

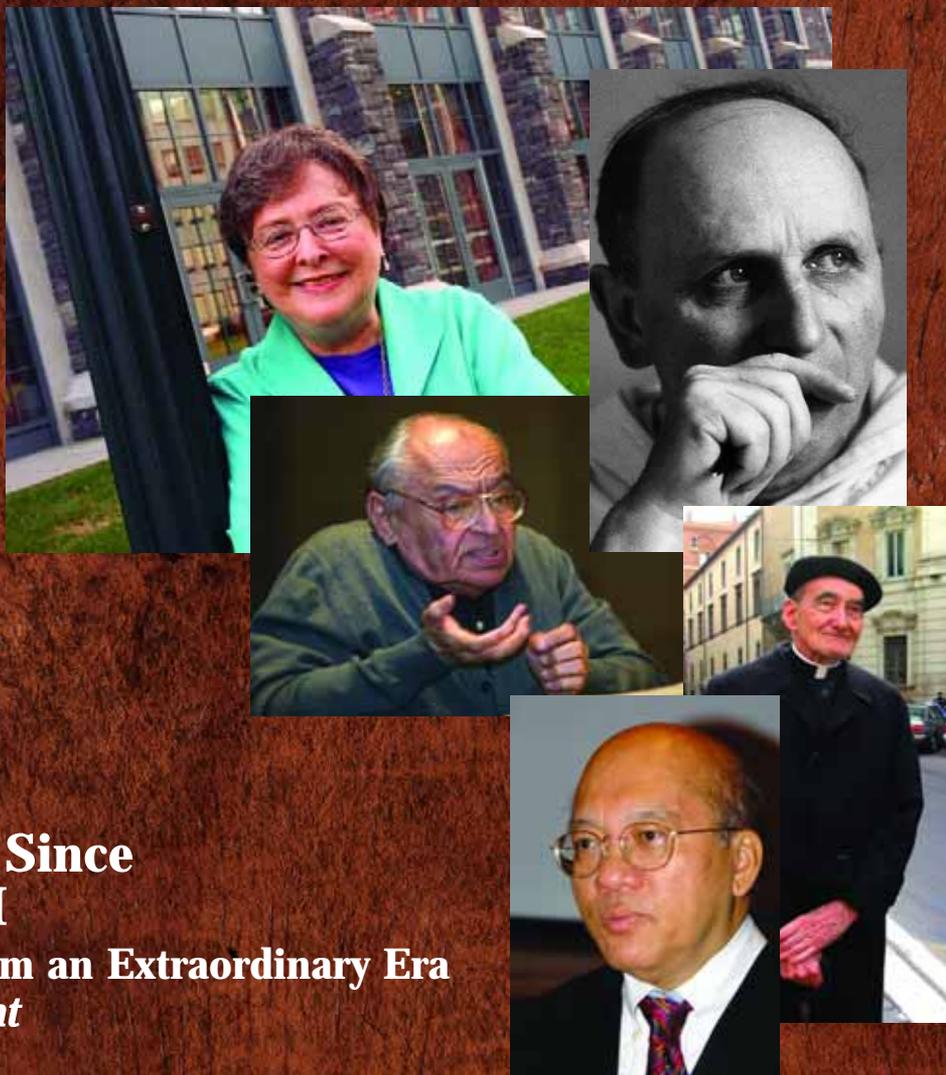
America

Theological
Education

March 17, 2008

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Theology Since Vatican II

Lessons From an Extraordinary Era
Roger Haight

Also in this issue:

Shadows in Prayer
James Martin

Understanding the Psalmist's Anguish
Daniel F. Polish

ANTICIPATION of Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the United States, from April 15 to 20, has quickened among those who will report on the visit and attempt to assess its significance for U.S. Catholics and the wider public. Preparations for the journey have been many months in the making, including undoubtedly a spirited discussion on what cities the pope would visit. The final choice was presumably dictated by the location of the headquarters of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C., and the U.N. General Assembly in New York City.

In both cities, the pope will preside over outdoor Masses, with tens of thousands expected to attend. Tickets are limited and come with security restrictions. A call has gone out for priests to assist with Communion at these outdoor Masses and seminarians to serve as ushers. Cassocks will be required, however, which has occasioned a search in closets and trunks for long-neglected items of clerical clothing.

During his time in Washington, Benedict XVI will not only meet with the U.S. Catholic bishops but will also address a gathering of U.S. Catholic educational leaders at The Catholic University of America on April 17. There may be even more speculation, at least in certain quarters, about the content of the pope's message on this occasion than about his address to the United Nations, where Benedict is likely to repudiate the use of violence in the name of religion.

The Vatican has presumably sought and received suggestions from people on this side of the Atlantic about what Benedict might say to his various U.S. audiences. I once had the opportunity to listen to Pope John Paul II address leaders of Catholic higher education in New Orleans in 1995 and noted significant changes from the proposed text that the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities had sent to the Vatican. Dialogue within the church can take various forms.

The personal style of Benedict XVI is very different, of course, from that of his predecessor. When Karol Wojtyła became Pope John Paul II in 1978, the world knew very little about this Polish cardinal. I remember standing in St.

Peter's Square that October evening in 1978 when the announcement was made, "Habemus papam...Carolus Cardinalem Wojtyła." The unfamiliar name prompted a seminarian in the crowd to declare, "It's the Japanese cardinal." But then, after a quick perusal of the issue of *L'Osservatore Romano* with pictures of all the cardinals in the conclave, he realized, "There is no Japanese cardinal!"

Over his long tenure (1978-2005), Pope John Paul II became a very familiar figure to the large crowds that greeted him on his visits to over 100 countries around the globe, but he was very much an unknown figure when he began his pontificate. In contrast, when Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger became Pope Benedict XVI three years ago, he was, if anything, too well known and his image as a disciplinarian, after a long tenure as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, was sharply defined in the popular imagination. But it has proven since to have been something of a caricature.

During the three years of his pontificate, Benedict

XVI has returned to his lifelong vocation as a theologian and teacher. His two encyclicals have addressed the fundamental Christian virtues of love and hope with a generosity of spirit and depth of meaning that have enriched the understanding of Catholics and commanded the respect of others. The publication in September 2006 of *Jesus of Nazareth*, the first part of his projected life of Jesus, has been welcomed by believers across the spectrum of theological opinion as a summons to a renewed personal faith in the central figure of the New Testament.

On his first, and perhaps only, visit to the United States, Benedict XVI will not attempt to emulate the personal style of his charismatic predecessor. Joseph Ratzinger began his pontificate at