticed, I am not the same man I was 30 years ago—physically, spiritually or politically. I gather that I have been something of an embarrassment to you. I won’t say that you are wrong, but neither will I apologize for the road I have traveled. I suppose I do owe you an answer to what has happened to me over the past three decades.

Let’s start with my “Renaissance prince” robes. I wear them proudly and humbly when it is appropriate to the occasion. I think our Lord will excuse

me for dressing up to celebrate his birthday. In any event, I try not to be manipulative, unlike certain media-savvy priests who wouldn’t be caught dead in their collars—except when they get to play “spokesman for the Catholic Church” on television.

I’ll also grant you that my diocesan newspaper is not exactly Pulitzer Prize material, but I have come to believe that the beginning of wisdom for a bishop is to understand just how insignificant his personal opinions are, no matter how passionately he may hold them. That is why I rarely use my column to address political controversies anymore.

As to our mutual friend Bill Worthy, are theologians immune from criticism? In case you didn’t get the memo, we are not in the business of banning books anymore. Excuse me for being cynical, but as a tenured professor, Mr. Worthy has more job security than I do, and our “reprimand” will probably earn him a promotion.

To answer your question, I don’t know if I am blind to what has happened to the church. Do you really think that if we just tweaked our teachings or flexed our political muscle, we could usher in some new era of peace and justice? I don’t. And with all respect to your sainted mother, people do change, but it isn’t easy.

We get trapped in our cocoons—in college faculties or religious houses or in social circles where we never encounter anyone with a lifestyle or opinion that is different from our own. That is an occupational hazard for bishops, but I suspect it is a fairly universal challenge. Thank you for your prayers, and always be assured of mine.

Love,
Bishop Josh

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“I gotta go Kim! Someone’s trying to, like, ask me something.”

CARTOON BY BOB ECKSTEIN

Darkness and Faith

PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD (B), APRIL 1, 2012

Readings: Is 50:4-7; Ps 22:8-24; Phil 2:6-11; Mk 14:1-15:47

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34)

This week, our holy week, we walk with Jesus from his glorious procession into the city to his death on the cross, from “Hosannah!” to “Crucify him.”

Lent comes to a climax in Jerusalem, the city of contradictions: a place of worship and idolatry, great faith and horrific scandal, light and darkness. In contrast to Jesus’ faithfulness we find massive betrayal. Consider: Judas who sells out the Lord; chief priests who fake a trial, disciples who sleep and then run away, Peter who denies him, Pilate who condemns him knowing his innocence, and soldiers and crowds who mock him. Here is an irony: The people reject Jesus and choose Barabbas, whose Aramaic name literally means “son of the father.” Opting for the false son while rejecting the true Son of the Father aptly represents the whole sinful human condition.

Jesus’ witness of faith in the utter darkness of the Passion aligns well with today’s reading from the Letter to the Philippians, which extols Christ’s self-emptying unto glory. It is widely believed that Paul is quoting an already known hymn to Christ. Paul’s preface to this hymn is not part of the Lectionary selection. This is unfortunate, because here Paul pleads for us to imitate the Lord. He begins, “If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the

Spirit, any compassion and mercy...have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:1-5). Then begins the hymn, “who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave.” The hymn goes on to show the cross as Jesus’ ultimate expression of humility and obedience. The result of such self-emptying is that “God greatly exalted him [that]...every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.”

Usually this hymn is understood to refer to the Son’s pre-existence and the renunciation of his divinity so as to enter fully the human condition, even unto death. It could, however, be read as highlighting a contrast between Adam and Jesus. Adam, born in the form of God (Gn 1:26-27) wanted to reach out to equality with God by pride and disobedience (Gn 3:5ff), leading to our fall. Jesus, in contrast, displays humility and obedience, leading to his exaltation and our salvation. The most illuminating approach to the passage brings both interpretations together. As both new Adam and pre-existing Son, Jesus emptied himself and embraced Adam’s condition of slavery and mortality in order to free us from both.

If we take seriously Jesus’ radical

self-emptying, witness of absolute faith and experience of the cross, then we should rethink the common assumption that Jesus always knew exactly what would happen to him—that he would die for our sins and then rise gloriously triumphant a day and a half later. Of course the post-Easter church puts such foreknowledge on his lips. But if Jesus saw all, then Gethsemane makes less sense, as does his experience on the cross. If he



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Set aside time to read through one of the Gospel Passion accounts.
- Consider the costs of discipleship for you.
- How would you respond to someone who is in spiritual darkness?

truly and completely emptied himself, as Paul writes, then he had to trust God radically, especially in the darkness. If he saw the script, then Good Friday amounts to a very bad day, knowing he would soon be glorified.

Seeing Jesus in true darkness and radical faith makes the cross fully real. It also guides us in our own times of darkness and loss. Haven’t we also felt lost? Derided by friends or colleagues? Felt abandoned by God? So did the Lord Jesus—and in Jerusalem, no less. This week we walk with him there during his last days.

PETER FELDMIEIER

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

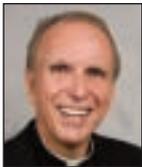
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BOSTON COLLEGE
To Artists



FR. DAVE DWYER, CSP
Director, Busted Halo
PAULIST YOUNG ADULT MINISTRIES
To Youth



DR. ROBERTO GOIZUETA
Margaret O'Brien Flatley Professor of
Catholic Theology
BOSTON COLLEGE
To the Poor, the Sick, and the Suffering



DR. NANCY A. DALLAVALLE
Associate Professor of Religious Studies
FAIRFIELD UNIVERSITY
To Workers



DR. MICHAEL W. HIGGINS
VP of Mission and Catholic Identity
SACRED HEART UNIVERSITY
Holiness in the Future; Holiness as Future

The conference is unique in its focus. The umbrella theme for the conference will be the watershed teaching of the council on the “Universal Call to Holiness.” Seven of the eight featured presenters will base their presentation on one of the seven speeches given by several cardinals at the conclusion of the council on December 8, 1965. These speeches are contained in the original Abbott edition of the council documents. The agenda of the conference will not be a critique of the council documents but rather creative ways in which the energy of the council can be marshaled in establishing the agenda and needs of the twenty-first century. The conference will target younger generations in the academic and pastoral communities.



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www.sacredheart.edu/VIIconference.cfm