

LENT ISSUE

America

Feb. 4, 2008

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

\$2.75



**Entering Religious Life
In a Time of Scandal**
James T. Keane

John R. Donahue
on the Lenten Readings

Ansley M. Dauenhauer
on Becoming Catholic

MY TWO-YEAR-OLD NEPHEW is a liturgical musician.

Whenever I used to read interviews with rock stars, they would invariably say something like, "My parents bought me my first guitar when I was three, and I started playing as soon as I could walk." And then I would think, "Yeah, right." How could a child do something like that?

So imagine my amazement when, a few months ago, I bought a little toy guitar for my nephew Matthew, and he began happily strumming away.

It shouldn't have been a surprise. From his mother (my sister Carolyn) I knew that Matthew was a big fan of—wait for it—Bruce Springsteen. Since Carolyn is herself a longtime devotee of the Boss, she plays Springsteen CD's in the car while driving Matthew to day care, along with her to shop, or to the pediatrician. Soon Matthew started singing along. He is particularly fond of "We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions," in which Bruce covers Pete Seeger folk songs.

The first night that

Matthew got his little plastic guitar he took it to bed with him. This was the beginning, as Rick says "Casablanca," of a beautiful friendship.

For the next few months Matthew was rarely seen without it. With it, he sang such toddler hits as "Old Dan Tucker" and his favorite, "Pay Me My Money Down." Though one wonders what a two-year-old would know about a 19th-century worker protest song first commercially recorded by the Weavers in 1955, this deterred him not at all from pursuing his art.

For Christmas his parents bought Matthew a second guitar, an inexpensive child's model. Essentially it's a half-size instrument, with a real wooden neck and body, and it's less likely to break than the plastic version. The first time his plastic guitar broke, Matthew uttered the all-purpose words that apparently all American toddlers know from birth: "Uh-oh." Tears were avoided with Crazy Glue and a stout rubber band.

Though I wasn't there for the Christmas unwrapping, I was with my nephew the following week at my mother's house. One morning, the first thing he said was a sprightly "Hi, Uncle Jim!" The second was "Strap!" That meant he

wanted me to position the guitar strap around his shoulders to ready himself for a day of nonstop music-making.

But even more surprising than the two-year-old guitarist is the two-year-old liturgical musician. For a few songs down from "Pay Me My Money Down" on his repertoire is the memorial acclamation from the Mass. The next day, at eight in the morning, I was awakened by the faint sounds on the other side of my bedroom door of a high-pitched voice that cannot quite pronounce the letter "r": "Quiste has dieeeed! Quiste is wizzennnnnn! Quiste wiw come agaaaainnnnn!"

Also popular is his rendition of the Great Amen, and "Jesus, Lamb of God," who takes away the sins of either the world or the "wuw'd." I'm guessing the former.

Matthew's enthusiasm for liturgical music probably comes from his love of church. He has always been happy to go to Mass with his family, sing the hymns and shake hands with the congregation.

One of his earliest words was "Amen!" and one of his earliest actions was

making the Sign of the Cross.

Speaking of which—last month I was asked to be a "technical adviser" for a movie now in production called "Doubt," starring Philip Seymour Hoffman and Meryl Streep, which was being filmed at the College of Mount St. Vincent in Riverdale, N.Y.

One day they were shooting "reaction shots" of parishioners listening to a homily during Mass. The production designers had reconfigured the space to recreate the architecture of a pre-Vatican II church, complete with a high altar and an altar rail. At the conclusion of his homily, the priest said, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." In response, the extras—local men, women and children dolled up in 1960s attire—sat motionless.

After I mentioned to the first assistant director that Catholics of that era would bless themselves at the invocation of the Trinitarian formula, he said, "Well, come up front and show everyone how to do it."

It took them two or three tries. The first thing that popped into my mind was a desire to say, quite truthfully, "My two-year-old nephew can do this!"

And he plays a mean Doxology, too.

James Martin, S.J.

Of Many Things

America

Published by Jesuits of the United States

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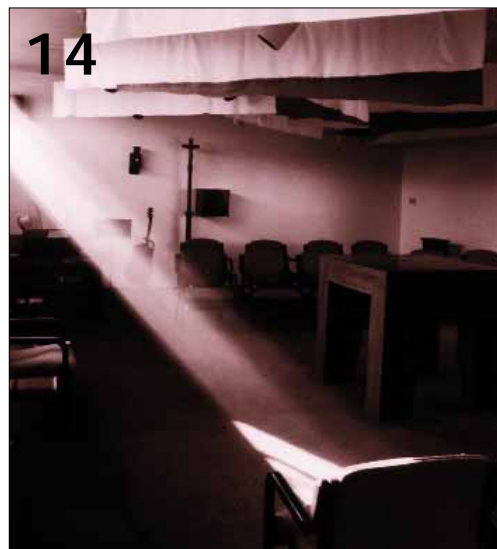
letters@americamagazine.org.

Web site: www.americamagazine.org.

Customer Service: 1-800-627-9533.

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Cover photo A man prays during a weekday Mass in Acton, Mass. Reuters/Brian Snyder.



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America Connects

Jane L. Wiesman on why she loves Lent, and James T. Keane, S.J. on joining the Jesuits during the sexual abuse scandal. Plus, Sean Dempsey, S.J., profiles Craig Finn of the indie rock band The Hold Steady. All at americamagazine.org.

Christian Unity

One hundred years ago the Rev. Paul Watson and Sister Laura White, co-founders of the American Anglican community called the Franciscan Friars and Sisters of the Atonement, organized the first Christian Unity Octave, a period of prayer for the reunion of the church that extended from Jan. 18 to Jan. 25, the eight days between the feast of the Chair of Saint Peter and that of the Conversion of Saint Paul. As Episcopalians, Father Paul and Sister Laura originally envisioned the observance as a time of prayer for the reunion of their fellow Anglicans with Rome. In 1909, the Society of the Atonement, popularly known as Graymoor after the location of its monastery in New York State, entered as a body into full communion with the Catholic Church. Following the Second Vatican Council, the Week of Christian Unity took a more ecumenical turn and is now observed by many churches as a time to join themselves with Christ's prayer "that all may be one" (Jn 17:21).

Since 1965 the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order have jointly prepared texts for the week. This year's theme is found in Thessalonians 5: "Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Golf Diversity at the Fore

When the Golf Channel's anchor Kelly Tilghman commented on Tiger Woods's dominance of the P.G.A. Tour in early January, she joked that his opponents might want to "lynch him in a back alley." Tilghman apologized for the remarks and Woods downplayed their significance, but it was only the latest incident in professional golf's troubled history with diversity. The P.G.A. did not drop its "Caucasian only" membership clause until 1961, and early African-American golfers like Charlie Sifford faced years of verbal abuse from fans. A decade ago, the golfer Fuzzy Zoeller suggested that Woods, after winning the Masters tournament, might serve "fried chicken and collard greens." The host of the Masters, the Augusta National Golf Club, still refuses to allow women to become members. (They are, however, allowed to serve as caddies.)

Ironically, the exploding popularity of golf in the last decade is due in large part to exciting new arrivals outside the traditional white male bastions of the sport, including the two-time P.G.A. champion Vijay Singh, originally from Fiji, and Michelle Wie, a Korean-American who played in her first L.P.G.A. Tour event at the age of 14. Then there is Woods himself, who in just 11 years has gained more career wins than any other active golfer, while simultaneously upending many of America's racial categories. Woods refuses to be identified by contemporary ethnic labels, because he is one-quarter Chinese, one-quarter Thai, one-quarter African-American, one-eighth Native American Indian and one-eighth Dutch, making him (to use his own word) "Cablinasian." Should his seven-month-old daughter Sam Alexis inherit his athletic prowess, she could one day increase further the diversity of the golf world. Her mother, Elin Nordegren, is Swedish.

Is Small Beautiful?

Perhaps it will be in this case. According to reports from India, Ratan Tata's tiny new \$2,500 car already enjoys wide appeal. Called the Nano (not to be confused with the iPod Nano, which, at the size of two fingers, is even smaller), the car represents a serious effort at thinking small. Its designers repeatedly asked themselves, Do we really need that? It is the right question. Mostly they answered no. As a result, compared with subcompact models currently on the market, the Nano is about half the size, with less than a third of the horsepower, not much speed and not one frill. Still, it is the first car affordable to millions of would-be drivers in developing nations (especially India and China). No wonder it has been nicknamed "the people's car." The Tata Group that developed it hopes to show that thinking small will earn them big profits in the right markets.

Environmentalists, however, are alarmed. They wonder whether the Nano can be made safe and green (fuel efficient and low on carbon emissions). That, too, is the right question to ask. A million more drivers each year in projected Nano sales would mean a huge increase in emissions, however stringently controlled. Will that prospect goad India into passing mandatory fuel efficiency standards, while the Nano fulfills the dreams and needs of the poor? Will other manufacturers follow Tata's lead in thinking small? Or is the Nano an hors d'oeuvre on wheels that will whet the appetite of new drivers for bigger, faster cars—the environment be damned?

Rich Nation, Poor People

WITH INCOME INEQUALITY in the United States hitting ever higher levels, it nonetheless comes as a jolt to learn that the share of after-tax income going to the wealthiest 1 percent of households has reached its highest point since the start of the Great Depression. Such is the conclusion of several related reports by the nonprofit Center on Budget and Policy Priorities released this past December. Phrased another way, the gap between the richest Americans and all others has grown wider than at any other time since at least 1929. This increasing concentration of income at the top of the income scale continues a long-term trend. The situation is not helped by tax cuts that have primarily benefited the highest income households. Thus those with incomes of \$1 million or more annually received an average tax cut of \$118,000 in 2006 (the latest year for which data from the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center is available). According to the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office, the share of after-tax income going to middle-income households was the smallest on record, as was the share going to the bottom fifth (according to data available back to 1979).

This overall skewing of income distribution toward the wealthiest Americans contrasts sharply with the fact that poverty and its accompanying hardships in areas like food, housing and medical care now negatively affect tens of millions of men, women and children. Indeed, according to government figures, more than 36 million Americans live in poverty. The U.S. Census Bureau classifies as poor a family of four with income below \$20,614. Should the economy move into a recession, “poverty will almost certainly get worse,” Arloc Sherman, a policy analyst at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, told **America**. Moreover, of those classified as poor, over 15 million live in what is referred to as extreme poverty—that is, a family’s

cash income is less than half the federal poverty line, or less than \$10,307 for a family of four. For such families, obtaining food, shelter and medical care can be a daily struggle.

Food

An estimated 35 million people are food insecure, that is, they lack access to adequate food because they cannot afford groceries. Some members of the most severely affected households cope by skipping meals or eating less. The 2007 survey of hunger and homelessness by the U.S. Conference of Mayors noted that escalating food and utility prices have led to rising requests for emergency food, with some agencies turning people away or reducing portions of distributed food. A Los Angeles official, for example, reported that food agencies there have been unable to meet the demand for food assistance.

Although food stamps provide help for many people, actual benefits now average only about a dollar per meal per person. In addition, 35 percent of those eligible are not

enrolled in the program. Barriers to enrollment include an application process that can be dauntingly cumbersome, especially for those of limited education. For non-English speakers, too, language can present another barrier, made all

The gap between the richest Americans and all others has grown wider than at any other time since at least 1929.

the more formidable because of a prevailing anti-immigrant sentiment. The National Council of La Raza has reported that Latinos, like African-Americans, suffer “alarming high rates of food insecurity.”

Shelter

Shelter needs represent another area in which men, women and children experience the effects of poverty at a time of plenty for some and want for far more. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 16 million households “either paid more for rent than the federal government says is affordable, or lived in overcrowded or substandard housing.” Of these, six million allocated half their income for rent or utilities or lived in severely substandard housing. For the homeless who rely on shelters, the mayors’ report states that in a number of the survey cities, shelter providers turn people away “some or all of the time.” An added cause for concern is the fact that nearly a quarter of those in shelters are families with children, along with high numbers of homeless veterans.

Medical Care

The number of Americans lacking health insurance has risen for six straight years. Forty-seven million Americans are uninsured. Forty million people in 2005 did not receive at least one type of needed health care (medical, dental, mental health or prescription drugs) because of cost, including some with insurance as well as those who had none. As for children, the number of those uninsured has risen for two straight years and is now close to nine million. Health advocates' efforts in 2007 to increase coverage for children who are eligible for the State Child Health Insurance Program but are not enrolled, failed because of a presidential veto. Current funding for 2008 is only enough to maintain present S-chip levels.

Deep budget cuts in states around the country also whittle away at the precarious livelihood of low-income people. Early in January 2008, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger of California proposed a \$1.1 billion cut in California's Medicaid program. Because of such cuts, millions of poor people, including those with H.I.V. as well as older adults and the disabled, may not receive services they previously counted on.

Second Chances

In addition to food, shelter and medical care, Congress should pay more attention to other poverty-related issues. These include assisting men and women leaving prison to make a successful transition back into their communities through help with jobs, education and housing. Lack of these and other needed services, like treatment for drug and alcohol addiction, have left thousands in a revolving-door situation that leads them back behind bars. It is estimated that over half the prisoners released this year will be incarcerated again by 2011. Passage of the Second Chance Act, long languishing in Congress, should therefore be a priority. It would provide funds for training and assistance, including family reunification, that would help ex-offenders lead crime-free lives. Because of the enormous costs of incarceration—over \$60 billion a year—state, county and local governments have less to spend on services that help low-income citizens. At present, 2.2 million people are being held in jails and prisons throughout the nation, many of them because of nonviolent drug offenses. Mandatory minimum sentences are responsible for much of the increase in the incarcerated population. Even Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy has said that sentences of this kind are often unjust.

Immigration Reform

Similarly, fortification of the border between Mexico and the United States with an ever-lengthening real and “vir-

tual” fence and ongoing increases in the number of Border Patrol agents are costing millions. These expenditures could be reduced by comprehensive immigration reform. Reform in turn could bring 12 million undocumented persons out of the shadows and allow them to earn their livelihood legitimately. This could lift them out of the poverty-related conditions in which they now hide in fear of discovery and deportation.

Low National Standing

Food, shelter, medical care—that such a rich country as the United States should allow so many millions to lack these and other essentials does not speak well for its standing as a world leader, especially in comparison with other wealthy nations, like Britain, Canada and Germany—let alone traditionally generous countries like Sweden—that do far more on behalf of “the least” among them. Whoever wins the 2008 presidential election will face great challenges on behalf of people struggling with a safety net badly in need of repair.

In the meantime, the Congressional Joint Economic Committee estimates that for the period 2002 to 2008, the economic costs of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan total \$1.6 trillion. Even a small portion of that sum could provide for the basic needs of most Americans. The next president of the United States will face great challenges in domestic as well as foreign affairs.

George M. Anderson S.J.

For More Information

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
www.cbpp.org

United States Conference of Mayors
www.usmayors.org

Catholic Charities USA
www.catholiccharitiesusa.org

Campaign for Human Development
www.usccb.org/cchd

National Council of La Raza
www.nclr.org

The Sentencing Project
www.sentencingproject.org

National Low Income Housing Coalition
www.nlihc.org

Signs of the Times

Jesuits Elect New Superior General at Rome Gathering

Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., moderator of the Jesuit Conference of East Asia and Oceania, was elected superior general of the Society of Jesus on Jan. 19. Pope Benedict XVI was informed of the election of Father Nicolás before the Jesuits announced it publicly. Father Nicolás was ordained to the priesthood in Tokyo and is the former Jesuit provincial of Japan. He also served as director of the East Asian Pastoral Institute in Manila.

Interviewed in December about his hopes for the work of the 35th General Congregation, Father Nicolás said, "I have a feeling, still imprecise and difficult to define, that there is something important in our religious life that needs attention and is not getting it." "We have certainly been diligent in addressing our problems whenever we have seen them," he said, noting the focus of past Jesuit general congregations, "but the uneasiness in the society and in the church has not disappeared." In the interview with *The Province Express*, the newsletter of the Australian Jesuits, he said: "The question for us is: Is it enough that we are happy with our life and are improving our service and ministry? Isn't there also an important factor in the perception of people ('vox populi') that should drive us to some deeper reflection on religious life today?" "How come we elicit so much admiration and so little following?" he asked.

The new Jesuit general concluded by telling the newsletter that he hoped the general congregation would begin "a process of dynamic and open reflection on our religious life that might begin a process of re-creation of the society for our times, not only in the quality of our services, but also and mostly in the quality of our personal and community witness

to the church and the world."

Born April 29, 1936, in Palencia, Spain, as the third of four brothers, Father Nicolás attended a Jesuit secondary school and college and entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1953. After earning a degree in philosophy in Spain, he was sent to Japan to study theology. He was



Spanish-born Father Adolfo Nicolás is cheered by delegates after taking the oath of office as superior general of the Society of Jesus in Rome Jan. 19.

ordained a priest in 1967. After higher studies in theology at the Jesuit-run Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, he returned to Japan and taught systematic theology at Sophia University in Tokyo. From 1978 to 1984 he was director of the East Asian Pastoral Institute, the influential catechetical and evangelization center in Manila, Philippines. In 1991-93 he was rector of the formation program for Jesuit scholastics in Japan, and in 1993 he was appointed provincial superior for Japan. Before being named moderator of the Jesuit Conference of East Asia and Oceania in 2004, he spent three years working in a poor immigrant parish in Tokyo, living with and ministering to Filipino and other Asian immigrants. Father Nicolás speaks Spanish, Catalan, Japanese, English, French, Italian and German.

Though he himself called his election "a shock," the news was greeted with great joy and satisfaction by those who had followed the selection process. Ben

Nebres, S.J., president of the Ateneo de Manila University, said: "When I think of him, the feelings that come are of affection and friendship. Father Nico is many things, but he is above all a companion and a friend. He brings the gift of friendship and encouragement like Blessed Peter Favre." A young Jesuit scholastic, also at the Ateneo de Manila, Isaias Caldas from East Timor, described the excitement among the 70 young Jesuits of the Arrupe International Residence. "I am excited and overjoyed, because this general is someone I know personally. He once told us to let our religious struggles become 'big' [broad in apostolic horizons] not limited only to our worries."

C. M. Paul, S.D.B., writing from Kolkata in the Indian journal of the Salesians of Don Bosco,

recalled that many Japanese Salesians were taught by Father Nicolás at Sophia University in Tokyo. For some he was the thesis moderator; for others he was spiritual director. "He used his theological expertise," said Father Paul, "for the catechetical education of migrants and their children and he wrote books in multilingual editions published by the Salesian publishers Don Bosco Sha. During this time, some young Salesians were working with him for the Japanese-Filipino Youth Program. He was the resource person for the program and he always showed his support for the Salesian way of educating youth. He always used to say 'Let us trust in the Salesians, for they know youth very well.' One former student described him as *Jinkaku-sha* (a man of character), which is a compliment showing the highest admiration in Japan. So now his former students will say to him in return, 'Let us trust in Father Nicolás, for he knows human reality very well.'"

Signs of the Times

Turkish Bishops Mark Pauline Year

Turkey's Catholic bishops marked the 2,000th anniversary year of the birth of St. Paul in the southern Turkish city of Tarsus and outlined preparations for the Pauline year. "This event is for all Christian communities, since Paul is a teacher for all the disciples of Christ. However, the anniversary is of particular importance for us living in Turkey—the Apostle of the Gentiles is a son of this land, and it is here he exercised most of his ministry," said a letter from the bishops' assembly, which includes bishops of Turkey's Armenian, Syrian, Chaldean and Latin-rite churches. "We are immersed in a Muslim world, where faith in God is still very present, both in its

traditional aspects and in the assertion of new Islamic religious organizations," said the letter, which was to be read in Catholic churches Jan. 25, the date on which St. Paul's conversion is remembered in the liturgy. Pope Benedict XVI designated the year 2008-9 as a special Pauline year marking the anniversary of the saint's birth. The pope said the celebrations should have a special ecumenical character. Bishop Luigi Padovese, apostolic administrator of Anatolia, said that the anniversary would begin formally on June 21-22 and include a Mass in Tarsus celebrated by Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

New Vatican Photo Resource

Scholars, history buffs and the public at large will now be able to peek inside some of the Vatican's collection of historical black-and-white photographs. The photo captions and photographers' notes for the Giordani Collection of the Vatican photo service have been transcribed into a searchable text file (nearly 375 pages) that can be obtained free of charge by sending e-mail to photo@oss-rom.va. Buyers can place orders for specific photos by sending a request by e-mail to the same address specifying the photo caption and the corresponding number. Some half-million images, mostly black-and-white, taken between 1933 and 1975, will now be more conveniently accessible to the public for research and sale.

This new electronic file is a modest but significant start to the Vatican photo service's long-term plans for updating and improving its collections. The collection is named for Francesco Giordani, a private, Rome-based photographer the Vatican commissioned starting in the 1930s.

Hong Kong Cardinal Prays for Direct Elections

About 200 lay Christians and members of the clergy—including Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kium of Hong Kong—attended a prayer rally before joining thousands protesting the central government's decision not to allow direct elections for Hong Kong officials in 2012. Cardinal Zen told participants in the prayer rally on Jan. 13 that he "regretted and was angry" that the Chinese government in Beijing ignored the aspirations of Hong Kong residents, reported the Asian church news agency UCA News. The cardinal also said he doubted that the elections for chief executive in 2017 and all members of the Legislative Council in 2020 would be conducted in a truly democratic manner. "We hope for respect and dialogue. We will hold on to our stance [for universal suffrage in 2012]

From CNS and other sources. CNS photos.

India's Christmas Nightmare



A boy stands at the entrance of a damaged church in the eastern Indian state of Orissa Dec. 28.

priest fled through the backyard, the mob—armed with swords, axes, crowbars and spears—broke the gates and destroyed the church. "See, this is not the result of an earthquake," Father Singh said on Jan. 5, pointing to the destruction around the church. The

As the vicar of St. Peter's Church in Pobingia was supervising his parishioners as they made decorations Christmas Eve, he received an urgent call from the parish priest less than 15 miles away in Phulbani, warning him that Hindu mobs were attacking churches. Father Prasanna Singh, the vicar, considered what to do next. Police, ordered by the government to guard the church, fled when they heard 600 Hindus approaching and shouting anti-Christian slogans. Other police officers stood by and watched. As the

days of violence in India's Orissa state began with Hindus destroying Christmas decorations at the local market. In retaliation, Christians burned Hindu shops and houses, followed by widespread violence over 600 square miles during four days.

Five Catholic churches, 48 village chapels, two seminaries, half a dozen hostels and four convents were destroyed. Dozens of Hindu homes and hundreds of Christian homes were burned and looted in the Kandhamal district.

Signs of the Times

right to the end and believe in the power of prayer,” he added. The Civil Human Rights Front and pro-democracy legislators called the rally to protest a decision by the Standing Committee of China’s National People’s Congress ruling out universal suffrage in the 2012 elections for Hong Kong’s chief executive and legislators.

Cardinal McCarrick Sees Gaza Sadness

U.S. Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick said meeting with young people from a parish in the Gaza Strip during a pastoral visit there left him feeling sad. “It is a sad place with a lot of unhappiness and frustration,” said Cardinal McCarrick, the retired archbishop of Washington. The youths he met at Holy Family Parish in Gaza had just completed their university studies and were unable to find work, he said. “They can’t get started on their lives,” the cardinal said Jan. 11 at the conclusion of a weeklong visit to the area. He said that “as long as Hamas stands for the destruction of Israel, we can’t move forward.” Christians in Gaza have expressed a growing concern for their safety since Hamas, an Islamic extremist political and military movement, took over Gaza last year. Since then, attacks on Christian institutions have increased, and the owner of a Christian bookstore was murdered by what were believed to be Islamic extremists.

Honoring Mother Lange for Black History Month

More than 30 years before the Emancipation Proclamation, Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange fought to establish the first religious order for black women and the first black Catholic school in the United States. To honor the 126th anniversary of their founder’s death, the Oblate Sisters of Providence have planned a Mass of Thanksgiving to be celebrated on Feb. 3 by Cardinal William H. Keeler, the retired archbishop of Baltimore, in Our Lady of Mount Providence Convent Chapel in Catonsville, Md. Sister M. Virginia Fish

of the Oblate Sisters said the sisters see honoring Mother Lange as a fitting way to begin National Black History Month, which is observed every February. “For so long, no one ever heard of Mother Lange, but now she is getting her just due,” said Sister John Francis Schilling, president of St. Frances Academy, the school founded by Mother Lange. “She was someone who saw the need for things before others did and took the risks to make them happen.”

Phoenix Parishes to Become Nonprofits

The Phoenix Diocese is undertaking a comprehensive restructuring process so that its civil organization matches the one already in place canonically. Currently, the diocese is a corporation sole, a legal entity consisting of a single incorporated office, occupied by Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted. Through July 1, church leaders will be preparing each individual parish to become a separate, nonprofit corporation. Little will change in day-to-day parish operations, according to diocesan officials. “While this is a civil restructuring, we cannot forget who we are as church,” said the Rev. Fred Adamson, vicar general and moderator of the diocesan curia. “The way the church structures itself provides a great deal of autonomy at the parish level to minister to the local needs of the people of God.” Under the current civil structure, Bishop Olmsted is listed as the property owner of all parish assets in trust for the given parish. But in actual practice, as prescribed by canon law, the pastor makes almost all decisions at the parish level.

Liturgical Development in Continuity

Pope Benedict XVI has no intention of launching a liturgical “return to the past” but would like to recover some important elements that have been lost or forgotten in recent decades, the Vatican’s liturgist said. Msgr. Guido Marini, master of papal liturgical ceremonies, was asked during an interview with Vatican Radio on Jan. 19 about fears that the pope

wants to abandon the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council. “These are certainly incorrect inferences and interpretations,” Monsignor Marini said. The path of Catholic liturgy is “development in continuity,” in which change never loses touch with the church’s living traditions, he said. “This may also require, in some cases, the recovery of precious and important elements that along the way have been lost or forgotten,” he said. On Jan. 13 the pope celebrated a Mass in the Sistine Chapel using the original main altar, so he faced away from the people during parts of the liturgy. Since Vatican II, Mass usually is celebrated facing the people. Monsignor Marini said the change in direction reflected the special artistic circumstances of the Sistine Chapel and was not out of line with Vatican II reforms.

March for Life



Peter Thompson, 3, carries a sign as he marches with his parents, Carl and Jerri Thompson, right, from Royersford, Pa., during the March for Life in Washington Jan. 22. Peter’s parents said that he is the youngest of eight children. Tens of thousands marched in the biting cold down Constitution Avenue toward the Supreme Court, marking the 35th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortions throughout the United States.



A Modern-Day Exodus

‘They choose to risk their lives rather than lose their faith.’

AS LENT BEGINS, the Scripture readings from the Book of Exodus tell harrowing stories of a religious minority fleeing persecution in the Middle East. Spending long and difficult years in the desert, the people wonder if they will ever know a stable, non-nomadic life again. A few weeks back the Holy Family readings told a similar refugee story. Jesus, Mary and Joseph left Palestine in the dead of night with nothing but the clothes on their backs, fleeing an oppressive regime and lucky to escape with their lives. In the words of modern-day asylum lawyers, they were “fleeing a well-founded fear of persecution.”

This story of families fleeing to preserve their lives and their faith is happening again today as Christians are forced to flee Iraq. Cardinal Theodore McCarrick tells moving stories of his visits with Iraqi refugee families in the Middle East. With Bishop Nicholas DiMarzio, he led a delegation from Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and the International Catholic Migration Commission (their trip report is available at the Migration and Refugee Services Web site, www.usccb.org/mrs). As Cardinal McCarrick recounts: “Imagine you are a Christian family living in the Dora neighborhood outside of Baghdad. In the middle of the night there is pounding on your door. You are visited by armed gangs of Islamic extremists who threaten you and your family. You are told you have three options: give up your faith and convert to Islam, die or leave your

MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE, professor of international relations at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., is a member of the board of the Jesuit Refugee Service.

homes, businesses, possessions and communities behind and flee. There is no doubt that you will be killed if you do not comply. Many have already been killed by similar death squads, and the Iraqi government seems unable or unwilling to protect you. Who among us would choose not to renounce our faith under such death threats? Yet these Christians do not renounce the faith. They do not convert. They choose to flee, to lose everything they own and risk their lives rather than lose their faith. These are the true modern-day martyrs.”

These Christians have been at home in Iraq for centuries. But of the 2,000 Christian families that once lived in the neighborhood of Dora alone, perhaps fewer than 300 remain. More than two million Iraqis have fled the country. Another two million have fled their homes but remain inside Iraq, unable to cross an international border. The Iraqi exodus now totals more than 15 percent of the population. Minority communities, like the Iraqi Christians, are particularly hard hit. More than 1.5 million Christians lived in Iraq prior to the war. Fewer than 500,000 remain.

The two million Iraqis displaced within the country continue to fear daily violence. But the two million Iraqi refugees outside the country also live in permanent insecurity. Fleeing to Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, they are not allowed to hold jobs, send their children to school or access health care. Fearing arrest and deportation, they often live in hiding, continually indoors to avoid hostile authorities. Without work they cannot pay rent, and most live in overcrowded conditions in poor housing, fearful of eviction. Host countries may have begrudgingly allowed temporary entry to refugees, but they do not want Iraqis to

feel welcome or settle permanently in their countries. Host governments fear they cannot support the cost of vulnerable refugee populations, and they cannot risk the increased ethnic and religious conflicts that the quickly changing demographics may entail. They do not want the Iraqis to become the new Palestinians, refugees who stay permanently because they can never go back.

Returning home or settling permanently in the countries to which they have fled are not options for most Iraqi refugees. That leaves resettlement in a third country, like the United States, as the only choice. The bishops note that the tens of thousands of Iraqis who are working or have worked with the U.S. government and contractors are particularly at risk.

The United States has a generous record of refugee resettlement. In 1975 130,000 Vietnamese were airlifted directly to the United States; over time more than 760,000 Vietnamese refugees were admitted, and hundreds of thousands more from the rest of Indochina. Catholic parishes and dioceses sponsored many of these refugee families. We took responsibility for the fate of the refugees our actions helped create. Then-Secretary of State Cyrus Vance explained the United States’ moral obligation to welcome refugees: “We are a nation of refugees. Most of us can trace our presence here to the turmoil or oppression of another time and another place. Our nation has been immeasurably enriched by this continuing process. We will not turn our backs on our traditions. We must meet the commitments we have made to other nations and to those who are suffering. In doing so, we will also be renewing our commitments to our ideals.” In the current Iraq war, the U.S. administration has amnesia about who caused the plight of more than two million Iraqi refugees. We face moral responsibilities to resettle more than the paltry 12,000 refugees the Bush administration has pledged to admit in the future. Our Catholic communities are again needed to help sponsor and resettle refugee families, to be ambassadors for Christ as the Ash Wednesday readings instruct. Will we welcome these modern day Holy Families? *Maryann Cusimano Love*



PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR.

Dawn breaks at the chapel at the Jesuit novitiate in Culver City, Calif.

Vocation and Crisis

Entering religious life during a time of scandal

— BY JAMES T. KEANE —

THE NIGHT BEFORE MY SISTER'S WEDDING five summers ago, my family and our new in-laws gathered for dinner at an Italian restaurant in the suburbs of Los Angeles. Because mine is a big family—I am the sixth of eight children, and my siblings have among them 14 offspring—we chose this particular restaurant for its willingness to accommodate large, raucous groups. Busy and loud, it was perfect for our needs. Our own table was unremarkable, except that we were probably slightly louder than the rest of the clientele, and one

JAMES T. KEANE, S.J., is an associate editor of **America**.

of us—I'm the one—wore a Roman collar. To the casual onlooker, our party was just another big Catholic family out celebrating on a Friday night.

At a certain point in the evening, the sheer volume of the conversation at the table got to me, so I joined my nieces and nephew on the little dance floor, where six of them between the ages of 2 and 5 were playing “Ring Around the Rosie.” It took a certain amount of physical effort to retain my balance while simultaneously running around holding hands with people less than 3 feet tall, particularly after I'd drunk a couple of glasses of wine, but I stuck with it. Over and over we circled, collapsing each time at the final line, “we all fall down.” Kids like repetition, of course, and love it when adults come down to their level, so they were screaming with laughter and shouting “again, again!” After what seemed like the millionth rotation, I finally sat down, sweating and laughing while trying to catch my breath, and they all piled on top of me. I grabbed my nephew, the only boy in the group, and tucked him under my arm like a football as I struggled to my feet. And then I looked around the restaurant.

Maybe I was projecting. Maybe my sensitivities betrayed me. Maybe I'm paranoid. But every single person in the restaurant was staring at me.

This was only one year after the awful spring of 2002, when a seemingly endless barrage of revelations about priestly sex crimes dominated the American media. Every day a new story broke in the papers about further abuses, crimes abetted by bishops and superiors who ignored warning signs or transferred abusive priests from parish to parish. The ranks of those we had all trusted the most seemed shot through with the worst kind of sexual deviants, and it appeared that people in authority had covered up their crimes for generations. The victims were our children, our brothers and sisters, as well as our faith in the worldwide communion we affirmed every Sunday as the church established by Christ and handed down from the apostles.

Even the well-documented argument that sexual abuse was no more prevalent in the priesthood than in other religious denominations, or indeed in families, did little to ameliorate the anger and disillusionment of the average person in the pews. After all, the Catholic Church has never staked its reputation on being simply no better or worse than anybody else.

For generations, perhaps the ultimate mark of distinction for a Catholic family in the United States was to have a son become a priest. Even as vocations plummeted in the past 40 years, a son or brother in the seminary was a source of family pride and satisfaction. In four short months, much

of that culture was swept away by a tide of abuse allegations and public scandals. Suddenly the sight of a young man in a Roman collar in public could bring new and unsavory images to mind.

And there I was in that restaurant, with six small chil-

I found the Jesuits' shared brotherhood and sense of mission trumped any external concerns.


dren clambering up and over me on the floor. Some onlookers quickly averted their gaze when I made eye contact; others talked behind palms to their tablemates; still others simply stared without expression. I may have imagined it all, I admit, because I know that I imagined more—that mothers were suddenly clutching their children to their side, that one of my own party watched me out of the corner of her eye, that the maitre d' looked on with barely concealed revulsion. This, I thought, was not what I signed up for.

In the Company of Jesuits

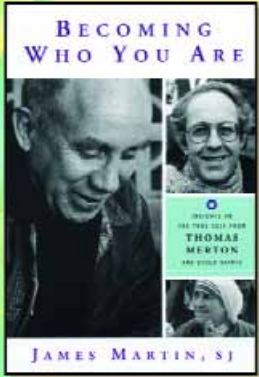
I can't exactly claim I stepped into this life unaware, however. While I never suffered any abuse myself growing up (despite many years as an altar boy and a lifetime in the company of clergy), not all the men accused of sexual abuse in the past five years are unknown to me, and include former teachers and parish priests. It is impossible in the present climate, I suspect, to be closely tied to the church and not know at least one priest accused of sexual misconduct. For anyone who would seek to enter the clerical state these days, the stakes are known.

When I was applying for entrance to the Jesuits in the spring of 2002, the drumbeat of sexual abuse allegations against priests and religious was at its loudest, and the Jesuits were hardly spared. On the morning of my departure for a four-day visit to the novitiate, I picked up *The Los Angeles Times* to find a front-page story with the headline “Cloak of Silence Covered Abuse at Jesuit Retreat.” Inside my apartment was an unread copy of *The New York Review of Books* featuring a book review by Garry Wills. The first story told of the sexual abuse of two mentally disabled men working in the kitchen at a Jesuit retirement home; the second, entitled “Jesuits in Disarray,” claimed the Jesuits (of whom Wills was once a member) were “coping with what seem almost insurmountable problems.” The two articles painted a shameful legacy of past abuse juxtaposed with a portent of future collapse for an organization I had only

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recently become fervently enthusiastic about joining. I arrived at the novitiate later that afternoon with a confused, troubled heart. Why was God calling me to a life that suddenly seemed so dramatically at odds with the Gospel values of the church I wanted to serve?

At the novitiate itself, I was surprised to find the men continuing their daily lives of prayer, study and manual labor without much reference to the ongoing media coverage. In fact, I was shocked by the equanimity with which they conducted a quiet and prayerful routine in such a climate. They had other things on their minds, I later realized: the discernment of their own vocations. Besides, the omnipresence of the issue in the media was somewhat less of a factor at the novitiate. To be sure, the crisis was an occasional topic of conversation—it was hard to avoid, since the magazine rack in the recreation room held a copy of Time asking “Can the Catholic Church Save Itself?” and a copy of Newsweek trumpeting “Sex, Shame, and the Catholic Church.”


In our conversations over several nights, however, I found their shared brotherhood and sense of mission trumped any external concerns, and I began to see more clearly how I could serve God in their company. In a guest room at the novitiate in March 2002, at the nadir of the fortunes of the American Catholic Church, I made a deal with God. If God would give me the grace to live my vocation with integrity, I would accept God’s call to follow, no matter what the circumstances.

Over the next few months, I undertook as part of the application process a number of interviews with various Jesuit priests and other members of the vocation team, including two psychiatrists who administered a 500-question mental health diagnostic evaluation, Rorschach tests and other verbal exercises designed to ferret out any serious psychological problems. Then I had to solicit five recommendations from peers and former superiors, including a recommendation from a female friend my own age. By the time I was accepted in July 2002 for entrance six short weeks later, I was wondering how any abuser ever made it into the Society of Jesus. Still the headlines continued.

Respecting Boundaries

My first apostolic assignment in the novitiate was to work two days a week with three other Jesuit novices at a local shelter for battered women and children. Run by a small group of dedicated nuns, the shelter was hidden behind a thick hedge and guarded by huge attack dogs, which trotted back and forth between the hedge and an inner fence topped with barbed wire. Visitors were carefully vetted before being admitted through an iron grate, and the nuns answered the phone with an anonymous “hello” to prevent abusers from identifying the location and


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attempting to get at the women and children who had fled from them. In almost every case, the women and children inside the shelter had suffered long-term violence and sexual abuse at the hands of husbands and boyfriends, men who would do anything in their power to regain control over their victims.

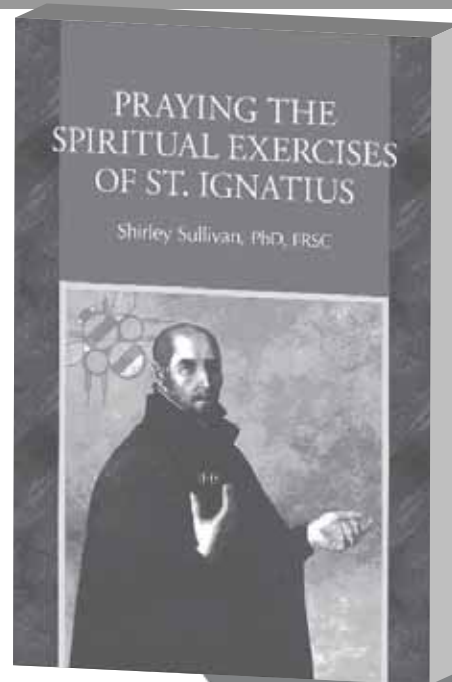
Having witnessed the savagery done to their charges, many of the supervising nuns could be forgiven for manifesting a certain skepticism about the male of the species; while they were grateful for our help, they didn't necessarily want to give us four novices carte blanche in interactions with the women and children either. This became clear within the first week, when they explained to us their rules about physical contact: we were not to hug the children, to pick them up, to touch them on their legs, or to make any contact with their rear ends. Because our main duties were to help out in the classrooms in the mornings and then organize play activities with the children on the shelter playground in the afternoons, the restrictions struck the four of us as impossible to follow. How does one push a child on a swing without touching her posterior? Or get a three-year-old onto a rocking horse without picking him up?

This was all the more painful because most of the children showed a serious need for physical touch. Bereft of safe male affection from an early age, they craved physical contact and were constantly looking for the reassurance of hugs and roughhousing. Games of hide-and-seek or tag often degenerated into scenes where half a dozen shrieking children would charge us, clinging to our legs, howling with laughter as they tried to tackle us. Unable to enforce the nuns' rules while still ministering to these needy kids, we quietly but guiltily broke them over and over. The nuns never corrected or rebuked us, though I don't know whether I spent a single day in that shelter without one or other of the novices fretting over some imagined boundary he was in danger of crossing.

Chaste Living

The situation with my non-Jesuit friends could be equally complicated at times, in large part because many people, Catholic and otherwise, draw an unconscious parallel between the voluntary decision by Catholic priests to give up a life of sexual fulfillment and the subsequent revelation that certain priests have gotten their sexual kicks from abusing children. To this mindset, the very decision to give up sex for a lifetime is a sign either of extreme pathology or of outrageous self-delusion, and visible proof that some mental screw is loose.

St. Ignatius Loyola might not object to that formulation. Indeed, he might even have taken pleasure in it—the idea that his followers were slightly mad, with all the connotations that accompany such a diagnosis. To be slightly



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mad is to be unsettling to others, to challenge others' preconceived notions about human nature and the purpose of life. In that sense, living a happy life of chastity with integrity can be a powerful witness to the otherworldly goals of a Christian life. In that *annus horribilis* of 2002, however, my friends and peers were dubious about my prospects. After all, many of them had known me for years as a man sometimes easily distracted by the fairer sex. What was I thinking? How long could this last? And when I appealed to the witness a life of happy chastity could provide to the world, many friends had an excellent rebuttal: are any of you actually living a happy life of integrity? And have you seen the paper today?

The only authentic response to that question was a non-verbal one, and it required only that I live out my daily life as a Jesuit. Look at me, this quiet rebuttal stated, I'm happier than I've ever been. Are you still sure that a chaste life inevitably warps the soul? Five years of Jesuit life have proved to me that chastity, lived properly, can be part of a healthy, fulfilling lifestyle with many unexpected rewards. It should go without saying, I suppose, that in those years I have experienced no desire to molest a child.

Humility, Not Privilege

A famous meditation in the second week of St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises is commonly known as the "Three



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Degrees of Humility," where the retreatant is asked to consider how humility can be divided into three categories, beginning with that which is simply necessary for salvation and proceeding toward the most perfect form of humility possible, the desire to imitate the life of Christ and "to be rated as worthless and a fool for Christ, Who first was held as such, rather than wise or prudent in this world." It is a tall order and one filled by precious few in the long history of the Society of Jesus, but it cuts to one of the central paradoxes of religious life: exactly those privileges that one thinks he or she is surrendering during the Spiritual Exercises actually return over the years by the hundredfold. I took a vow of poverty, yet have at my disposal the shared resources of a wealthy, well-connected worldwide organization; I took a vow of obedience, yet have opportunities to study subjects and travel to destinations about which I previously only dreamed; I took a vow of chastity, yet find myself free to love all manner of people who would never think of getting so close to me if I were married. All are privileges that only increase as one advances further in religious life, especially in the priesthood.

Here and now, in the midst of what is arguably the worst crisis the Catholic Church in the United States has ever faced, any young man preparing for the priesthood is invited to show he's looking for something other than privilege, ready to receive his share of humility. No matter how much pain and sympathy one might feel for the victims of priestly sexual abuse, it is impossible to atone for the acts committed by those who preyed on the weakest in society in past generations. Nor is it really possible to undo all the permanent damage done. I realize the church faces problems that are not of my causing, requiring solutions beyond my ken. In the meantime, my peers and I persevere in hope and humility.

Whether embarrassed or ashamed in a restaurant, or ministering to others awkwardly and in confusion, or experiencing the personal pain and humiliation caused by the failings of my church and my order in these past years, I at least have a chance to choose these burdens willingly and to choose not to be counted among the "wise and prudent of this world." Like my peers, I am stubbornly confident that the Catholic Church will eventually eliminate the conditions that have caused so many people to suffer over past generations. At the same time, from an unexpected and unwanted direction arrives the personal possibility for coming closer to real humility, to become a better Jesuit and stronger disciple of Christ. Even in the most terrible of circumstances—even there a gift can be found. **A**



An audio interview with James T. Keane, S.J., at americamagazine.org.

Thirsting for Light and Life

Three Gospel stories for Lent and Easter

BY JOHN R. DONAHUE

STRAINS OF “Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days” echo through many parishes during Lent as a summons to imitate Jesus in fasting and prayer. But too much emphasis on the penitential dimension of the six weeks of Lent can obscure the fact that the seven weeks of Easter also shape the liturgical season. Like ripples from a stone cast into a pond, Lent grew from the Easter celebration of the paschal mystery, backward to the six weeks of preparation and forward to the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost.

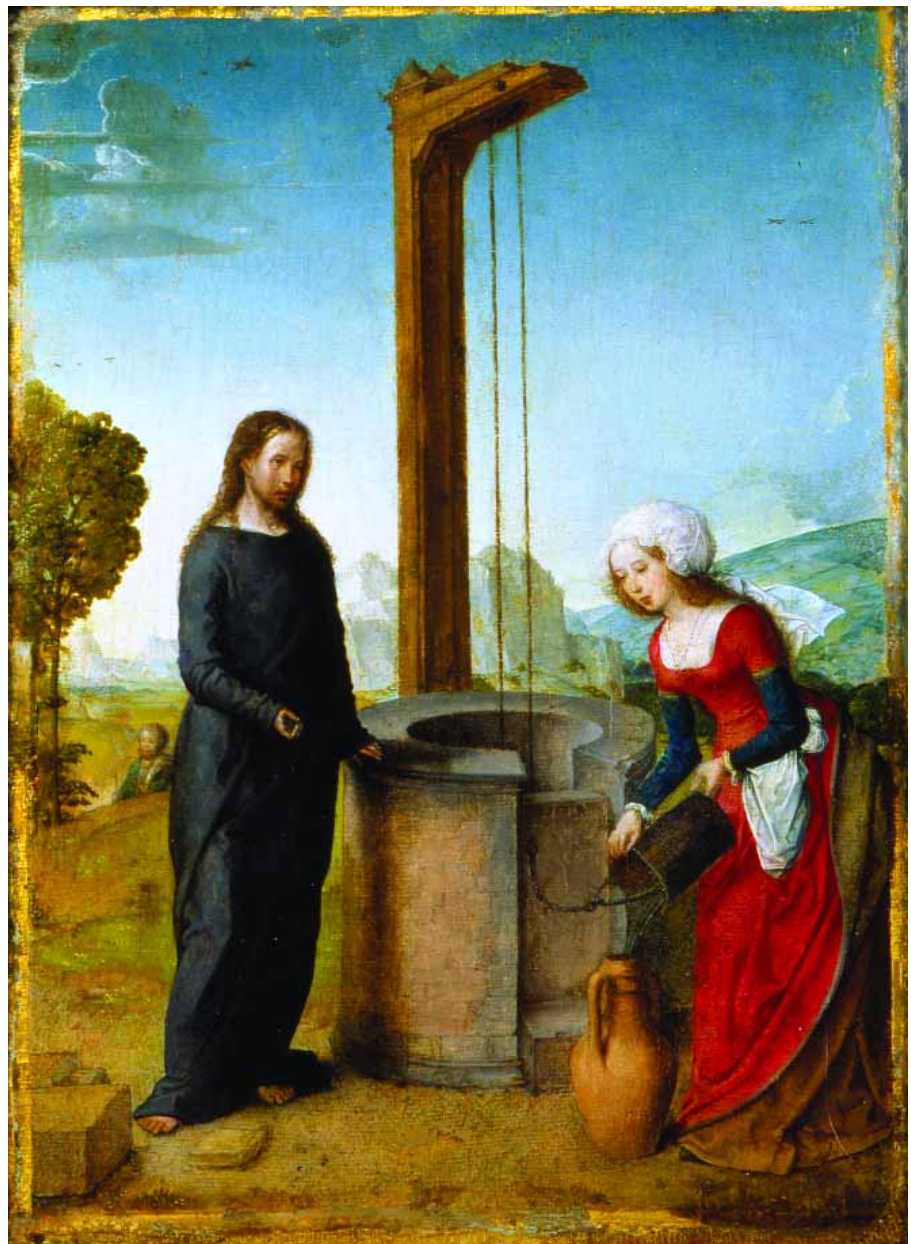
One of the most innovative restorations of the liturgy after the Second Vatican Council was to place the three great readings from the Gospel of John (about the Samaritan woman at the well, the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus) into the Lenten Sunday readings of Cycle A, and in the other cycles when there are people in the community preparing to be baptized during the coming Easter vigil. Originally part of the scrutines (examinations) of baptismal candidates and read only on select weekdays in Lent, they now guide the whole people of God to a renewed appropriation of Christ’s saving gifts and the continuing presence of the Spirit. They preview those key insights of the Gospel of John that will resonate from Easter to Pentecost.

On the first two Sundays of Lent, the Gospels tell of the testing of Jesus in the desert and the Transfiguration, summarizing the meaning of the Lent-Easter season. The readings focus on a message contained in one of the oldest Christian hymns (Phil 2:5-11), which heralds Christ Jesus who, though “in the form of God took on the form of a slave” and suffered the ultimate human test, death on the

cross, only to be exalted and given a name above every other name. In the three weeks that follow, the Gospel readings from John use symbol and story to guide the church to the threshold of Easter.

Origen called John “the spiritual Gospel,” and the theologian John S.

Dunne has described the fourth Gospel as “the essence of Christianity” and “a reading glass for reading all else.” In this narrative of the “Word made flesh,” Jesus speaks as one “from above” and most often in the allusive and rich language of symbol and story. Taking a cue from Paul



“CHRIST AND THE SAMARITAN WOMAN AT THE WELL.” BY JUAN DE FLANDES PHOTO: SCALA/ART RESOURCE

JOHN R. DONAHUE, S.J., is a research professor in theology at Loyola College, Baltimore, Md. He wrote *America*’s column The Word from 1999 to 2002.

Ricoeur's famous dictum that "symbol gives rise to thought," I offer some thoughts on the symbolism of these three great Lenten Gospel readings, which guide us along our way to discipleship and lead to abundant life with God.

"Symbol" and "symbolic" are two of the most evocative and widely defined terms in any language. As Craig Koester has written in *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, symbol is "an image, or action, or a person that is understood to have transcendent significance," and "in Johannine terms, symbols span the chasm between what is 'from above' and what is 'from below' without collapsing the difference." Just as the "fleshly" Jesus reveals the mystery of God, concrete images from human life and history open minds and hearts to the transcendent. John speaks in the archetypal symbols of water, light, darkness, earth and life, breath and spirit, but also uses images from the everyday experience of his readers: wine, bread, shepherds, paths and roadways, vines and branches. A treasury of Old Testament images and allusions is woven into the Gospel's tapestry.

Taken as a whole, the Johannine

images from Chapters 4 (water and spirit), 9 (light) and 11 (life conquering death) evoke the opening words of Genesis, where the spirit of God hovers over the water, light is created, and nature and human life follow, originally free of death: "God formed man [and woman] to be imperishable" (Wis 2:23). Within each Gospel reading are multiple symbols that shape the narrative and reverberate throughout John's Gospel. From antiquity to the present, these symbols have prepared faith seekers for Christian baptism.

Thirsting for the Water of Life

A thirsty Jesus at the sixth hour (foreshadowing another sixth hour when he will cry out "I thirst") stops at a well. A well is a traditional site in Jewish history of meetings between future spouses, including Isaac and Rebekah (Gn 24:10-21), Rachel and Jacob (Gn 29:1-13) and Moses and Zipporah (Ex 2:13-22). This story appears in the Cana-to-Cana cycle of John (2:1-12-4:46), which stretches from Jesus' appearance as the true bridegroom, who provides wine for a wedding, up to the moment when John the Baptist points to

Jesus as the groom to whom is given the new Israel (Jn 3:27-30). In the scene at the well, Jesus "woos" the Samaritan woman to come to the fountain of living water. From betrothal imagery at the well, the inchoate symbolism of water streams out.

Commentary on the saving power of water permeates John's entire narrative. He writes that Jesus will baptize with "the Holy Spirit" (Jn 1:33); Jesus himself proclaims that no one can enter the kingdom unless he or she is born "of water and Spirit" (Jn 3:5). The Samaritan woman looks for "living water," that is fresh spring water, not stagnant water from a cistern; but Jesus promises "water of life" and that the woman herself will become "a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (Jn 5:14). The conversation anticipates Jesus' proclamation: "Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink, for as Scripture says: 'Rivers of living water will flow from within him.'" At Jesus' death, blood and water will flow from his side, a symbol of the moments before birth—not just the birth of an infant, but of the new community in the Spirit (Jn 19:34).

The catechumens, making their way to baptism, are initiated into the deep symbolism of water as containing the spirit of God from creation, and as an answer to their thirst for life and meaning. They are led to a host of Old Testament allusions. Like the parched Israelites, they will be sustained by streams of water (Nm 20:2-10); like the woman at the well, believers come to draw water and receive the water of life.

While these Johannine symbols lead to engagement with the mystery of the Word made flesh, they also shed light on the challenge of discipleship. The dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman concludes when the woman voices her hope for a messiah. Jesus responds, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you" (Jn 7:26). The woman runs off, leaving her unfilled jug, since her deeper thirst has been quenched. She becomes an apostle to the Samaritans, who then come to Jesus. Similarly, the already baptized followers of Jesus and those who are preparing for baptism in every age are invited to enter the world of Johannine symbol, where, as Craig Koester has written, "the mystery of God is encountered but not comprehended." Christians are also called to convey the beauty and power of this world to oth-

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ers, a mission now called evangelization.

A Light for My Path

The second Gospel reading is the long, dramatic story of the man born blind (Jn 9). Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth), a joyous autumn festival when people build little booths or tents to recall their dwellings during the wilderness wanderings and arrival in a land flowing with milk and honey. The days and nights were filled with singing, dancing and ceremonies during which priests carried water from the pool of Siloam to the temple (perhaps for use as sacrifices for the rainy season). Tabernacles was also a feast of lights. Four great menorahs were erected in the temple so that, as the Jewish Mishna records, “there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light of the House of Water Drawing.”

The narrative drama points clearly to a baptismal catechesis. The motif of washing leading to sight anticipates baptism at the Easter vigil, and the story also suggests that the journey involves persecution. Once the blind man receives sight, he enters a world without Jesus. Yet as he is

berated and questioned by Jewish officials, his insight into the person of Jesus grows. His descriptions move from “the man Jesus,” to “prophet,” to “worshiper of God” and finally to a confession of Jesus as “the Son of Man.” Like two elevators passing, the blind man’s accusers descend into spiritual blindness as he moves up toward the true light of Jesus. The narrative does not simply contrast the blind with those who see. Rather, it distinguishes those who know they are blind from those who claim to see. The blind man’s brash fidelity during Jesus’ absence offers John’s persecuted community a model of courageous witness.

Rich symbols also suffuse this narrative. In his interpretation of the mixture of saliva and clay used to restore the man’s sight, Irenaeus of Lyons wrote that Jesus “was making clear that this was the same hand of God through which man was formed from clay.” The Evangelist unveils the baptismal symbol by disclosing that the washing in the pool of Siloam refers to Jesus as the one “sent.” The primal symbol of light, sounded first in the Prologue—“In him was life, and that life was the light of men” (Jn 1:4)—shapes the

first part of the Gospel with its rhythmic pattern: the light came into the world, but the world did not accept the light and remained in darkness (esp. Jn 3:19-21); it culminates in Jesus’ proclamation, “I am the light of the world” (Jn 9:5).

Our contemporary celebration of Easter begins on Holy Saturday, when the darkness is broken by the cry, “Light of Christ,” and the paschal candle reminds us of the risen Christ. When godparents present a lighted candle to the newly baptized, they remind all that Christ is the light of the world and that the neophytes are to walk in the light of Christ’s teaching and example.

Downfall of the Last Enemy

As Holy Week approaches, the narrative of the raising of Lazarus is the final and greatest symbol of Jesus’ public life: the promise of eternal life. It is one of the most vivid and dramatic stories in John’s Gospel and concludes the Book of Signs (Jn 1-12). The narrative is located between Jesus’ description of the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep and the decision of Jewish leaders that “one must die for the people.” It



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enfleshes Jesus' own praise of that greater love that lays down life for a friend (Jn 15:13): Jesus, who brings living water and is the source of light, restores life to a beloved friend at the cost of his own life (Jn 11:45-53).

Like the story of the woman at the well, this narrative unfolds as Jesus speaks with a woman. The plight and grief of Mary and Martha, two sisters whom Jesus loves, is vivid. Jesus' own grief is intense as he collapses in tears.

Each previous narrative had a symbolic "shadow side"—religious competition and division in the story of the Samaritan woman, the spiritual blindness of official teachers in the story of the man born blind. In this story, the intensity of emotion symbolizes the power of that last enemy, death, while the image of Lazarus emerging from the door of death symbolizes the power of life.

Deeper meanings to the story emerge after Martha's misunderstanding of Jesus' promise, "Your brother will rise." Jesus responds, "I am the resurrection and life; whoever believes in me even if he dies will live, and every one who lives and believes in me will never die" (Jn 11:23-25). This is the culmination of the promise of John's Prologue, "What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race" (Jn 1:2-4). It is also the prelude to the Book of Glory (Jn 13-21), which will guide readers to Pentecost.

Memory and Hope

Over 14 centuries ago at the basilica of St. John in Ephesus, built by the Emperor Justinian on the traditional site of the tomb of St. John, catechumens stood by a large baptismal pool. They were thirsting for life and love, drawn by the Father to Jesus. They had been examined on the same chapters of John that are at the heart of Lent today. They put off their old selves and were baptized into the waters of Christ's death so that they might walk in newness of life. Today Christians are called to nurture themselves on these same texts as they hunger and thirst for the Word of life and the gift of the Spirit. **A**



From the archives, Jane L. Wiesman on loving Lent, at americamagazine.org.

Student of the Laity

The priestly ministry of Neil Connolly

BY MATTHEW P. MOLL

SUNDAY MASS AT ST. MARY parish in Manhattan's Lower East Side could remind an observer of the children's visual riddle: "Which one of these things is not like the others?" Among the sea of Latinos, who make up roughly 75 percent of the parish's population, stands Father Neil Connolly, 100 percent Irish-American and silver-haired at age 73, celebrating Mass in crisp Spanish—a language he has mastered after working nearly 50 years as a priest in New York City.

After Mass, Father Connolly glides through a crowd of more than 250 participants, mingling easily with children and adolescents, active adults and senior citizens. He moves from one to another as seamlessly as he moves from Spanish to English, from youth group to social action committees, from Eucharistic minister recruiter to sound system technician. Whether Father Connolly has a word of sympathy for someone in sorrow or extends his hearty handshake to an enthusiastic parishioner, he is at ease and at home wearing the many hats required of a pastor.

Despite the obvious physical, ethnic and linguistic disparities between pastor and parishioners, Father Connolly's chameleonlike ability to connect with his different parishioners is not a surprising oddity; the fundamental ground of his long priestly ministry has been a commitment to know his parishioners and understand how best to deliver the message of Jesus to them. Throughout his life as a priest, Connolly has worked with and for his parishioners as a teacher and advocate of lay leaders in the church.

MATTHEW P. MOLL, a 2003 graduate of Marquette University, moved to Brooklyn as a member of the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and is currently studying New Media at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism.

While giving thousands of lessons to parishioners over the years, he is also a student of the laity, learning by working with the people of God how a community can grow closer in faith.

It Started in Puerto Rico

Roughly half a century ago, immediately after his ordination at age 24, Neil Connolly, a son of Irish immigrants, traveled to Ponce, P.R. to take part in a pioneering New York Archdiocesan language-immersion program in Spanish. "I was there to lose myself in the culture and get into what I was doing by giving as much of myself as I could," says Father Connolly of those eight weeks. "That is such an important factor when you go somewhere else. You have to realize you are in a different place and try to observe."

Neil Connolly did not realize how dif-

ference to keep the churches running. It was the people who implemented the changes in the church from within." Those days in Ponce were also occupied by less pious endeavors—playing basketball and attending such community events as dances and parties. Looking back, Connolly says that those casual exchanges with his parishioners allowed him to gain a better understanding of those with whom he worked. "It is important to hear the sighs of the people, and you can't do that if you are not touched by them," he says. "I want to be colored by what happens and by where I live."

Empowered Laity

In the hills of Puerto Rico, Father Connolly experienced the benefit that an empowered laity brought to a struggling congregation. Years later, he would draw wisdom from those lessons in a place that bore little resemblance to rural Ponce. After his post-seminary weeks in Puerto Rico, Connolly returned to one of the most densely populated areas of the United States, New York City's South Bronx. At St. Athanasius, a parish with a high percentage of Spanish-speaking congregants, he immediately drew on his lan-

'It is important to hear the sighs of the people, and you can't do that if you are not touched by them. I want to be colored by what happens and by where I live.'



guage skills and ability to adapt to and learn from different people. Convinced that the fundamental strength of the church was to be found in its parishes, Connolly soon established himself as an educational leader who encouraged his parishioners to learn from one another and work for change within their own community.

"He was a teacher who thought people should live and learn their faith together," says the Rev. Louis Gigante, who worked with Father Connolly at St. Athanasius for nearly 20 years. "Neil taught laypeople

ferent his new environment really was until he ventured out on weekend assignments down dusty roads to remote towns to celebrate Mass in the *campo* (the countryside) under a large tree or near a tin-roofed chapel erected by the local community. It was within these small communities that he first encountered a congregation's commitment to establish a parish without clerical leadership.

"These *campos* had no clergy to run their churches," Father Connolly recalls. "So it was an absolute necessity that the people themselves assumed the responsi-

CNS PHOTO FROM CCHD

how to teach each other.”

In Father Connolly’s third year at St. Athanasius, the parish began a summer program that brought multicultural events to parks in the South Bronx as a response to the drug activity and violence that had dominated many neighborhood public spaces. The success of that initial program led to a more ambitious effort in the borough: Neil Connolly was assigned to oversee a satellite parish at Spofford Ave. in Hunts Point. The efforts of just over 100 committed churchgoers established a new storefront chapel next to a luncheonette.

“The people knew they were a little group and had to take responsibility for their parish,” says Father Connolly, who often quieted his own voice in order that others might lead. We had to decide things as a community. I wanted to be there as a facilitator and offer support but allow the laity to take ownership of what goes on.”

During one of the storefront chapel’s early days, an elderly lady complained to Father Connolly about the number of working light bulbs in the chapel—a grand total of one—and asked him to do something. Rather than fix the problem, admittedly his first instinct, he instead suggested, “Say something yourself.” She addressed the congregation at Mass, and as a result electricians volunteered to rewire their homemade place of worship. In a small but critical way, Connolly said, this elderly woman had emerged as a community leader.

Father Connolly and his fellow priests at St. Athanasius also reached out beyond their single parish to address challenges that arose from the hotbed of racial and socioeconomic tension that was the South Bronx. “We realized that the clergy could be used as an instrument of change,” he says. “The thought was, ‘We gotta use collar power to confront local authorities about miserable conditions in our neighborhoods.’”

Neil Connolly and other members of the South Bronx community took action. They brought complaints to officials regarding heating problems in government housing. When they were ignored, they organized demonstrations, going so far as to disrupt a New York City Council

meeting. The organizing efforts by the priests and the active involvement of the laity led to changes that had a direct impact on the lives of all members of the community.

The Church Today

Today, Father Connolly notes, the laity is notably absent from the hierarchical leadership of the church, leaving a resource untapped and most members of the church without a voice.



“Parish life is where the heart of the church is,” he says. “But leadership is not always selected from this group.” Instead, academic and theological scholars are chosen as religious leaders—individuals Connolly finds to be intelligent and thoughtful, but not representative of most parishioners.

The limited ability of community members to graduate from positions of informal leadership to more official and influential positions within the church hierarchy is not the only obstacle to community empowerment and spiritual fulfillment that the church faces, says Father Connolly. Denying the laity access to formal leadership positions within the church threatens the church’s ability to meet the needs of all Christians who seek a religious connection. Indeed, because of diminishing numbers of the clergy, there are fewer priests available to share the sacraments within the church.

“Everywhere the faithful are being deprived of the Eucharist,” Father Connolly points out. “If the church were to allow women and married men to be ordained, Mass could be more widely offered, and this would be good for the life of the church community.”

The only way to reverse the current trends, Father Connolly insists, is through a commitment by the church hierarchy working with parish communities to spread the message of Jesus together:

“The church is always a community in search of the good news of salvation. But the church thrives when there is a healthy and honest struggle to look for real solutions to real problems, not when it is content, comfortable and triumphal. That is not what Jesus intended.”

When Neil Connolly envisions such solutions, they recall the efforts of the communities in Ponce and the South Bronx that, in establishing their own parishes, cultivated their own relationship with God. The solutions they found for particular challenges are stories of people finding their way to God, with the guidance of clergy, but more importantly, through their own devotion to Jesus.

“Our relationship with God is the most important thing. It feeds us and gives us insight,” Father Connolly says. “If we as Catholics believe this, we can sustain ourselves through trials and tribulations and grow into our full promise as a church.” **A**

Be Still, My Knocking Knees

An adult Christian enters the Catholic Church.

BY ANSLEY M. DAUENHAUER

ON HOLY SATURDAY, in the minutes just before my reception into the Catholic Church, someone commented to me, “Well, you held out 11-1/2 years.” I laughed nervously. Mark and I had been married for nearly 11-1/2 years, and for most of that time, not only was I a staunch Episcopalian, but I had also prayed fervently that Mark would become one too. Now here I sat in the initial darkness of the great Easter Vigil wrestling with that thought. Was I just giving in?

I had spent the last year learning much about Catholicism and, more important, about the riches of Christianity. I had also experienced how the Catholic community, at least as it is at our parish, St. Ignatius Loyola in Manhattan, did feel like home. But all along I also knew that while my move toward Catholicism was about me and my religious life, it was also for the sake of my husband, whom I love dearly, and my children. I wanted it to be real, not just an act I put on to make our family look more coherent. My long skirt hid my trembling legs. Was I doing the right thing? Above all, I wanted to do what God wanted me to do, and here in the church, only an hour or so away from my confirmation, I just did not know.

Almost exactly a year before, we had attended a children’s Mass at the parish in our quest for a church home in New York. I had come across a note in the parish bulletin, which I filed away: “Interested in becoming Catholic? Call Maureen

ANSLEY M. DAUENHAUER is a parishioner at St. Ignatius Loyola in Manhattan.



Fullam.” Both Mark and I deeply honored the Eucharist as the central act of worship in our respective churches, and the importance the Catholic Church placed on preparation for first Communion had already led us to register our daughter for religious education classes for the following fall. I was curious as to what she would be learning in them and how it would differ from what I had learned years before.

That line in the bulletin kept coming back to me. By this time I had also figured out that if either of us were going to shift denominations, it would have to be me. My inquiry into the Catholic faith began with trembling fingers dialing the parish office.

Preparing for Initiation

Maureen met with each of us individually long before the class actually started in the fall. Deciding honesty was the best policy, I poured out my story, half expecting to hear her say it was the pope’s way or the highway. Instead, she turned my whole perception of the Catholic Church on its head by saying, “What really matters is your relationship with Jesus Christ.” Immediately I felt that my already vital relationship with God was validated. Rather than having to put it away in order to “take on” Catholicism, the initiation experience could enrich what I already celebrated.

And enrich it, it did! We started with the foundations of Christianity—Christ himself speaking from the pulpit of the Gospels. No matter how many times I have read and thought about his words, hearing other people’s reflections on them always adds new dimensions, especially when the thoughts come from people whom I respect deeply. During the past year, I have felt blessed to spend time with my classmates in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. They challenged me intellectually and spiritually. I looked forward to our classes on Thursday nights and Sunday mornings and Mass together on Sunday. I brought home all we talked about in class and generally rehashed it

ART BY DAN SALAMIDA



“Aquinas helped me grow in my knowledge and love of God so that I was compelled to go out and share that love with others. I didn’t expect that to happen.”

Angie Doerr

Director of Religious Education
St. Francis Xavier “College” Church, St. Louis
Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies (MAPS), Aquinas Institute of Theology

Angie, a mother of three, wanted to learn more about her faith. At Aquinas she studied with college graduates her daughter’s age, along with priesthood candidates, religious women and men and lay students like herself.

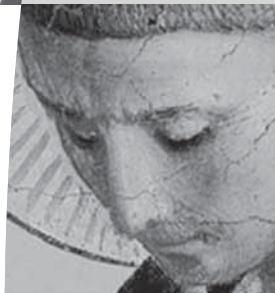
Angie found that this diversity of backgrounds brought richness to the classroom and to the discussions. Never strictly about content, it was also about formation – and about building her confidence to share an enriched love of God and the Church.

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with Mark, who learned a lot too.

While I had considered myself pretty religious before starting this journey, I began to encounter God in many unexpected people and places. I noticed my world outlook gradually shifting. Though I was looking for a personal “aha” moment, I could relate when a classmate referred to the process as more of a “warm bath.” That phrase accurately summed up my experience. If the idea of a prayerful life, to paraphrase Henri Nouwen, is to experience absolutely everything in relation to God, then I was slowly discovering prayer everywhere, becoming immersed in God. Not only did I plainly see God in my children, in whom I have always had glimpses of the Almighty, but also in our unplanned adoption of a dog. And not only was God in the people I saw everyday, but rooted in what they were saying to me. I learned more than I could ever imagine from nearly everyone I encountered.

I look for clear direction on where God wants me in any given moment, a habit that, left unchecked, can lead to some discontent. Yet I became more at peace as I grew to understand that God uses us as we are, even without clear direction. Being human means letting God put us where we need to be. With that, I became enthused by projects—at my children’s schools, in the community and in my own personal pursuits—and got more involved in life than ever before. It felt good.

Sitting in the quiet of the church on Easter eve, I knew all this. Just thinking about how amazing the initiation experience had been evoked in me a sense of peace and purpose. Yet even as the light from the paschal candle spread and illuminated the excitement in the faces of my classmates, now friends, I still felt a vague sense of disquiet. Internally I argued with my doubts. Holy Week had been special: my conception of Christ’s humanity had stretched. The agony of Jesus’ last week was magnified because he was fully human, limited in understanding what was happening to him. It makes his plea from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” much more powerful and makes his dying there so ignominiously (possibly thinking he’d been forsaken literally by all) that much more an act of love. Even as I write about it, I

get goose bumps.

At the vigil, my legs still shook: could I possibly be turning my back on a 38-year-old relationship with a church, and the God, I grew up with? Or supporting corruptions that Martin Luther had rebelled against long ago? Such questions had bubbled up over and over during Holy Week. When yet another sleepless night passed, I felt that I was experiencing a minute taste of Christ's own yearnings that first Holy Week. While I knew my pain was microscopic, it was still hard longing to know if this was what God wanted me to do.

Time to Trust God

Standing in the sanctuary, I located my husband in the congregation. A surge of love warmed my hands, but even that did not calm my knocking knees. My turn was next: I was about to become a Catholic. I prayed, "God, if this is what you want me to do, I have to stop shaking!" It sounds silly now, but at the moment that practical prayer was of the utmost importance to me. God is there for us in things little and big, there for us wherever we are, doubts and all. In that moment, I could feel the tension stop, my knees become still and my shoulders relax; and that blessed "peace that passeth all understanding" transcended everything going on around me. It was O.K.; I was doing God's will; I did not have to understand it all.

That night I did not sleep, not from nerves, but from excitement and anticipation about what God had ahead for me.

A week later I was still amazed that I was Catholic! While I do not understand it all, I do know that God is divine. I know that no one person or group has a monopoly on God. We are all human, and the church, as a human institution, has flaws. That's why we need forgiveness and the privileges of the sacraments—gracious avenues to God's grace. That's why we need Jesus, who, despite his human limitations, followed God's will perfectly. In attempting to follow God's will, we Catholics, as individuals and as a church, bring ourselves as close to Christ's divinity as we possibly can in this life. When we fail, we can always bring ourselves back to Christ, who, with the Father, will welcome us with open arms. How much better does it get than that? **A**

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This Land Is Their Land

Martyr of the Amazon

The Life of Sister Dorothy Stang

By Roseanne Murphy
Orbis. 164p \$18 (paperback)
 ISBN 9781570757358

The Greatest Gift

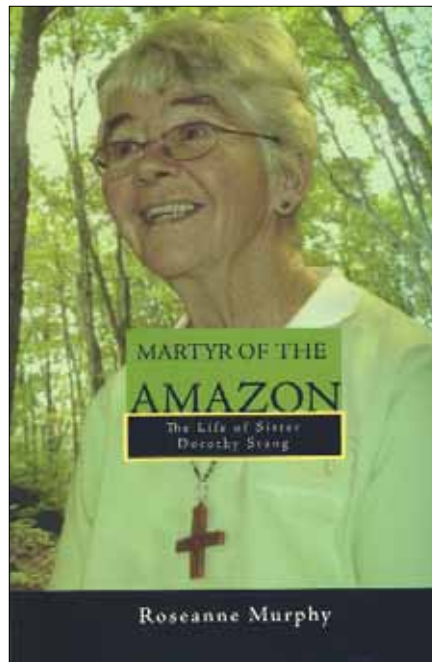
The Courageous Life and Martyrdom of Sister Dorothy Stang

By Binka Le Breton
Doubleday. 233p \$21.95
 ISBN 139780385522182

Dorothy Stang, the American missionary murdered in Brazil three years ago, shines forth in two new biographies that join the growing network of materials about her life and work.

Roseanne Murphy, also a member of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and the biographer of their congregation's founder, presents "Dot," as she was known, from the inside out. Binka Le Breton, a British journalist who had access to the same materials, paints the story with a broader brush.

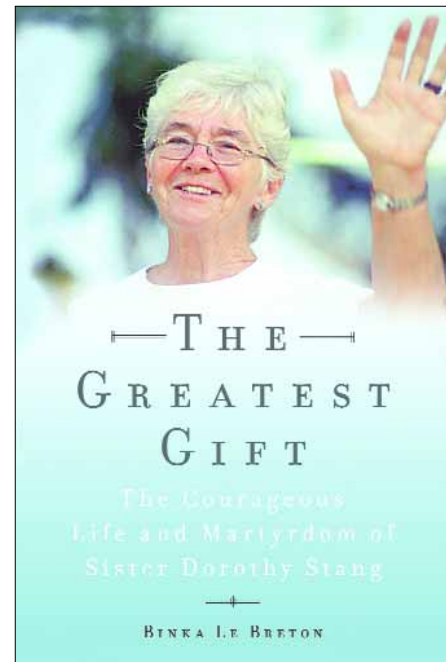
Facts are fluid, but this is what seems to have happened. On Feb. 12, 2005, on Lot 55 of the area in Brazil called Boa Esperança (Good Hope), deeded to settlers by the Project for Sustainable Development, which was in turn created through Brazil's National Institute for Agrarian Reform, Dorothy Stang was killed. She knew her killers—Raifran das Neves Sales, who held the gun, and Clodoaldo Carlos Batista—and they knew her. She pulled her Bible from her plastic shoulder bag, and read from the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the...." A bullet struck her Bible, then her stomach. She fell. Sales stood over her and fired five more times, hitting her shoulder, back, neck, head and hand as she lay on the red clay she so wanted for the poor. The two men ran into the forest, toward the ranch of Vitalmiro Bastos de Moura, the land-grabbing thug known as Bida. His agent, Amair Feijoli da Cunha ("Tato") had promised them \$25,000 for the deed. Another rich rancher, Reivaldo Pereira



Galvão, also seems to have been in on the deal.

The two biographies differ in detail, but begin with what we know: Dorothy Stang is dead. From there they digress. Le Breton traces more childhood stories and details of Dorothy's life with her parents and eight siblings in northwest Dayton, Ohio. Murphy follows the trajectory of Dorothy's religious life as it echoes the changes in the church. Dorothy makes her religious profession just after the last century turns the halfway mark, becoming Sister Mary Joachim, in long black serge dreaming of missions, but teaching third grade in Illinois. She continues teaching, next in Arizona, where she becomes superior. But then in 1966, in her early 30s and still in a habit, Dorothy lands with four other sisters in Brazil.

Murphy watches as the little band of sisters do pastoral work among the poor. By the early 1980s, Dorothy is on the Trans Amazon, the 3,000-mile highway running through the interior of Brazil, in T-shirt and jeans. She was in Pará, a state twice the size of Texas. Bishop Erwin Krautler, who had heard about her work in building base communities in Abel Figueiredo and nearby, told her the poorest of the poor lived east of the highway. Le Breton quotes the bishop at length: "The people worshipped her. If any decision had to be taken, they'd



always say 'Let's ask Sister Dorothy.'...She got jobs for people. She helped them over the land issue. She set up a fruit processing factory. And she worked hard for the women."

During a 1991 sabbatical in California, Dorothy studied creation spirituality. She attended the Rio Earth Summit the following year. Murphy and Le Breton have different takes on this phase of her life. Murphy views the sabbatical as a freeing event, leading Dorothy to see God as "Mother" as well as "Father," internalize the connections between creation spirituality and liberation theology and reconnect with her Irish

The Reviewers

Phyllis Zagano writes widely in Catholic studies. She is author of *Ita Ford: Missionary Martyr* (Paulist Press), and holds a research appointment at Hofstra University, L.I., N.Y.

Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. is professor of New Testament at Weston Jesuit School of Theology, Cambridge, Mass. His most recent books are *How Do Catholics Read the Bible?* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) and *Jesus: A Historical Portrait* (St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007).

George W. Hunt, S.J., former editor in chief of *America*, is director of the Archbishop Hughes Institute on Religion and Culture at Fordham University in New York City.

roots. Le Breton suggests in Dorothy a less theological and more political response to pantheism. Their differences reflect their outlooks and research: Le Breton, fluent in Portuguese, has published other books about land reform in Brazil. She interviewed many who knew Dorothy in Brazil.

But the books do not compete. Together they present what the fight is all about, describing the stunning ecological details of the rainforest. Central Brazil houses most of the biodiversity on the planet, and serves in large part as its lungs. All manner of flora and fauna coexist, until loggers backed by wealthy ranchers clear cut precious hardwoods. Rough grass soon planted serves for grazing cattle, and the ecostructure is destroyed. Poor settlers knew no better, so they farmed until soil

turned to sand, and then moved on. Dorothy led replanting of thousands of mahogany and other trees, and taught sustainable farming. She also fought the bureaucracy whose inertia crushed the poor.

Since the books tell the same story, their parallels are many. Murphy's careful analysis draws on the charisma she shares with Stang. Le Breton presents long transcripts of statements by Dorothy's friends and colleagues. Unfortunately, Le Breton sometimes suggests what people, including Dorothy, were thinking and doing where no record exists. Le Breton's book, which begins rather like a movie treatment, ends more like a novel: "Drawing on reserves she didn't know she had, Dorothy read in a level voice, "Blessed are the...."

Murphy, however, uses Dorothy's let-

ters to present her reactions to the gathering storm clouds of her final days. "All I ask of God is His grace to help keep me on this journey, fighting for the people to have a more egalitarian life at all times and that we learn to respect God's creation."

Dorothy's earthly journey ended when Rayfran and Clodoaldo, both now in jail, tried to silence her—nemesis of Bida and Galvão—at Tato's bidding. Bida and Tato also sit in jail; Galvão is on the loose. Dorothy Stang's blood is forever commingled with the red clay of Boa Esperança, now reserved for sustainable development. Her memory is well served by these books, which no doubt will be followed by others. As a sign carried in her funeral procession—pictured in Le Breton's book—proclaims: *Dorothy Vive!*

Phyllis Zagano

Poem

Aunt Kerenhappuch, Immigrant

Homes tent on prairies, grown wheat brims all horizon
wide as light. Wind seeding the sunshine, all homes turn
homeless, friends track the wind west, become stories of

themselves, mostly beginnings forever, the liveliest
never at home in old words or new, overturning

all edges, and claiming they never met a good
story's end, God himself new, tenting among us
in sunshine and desert, a nomad, a foreigner.

Judy Little

JUDY LITTLE, recently retired from the English Department at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, has published *Comedy and the Woman Writer* (University of Nebraska Press, 1983), and poetry in *Prairie Schooner* and elsewhere.

An Agnostic's Perspective

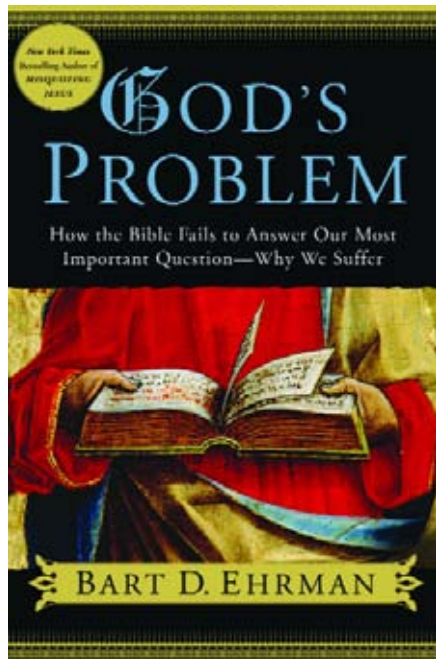
God's Problem

How the Bible Fails to Answer Our
Most Important Question—
Why We Suffer

By Bart D. Ehrman
HarperOne. 304p \$25.95
ISBN 9780061173974

Bart Ehrman, chair of the department of religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has become an amazing phenomenon in religious publishing. His literary and historical introduction to the New Testament is widely used as a textbook in universities across the United States. In recent years he has produced many scholarly and popular books on the Bible and related topics (like the apostolic fathers and *The Da Vinci Code*) at a very fast pace. His 2005 book on New Testament textual criticism, *Misquoting Jesus*, even made its way onto the bestseller lists of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

Ehrman has often told (as he does here) the story of his religious journey from biblical fundamentalism to agnosticism. From his text-critical studies he concluded that the New Testament text contains so many errors and corruptions that it could not be the inerrant word of God.



One of the other elements in what he describes as his “deconversion” to agnosticism was his being overwhelmed, while teaching a course at Rutgers University on biblical approaches to suffering, by the massive suffering in our world today and his own dissatisfaction with the answers he found in the Bible. His goal in this book is

to explore critically the biblical responses to the problem of suffering and to help readers make a judgment (as he has done) on their adequacy.

After describing his own crisis of faith with reference to personal and global suffering, he discusses the classical view of suffering (sometimes called the law of retribution)—foolish and wicked persons get what they deserve by way of suffering, and wise and righteous persons are rewarded—and how this approach dominates much of the Old Testament and even parts of the New Testament. He also explores the related approach that focuses on the bad consequences of the evil deeds done by others, and investigates the theme of redemptive suffering with reference to biblical figures such as Joseph, Moses, the Suffering Servant and Jesus. Next he asks whether suffering makes any sense at all in the light of the poetic parts of the book of Job, and finally finds a kindred biblical spirit in Ecclesiastes/Qoheleth and that author’s views that suffering sometimes defies explanation and that the best approach is simply to enjoy life in the present. Then he considers the “apocalyptic solution” in the Book of Daniel, the teachings of Jesus and Paul and the Book of

Revelation. In this perspective God’s omnipotence and justice will be fully manifest only at the final coming of God’s kingdom, when the righteous will be vindicated and rewarded and the wicked will be condemned and punished. In passing he treats the biblical ideas that suffering can be a test or a discipline, and that God can and does draw good out of evil. At each point Ehrman explains why he cannot accept any of these answers.

Despite Ehrman’s thoroughgoing agnosticism about God and the mystery of suffering, this is a book worth reading even by believers. The author knows his Bible well, and describes the content of the pertinent biblical passages objectively and clearly. And sometimes his agnostic perspective can sharpen the understanding of believers and challenge us to view the Bible and the human condition in a fresh light. I regularly teach a course on suffering in the Bible and intend to include Ehrman’s book in my bibliography.

In my opinion, however, the problem treated in *God’s Problem* is more the author’s problem than God’s. It shows very well that the Bible does in fact answer our most important question (why we suffer) in many different ways. His problem is

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that at this point in his life he does not like any of the answers the Bible gives. But none of these answers is put forth as the only, one-size-fits-all, always-and-everywhere appropriate solution.

The Bible is not that kind of book. It is an anthology of all kinds of writings from many different periods and places, not a treatise in philosophy or systematic theology. Each of the biblical approaches has its own set of possibilities and problems. Moreover, Ehrman sticks to the Protestant and Jewish Hebrew Bible canon. But the problem of suffering takes on a different cast when the so-called deuterocanonical books found in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles are included. The problem of suffering is a major theme there, and the Book of Wisdom is especially important. Finally, while Ehrman struggles to do so, it is hard to put together working for social justice and Ecclesiastes/Qoheleth's advice to "eat, drink and be merry."

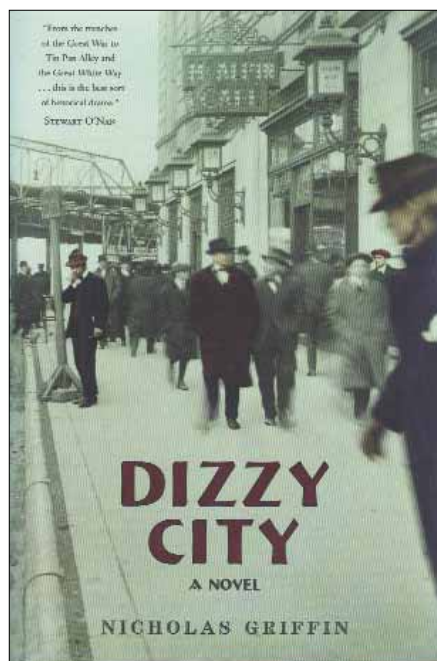
The sales of Ehrman's books indicate there is a large audience for what he does with the Bible. In place of Christian faith, he seems to have adopted the perspectives of the European Enlightenment, and uses them as criteria for judging the biblical approaches. But in his approaches to both the Greek New Testament text and to the biblical theme of suffering, it seems that his former fundamentalist quest for certainty remains, but now everything has been turned upside down. And if you think that the Enlightenment philosophers do better with the problem of suffering than the biblical writers, you should read Susan Neiman's *Evil in Modern Thought*. **Daniel J. Harrington**

Ben Cramb, the Con Man

Dizzy City

By Nicholas Griffin
Steerforth Press. 384p \$24.95
ISBN 9781586421328

Allow me to presume that you are one of those mildly perverse people who finds delight in stories that run counter to your usual fuddy-duddy moral judgments offered in public. If so, then we know that



there are several sure-fire kinds of narrative that never lose the naughty appeal of slumming with sharpies. Most prominent among them is the story of an elaborately planned heist, where the goal might be some obscenely studded necklace or a precious painting or a hefty bank delivery, and we catch ourselves complicit with the wicked, rooting for their success. Slightly below the heist in its endearing charms is a story about a sting or con-game in which we relish every maneuver in the amoral world of grifters, each doing dirty to each, villainy not only reciprocated but saluted by all concerned.

If the latter category captures your fancy, then don't miss the novel *Dizzy City*, a virtual how-to manual in flim-flamery. Its author, Nicholas Griffin, has written three historical novels (including *The Requiem Shark* and the *House of Sight and Shadow*) and a nonfiction work, *Caucasus*.

The events in *Dizzy City* take place between November 1915 and July 1916, a period when the United States had not yet entered the war then raging in Europe. The narrative begins in the British trenches in northeastern France where we meet a central character named Ben Cramb, burrowing down with his boyhood pals under German bombardment. None survive save Ben, a minor-league bunco artist and major-league ladies' man who, by contrivances and wit, manages to escape the army hospital, stow away on a merchant ship and land in ostensibly peaceful

New York City. Once there, Ben, the young amateur in con games, gradually encounters some seasoned professionals.



Although *Dizzy City* is not a historical novel in the familiar sense (e.g., no one famous appears) and is in equal parts an offbeat romance and picaresque tale, the time and place (1916 New York City) are crucial for context and atmospheric as well as for emotional resonance. We visit prewar Broadway and the Bowery, Central Park, Coney Island, old Penn Station and its stockyards nearby, pre-renaissance black Harlem, and Tin Pan Alley (28th Street off Broadway), with occasional side-trips to elegant Newport, R.I., and the London of Ben Cramb's memory. The novel's main characters, shifty themselves in so many ways, reflect nicely these ever-shifting environments. Like Ben Cramb, all are part-time actors, like him reinventing themselves and committed to deception, with the city the stage and theater for their most studied performances.

Rather than spoil the fun by revealing the plot (except to remind readers to stay on their toes and insert that two of the

scams involve song-writing proceeds and a stockpile of army munitions), it is important to note that the title *Dizzy City* refers not only to the Big Apple of 1916 but to the novel's action (a whirligig of cons) and its literary shape. The reader glimpses the same events from three different perspectives, offered from the point of view of three separate characters. What in less sure hands would have a dizzying effect on the reader deftly enhances engagement with the action, while offering endless surprises. In short, the novel itself parodies the most familiar of con games—Three Card Monte—in which the one being conned keeps his eyes on one card, only to discover after the shuffle (and a bit of palming) that he's been had.

It is not easy to compose a novel in which a reader delights in being tricked, nor is it easy to compose a novel in which the 1916 Easter Rebellion in Ireland and the Black Tom Island munitions explosion on the Hudson River between Manhattan and Jersey City are fateful cards in a quick shuffle. So hats off to Nicholas Griffin for both tricks and treats.

George W. Hunt

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Positions

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COORDINATOR OF YOUTH MINISTRY. The Church of the Incarnation seeks applicants for the full-time position of Coordinator of Youth Ministry. Located in Charlottesville, Va., within the Catholic Diocese of Richmond, Incarnation (www.incarnationparish.org) is a vibrant community of 1,100 households with a contemporary style of worship and strong parishioner participation in ministry and faith formation.

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tal preparation.

Applicants should have a bachelor's degree in education, religious studies or related field and three-plus years' experience in youth ministry and/or catechesis. Completion of a recognized youth ministry formation program or demonstrated intent toward program certification is required. Spanish fluency to interact with our growing Hispanic ministry is a plus.

Position begins in May 2008 and requires weekend and some evening hours. Salary and benefits are in accord with the diocesan pay scale. Interested candidates should submit a résumé by Feb. 15 to office@incarnationparish.org or Youth Ministry Search Committee, Church of the Incarnation, 1465 Incarnation Drive, Charlottesville, VA 22901.

DIRECTOR OF FAITH FORMATION. Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, a vibrant and growing parish of 1,000 families located in Wilmington, N.C., seeks a faith-filled Director of Faith Formation. The parish is part of the rapidly growing Raleigh Diocese and is staffed by the religious order of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales.

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Interested and qualified candidates are asked to submit a cover letter, résumé and three professional references to: Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, C/O D.F.F. Search Committee, 6650 Carolina Beach Road, Wilmington, NC 28412; e-mail: DFFCommittee@iccwilm.org.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CAMPUS MINISTRY.

The Office of Campus Ministry at Georgetown University, the nation's oldest Catholic and Jesuit institution of higher learning, serves both Roman Catholic students, faculty and staff, and students, faculty and staff of other faith traditions. The Campus Ministry staff includes Roman Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim and Orthodox Christian chaplains, and they support various affiliated ministries and student groups representing a variety of other religious traditions as well. The Executive Director of Campus Ministry reports to the Vice President for Mission and Ministry and works with the Vice President and other University officials to promote the Catholic and Jesuit character of the University and its values. The Executive Director also has day-to-day supervisory responsibility for all campus ministry programs and personnel throughout the University, including law and medical school campuses.

The Executive Director of Campus Ministry is expected to guide the department in its efforts to help students integrate their intellectual lives with their spiritual development and service to others. The Executive Director also is expected to foster ecumenical and interreligious understanding and coordinate interfaith activities among students on campus.

The Executive Director of Campus Ministry is responsible for implementing programs and activities on all three campuses to involve students, faculty and staff in fostering the religious life of the University. The Executive Director will also serve as a resource for and liaison with academic and student affairs programs that promote the Catholic and Jesuit nature of the University and will assist the Vice President and others with the collaborative development of new programs in these areas. Consequently, it is necessary that the Executive Director have a strong knowledge of and deep identification with Roman Catholicism.

Under the supervision of the Vice President for Mission and Ministry, the Executive Director of Campus Ministry will oversee departmental administration, staffing and policies, including the development, presentation and management of the annual operating budget. Campus Ministry includes 23 full-time staff, 6 part-time staff, 21 volunteer Chaplains-in-Residence and various affiliated ministries. The net budget is over \$1.8



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million, with additional endowment funds for specific projects. On occasion the Executive Director of Campus Ministry may be involved in development activities with the Vice President, but development will not be a primary responsibility.

The ideal candidate for Executive Director of Campus Ministry will be inspiring, creative, effective and principled, with an in-depth understanding of and personal commitment to the Catholic and Jesuit character of Georgetown and Ignatian spirituality. Other general responsibilities of the office and qualities and abilities preferred in candidates for the office include, but are not limited to:

- Helping to sustain and strengthen the University's strong Catholic and Jesuit identity,

appreciating the pastoral and spiritual leadership required in this role, supporting the liturgical life of the campus and furthering the University's service to the church, particularly in the area of social justice;

- Working closely with the Vice President for Mission and Ministry and other senior administrators to foster and sustain a sense of community, shared purpose and collaboration among the University's diverse faculty, staff and students;

- Possessing proven management skills for the formulation and implementation of short- and long-term plans in an ecumenical and interreligious context.

It is preferable that the Executive Director of Campus Ministry possess a Ph.D. or D.Min. or equivalent, significant leadership in campus ministry and proven managerial skills within a pastoral setting. Compensation for this position is competitive with similar positions at other private research universities.

Applications should be submitted through the University's human resources Web site at <http://hr.georgetown.edu> (Job no. 2007-1215D). Other inquiries regarding the position may be directed to Aaron Johnson, Special Assistant to the Vice President for Mission and Ministry, at (202) 687-1395 or missionandministry@georgetown.edu.

Qualified candidates are asked to submit a letter of interest, a current curriculum vitae and a list of four references. Completed applications will be reviewed immediately. Applicants are encouraged to submit their credentials before Feb. 29, 2008. The preferred starting date is June 16, 2008.

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A CASE For GOD Essay Contest

As part of America's centennial celebration, the editors are pleased to announce the America Essay Contest, open to writers of all ages and occupations. At a time when atheism and religious belief have become prominent issues of discussion and debate in both our nation and our church, the editors have chosen as the general theme: "A Case for God."

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Through a generous bequest from an America donor, the author of the **winning entry will receive \$3,000, and the essay will be published in the magazine during the centennial year.** Submissions must be original, unpublished work of no more than 2,500 words, and must be received by June 16, 2008. The winner will be announced in October 2008. Submissions should be sent by email to writingcontest@americamagazine.org, or by postal mail to America Writing Contest, 106 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019.

For more details, see www.americamagazine.org/contest.cfm.

Chaminade-Madonna College Preparatory, 500 E. Chaminade Drive, Hollywood, FL 33021; e-mail: jbolooki@cmlions.org.

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SUMMER 2008

SUMMER ONLINE COURSE: JUNE 16 – AUGUST 8

Barbara Radtke Jesus the Christ: Who Do You Say I Am?

SESSION ONE: JUNE 23 – JULY 3

Richard Caillardetz Thomas Groome	Foundations of Theology: A Pastoral Perspective Sharing Faith in Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry
Richard Gula, SS Hosffman Ospino Katharine Doob Sakenfield Philip Sheldrake	The Moral Dimension of the Christian Life Hispanic Ministry Seminar I: Theological Foundations Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Resources for a Contemporary Spirituality

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A Spirituality for the Second Half of Life: **Featuring Kathleen Fischer**

SESSION TWO: JULY 7 – JULY 18

Lynn Jarrell, OSU Gustavo Gutierrez, OP & James Nickoloff	The Church and Its Law Church of the Poor
Theresa O'Keefe Michael Himes Daniel Harrington, SJ John Shea, OSA	Practice of Ministry with Youth and Young Adults Ecclesiology Introduction to the New Testament Basic Dimensions of Pastoral Care and Counseling

CONFERENCE WEEK – JULY 7-11: CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALITY AND TWO-WEEK COURSE – JULY 14-18

Robert Ellsberg Saints for Today (July 7-11) Evening Course 6:00-9:00 pm
& **Joyce Rupp, OSM** A Spirituality for Our Time (July 14-18) Evening Course 6:00-9:00 pm

SESSION THREE: JULY 21 – AUGUST 1

John Baldovin, SJ Maryanne Confoy, RSC John McDargh Shawn Copeland Jane Regan Robert VerEecke, SJ	Sacramental/Liturgical Theology Toward Effective Christian Ministry in the Twenty-First Century Sexuality and Spirituality Christology Fostering Faith Across a Life Cycle Sacred and Liturgical Dance Study Program
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Debating Mark Lilla's new book, *The Stillborn God*, **America Connects**

The separation of church and state in the United States did not entail the great separation of religion and politics that Lilla seems to presuppose. The entanglement of religion and politics has been a constant in American history and most of the movements for social and political reform, from abolition to civil rights, utilized the discourse of political theology as much as secular political philosophy. American secularism and American liberalism owe more to the political commitment and the civil disobedience of religious "fanatics" and "enthusiasts" than liberal secularists like Lilla are willing to recognize.

José V. Casanova

An interview with John Slater, a Trappist monk and winner of our 2007 Foley Poetry Contest, **America Connects**

Do you see any connections between your vocation as a monk and your vocation as a poet?

There are many connections... cloistered monastic life is something like living in a sonnet. There is a definite skeleton, a strict set of norms and limits given. For

the poet, the rhyme-scheme and so on can challenge and stretch his imagination in fresh and surprising ways; they force him to question what is essential to the work and to prune away the superfluous. The rules exist to secure and support a certain inner liberty—at the same time the very freedom unleashed, intensified by confinement in such tight quarters, tests and pulls against the edges.

"Violence and the Old Testament," **The Good Word**

I find it overly simplistic to say that the God of the Old Testament is a God of war and that the God of the New Testament is a God of peace. In both [testaments] we are dealing with the same God.... There is, to be sure, a shift in emphasis between the Old and New Testaments, but it is the same God who is loving and forgiving, who is angry and punishing. God in the Old Testament shows his love for his people in rescuing them from slavery and from their enemies.

In Hosea God's mercy overrides his anger against his people. It is because he is God and not human that he will not carry out the punishment they so richly deserve (Hos 11:9). The Old Testament describes God as "slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." The language of violence is not absent from the New Testament. The war lamb of the Book of Revelation is not a warm and fuzzy creature. Eternal punishment is still on the horizon for those who fail to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, visit the sick and imprisoned (Mt 25:41-46).

Pauline Viviano

"Christmas at Harvard Divinity School," **In All Things**

Advent and Christmas, perhaps even more than other religious holidays, are at

first a bit awkward at Harvard.... While custom and the academic calendar combine to maintain the sense that December is a festive time, there is little room for a straightforward celebration of our Christian feasts; indeed, even to wish someone "Merry Christmas!" is an experimental venture, since going beyond the safer "Happy Holidays!" implies either knowledge about people's religious persuasion and practice, or an (over)confidence that the Christian calendar still counts most. So the various parties, lunches and dinners celebrate "this season," without further specification.

Francis X. Clooney, S.J.

"His Dark Materials, Indeed," **America Connects**

Is "The Golden Compass" an appropriate film for Christians? Should parents take their children to see it, knowing it may spark their interest in reading the books? But of course—we should not fear books or underestimate our children. Parents should be happy if their children want to read them. The potential harm is far outweighed by the definite good achieved by getting kids to read in general. Anti-Catholic fiction in this country has been around for as long as the United States has existed—think of the lurid "escaped from the convent" potboilers of another century—and the church has survived and flourished.

James T. Keane, S.J.

"The Church and the Fiction Writer," from March 30, 1957, **In These Pages**

It is popular to suppose that anyone who can read the telephone book can read a short story or a novel, and it is more than usual to find the attitude among Catholics that since we possess the truth in the Church, we can use this truth directly as an instrument of judgment on any discipline at any time without regard for the nature of that discipline itself. Catholic readers are constantly being offended and scandalized by novels they don't have the fundamental equipment to read in the first place, and often these are works that are permeated with a Christian spirit.

Flannery O'Connor

Letters

Forgive Us Our Sins

"I Need Your Help," by George B. Wilson, S.J., (12/17), presents the imagined situation of a bishop asking for advice on how to cope with the pastoral problems of his diocese in the face of the declining number of priests. While he considers a half-dozen strategies, not one of them proposes general absolution. Even though writers have suggested various ways to deal with the infrequency of confession, nothing has really changed since 20 years or so ago, when one American pastor declared: "The sacrament of penance in the form of private confession is dead." This is even more true since 2002 and its devastating revelations for the Catholic Church in the United States, in the wake of which the situation relating to confession has gone from bad to worse.

It appears that the time has come for the bishops to institute general absolution at the start of every Mass without demanding later recourse to individual confession. In this way, we could significantly compensate for the shortage of

priests while at the same time enriching the spiritual lives of the faithful.

Vincent A. Lapomarda, S.J.
Worcester, Mass.

Willing and Able

In "I Need Your Help" (12/17), the fictional Bishop Pascal asks for advice in how to address the declining priest population. His traditional solutions include: pray, rethink celibacy, ordain women, close parishes, import priests, change the day of obligation and offer fewer Masses. While many of these ideas beg for further discussion and investigation, none will result in any immediate change.

But there is one out-of-the-box option: What about the over 17,000 ordained ministers already serving in the Roman Catholic Church? What about these fully formed, properly instituted, sacramentally prepared men who are already serving in parishes all over the country? What about tapping into the diaconate community for help?

Deacons who serve the church answer to a sacramental calling when we

witness marriages, baptize babies, comfort the sick, distribute Communion, visit the imprisoned and preach the word. With between 500 and 1,000 newly ordained deacons per year, ministering to the needs of their brothers and sisters in the pews, our ranks will outnumber those of priests in just a few years.

(Deacon) Jim Nazzari
Phoenix, Ariz.

A Question of Justice

"American Catholics and the New Gilded Age," by Daniel J. Morrissey, (1/7) offers an account of C.E.O.'s plundering and amassing huge fortunes but falls short of describing the great suffering of millions of American families as a result of the corporate-political alliance. This partnership of top corporate managers and our top political leaders is destroying the country as fast as it is generating mind-boggling wealth for some. One of the scariest scenarios coming out of all this begins with the question: What is the worldview of the children who see their fathers and mothers crushed by a company, to have to imagine at night before they go to sleep how anyone could treat their parents this way? And what must the casualties of the corporate-political alliance who are Catholic think about their church and its silence in the face of great wrongdoing?

Jim Crosson
Fair Lawn, N.J.

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Fellow Americans

Daniel J. Morrissey's article, "American Catholics in the New Gilded Age," (1/7) raises a conceptual problem. What is this thing called the "American Catholic"? Assuming it speaks English, what kind of English? What color is its skin, its hair?

The problem lies, I suspect, in that the author really means more a culture (or more precisely a subculture) than either a religion or a nationality. These two words are supposed to carry meanings that are inclusive and universal. To tack these two specific words together and then use the resulting phrase as the label for one category in an essentially anthropological description of contemporary American ethnicities strikes me as just as likely to warp perceptions and dis-

Letters

tort discussion as it is to enlighten public discourse and catalyze collective action.

*Paul Bangasser
San Juan, P.R.*

A Father's Wisdom

Thanks to John Hardt for sharing his father's wisdom with us in "Church Teaching and My Father's Choice" (1/21), about the use of artificially supplied nutrition and hydration for those diagnosed in a "vegetative state."

What I hear in Mr. Hardt's words, as reported so respectfully by his bioethicist son, is that if he were to end up in a "vegetative state," there would not be sufficient benefit to be kept alive through artificial nutrition and hydration.

It would be good for us to listen well to Mr. Hardt's Catholic wisdom. The teaching from the Vatican on this issue stresses the fact that our physical lives are important. As Catholic tradition has long held, we are to use reasonable measures—ordinary means—to preserve health and life. But Hardt is asking us not to gloss over the part of Catholic tradition that affirms that "ordinary" is a judgment call, made by the patient or those who speak on his or her behalf, about the proportion of the hoped-for benefits and likely burdens of medical treatment.

*Russell B. Connors Jr.
St. Paul, Minn.*

Faithful and Sensible

John Hardt's fine article, "Church Teaching and My Father's Choice," (1/21) deserves wide circulation for its grounding in a real conversation and for presenting a faithful and sensible approach to the topic of artificial nutrition and hydration. It is tragic that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in its laudable desire to prevent the devaluing of human life, has made this valuable discussion between parents and children into a theological dilemma. We

should recognize that we can preserve Christian respect for the body and soul while keeping a common-sense approach to end-of-life issues long supported by the best of Catholic theology.

*David E. Pasinski
Fayetteville, N.Y.*

Out of Our Hands

Regarding "Church Teaching and My Father's Choice" (1/21): What bothers me about the whole idea of advance directives is that we really have no idea what we are going to want if we find ourselves in circumstances where we are helpless to express our wishes. We do not know enough about persistent vegetative states or similar conditions to know what is going on in the mind, heart or spirit of the afflicted person. We hear story after story of someone who was in a coma but aware of things going on externally. Plus, making an end-of-life decision like this presupposes that miracles never happen.

If we truly believe in a loving, merciful, all-powerful God, would we not also believe that our life is totally in his hands, even on the matter of when we die? The

whole idea that we might decide such things ahead of time, or that we might think that artificial feedings would keep us from heaven when it is our time to go, puts too much control of our lives back in our own hands.

It is so easy for people to say, "I know I would never want to be kept alive like that." But we truly do not know what we would want in such a situation. Why not leave the decision up to God?

*Judy Hake
Union Bridge, Md.*

Awaiting Springtime

During these winter days, how timely is Margaret Silf's reflection "Sacred Space for Transformation" (1/7), beckoning all believers to consider how our calling is to "be fixed and rooted in the cold soil." Her sentiments are reminiscent of the line in Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem "Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend," especially the hopeful, passionate last line, "Mine, O thou Lord of life, send my roots rain."

*(Rev.) Robert Uzzillo
Stratford, Conn.*

without guile



"Is there life after the thaw?"

America (ISSN 0002-7049) is published weekly (except for 11 combined issues: Jan. 7-14, 21-28, March 31-April 7, May 26-June 2, June 9-16, 23-30, July 7-14, 21-28, Aug. 4-11, 18-25, Dec. 22-29) by America Press, Inc., 106 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019. Periodicals postage is paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. Business Manager: Lisa Pope; Circulation: Judith Palmer, (212) 581-4640. Subscriptions: United States, \$48 per year; add U.S. \$22 postage and GST (#131870719) for Canada; or add U.S. \$32 per year for overseas surface postage. For overseas airmail delivery, please call for rates. Postmaster: Send address changes to: America, 106 West 56th St. New York, NY 10019. Printed in the U.S.A.

The Word

The First and Second Adam

First Sunday of Lent (A), Feb. 10, 2008

Readings: Gn 2:7-9; 3:1-7; Ps 51:3-6, 12-13, 17; Rom 5:12-19; Mt 4:1-11

“But the gift is not like the transgression” (Rom 5:15)

THE SCRIPTURE READINGS for the Sundays of Lent are extraordinarily rich. The Old Testament texts provide a sketch of the history of our salvation. The Gospel readings focus on key episodes in Jesus’ life and ministry. The epistle readings emphasize what God has done for us in and through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

Lent is a time for self-examination, repentance and acts of self-control and self-denial—whether we are preparing for baptism, confirmation and Eucharist or are already full members of the Catholic Church. The danger is that we can make ourselves the focus of Lent. Lent is pre-eminently a time for entering into the suffering and death of Jesus. The Sunday readings can help us to place our observances and even the passion of Christ into the larger context of the history of our salvation. That history begins with Adam and Eve.

Today’s selections from Genesis 2 and 3 tell the story of the “original sin.” The first part tells how God created Adam (meaning “the human”) and placed him in the garden of Eden (meaning “delight”). The one commandment imposed on Adam was the prohibition against eating from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. The second part tells how Adam and Eve were tempted by the serpent, who promised that if they transgressed that command, they would not die, but instead would become “like gods.” They succumbed to the temptation and committed the “original sin.” Their sin has consequences for us all, and the story helps to explain what is wrong with us and why humans often do terrible things. It

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has been said that original sin is the easiest theological doctrine to believe.

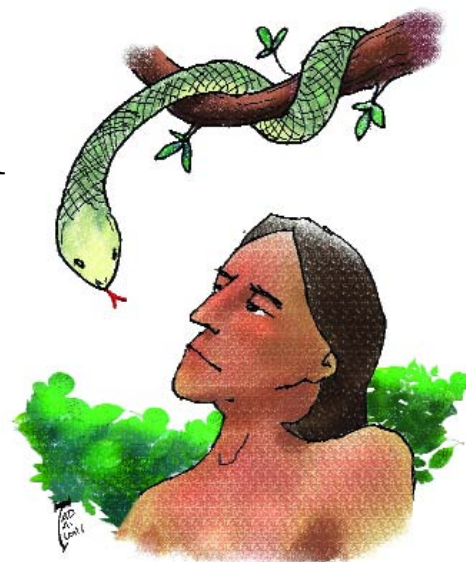
The human condition is not entirely hopeless, of course. We are no longer forced or doomed to repeat the pattern set by Adam and Eve. On our own, by human effort alone, we could not break that pattern. Rather, we need the example and the power of Jesus the Son of God.

The example of Jesus the Son of God is illustrated in Matthew’s version of the temptation of Jesus. At three points Jesus rejects Satan’s temptations to make him stray from his vocation as the new Adam and the new Israel. By his repeated appeals to Israel’s Scriptures, Jesus resists Satan’s temptations to satisfy his physical hunger, to make a public show of his powers and to grasp at political power. Instead, Jesus retains his focus on serving God alone and shows us how to resist temptations in our own lives. Whereas Adam and Eve failed in their test, Jesus emerges as the victor over sin and Satan and shows what kind of Son of God he really is. We can hope to imitate his example.

And through Christ we have the power to do so. Today’s reading from Romans 5 shows why that hope is possible and even realistic. It is because Jesus as the new Adam has broken the reign of sin and death, and because through his obedience, shown in his sacrificial death, Christ has reversed the consequences of Adam’s sin and made it possible for us to enjoy right relationship with God.

According to Paul, Adam and Christ represent two aspects or dimensions of the human condition. Paul wants to emphasize that the gift (which is Christ) is not like the transgression (which is Adam and his sin). The gift has come to us through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection.

The result of Jesus’ fidelity is that the reign of God’s grace and eternal life is open to all of humankind. Whereas Adam



ART BY TAD DUNNE

was disobedient to God’s command, Christ was obedient to his Father’s will even to the point of death on the cross. Whereas Adam sinned, Christ remained righteous and without sin. Whereas Adam brought condemnation on himself and his descendants, Christ brought acquittal from judgment and the possibility of right relationship with God (justification). And whereas Adam brought death upon us all, Christ brings to us all the possibility of eternal life with God.

The first Adam brought disobedience, sin, condemnation and death. The new Adam has brought obedience, righteousness, justification and eternal life. Through the first Adam we became wounded and weak. Through Christ we are now God’s children more than ever and so people of hope. We can now legitimately hope for and realize what Adam and Eve thought they could obtain by succumbing to the serpent’s temptation. We can become “like gods” through the example and the power of Jesus the Son of God. And we can hope for eternal life with God in the fullness of God’s kingdom (“You certainly will not die”).

Daniel J. Harrington

Praying With Scripture

- Do you believe in “original sin”? Why?
- What similarities do you see between the temptations of Jesus and your own temptations?
- Do you find elements of both Adam and Christ in yourself? What are they?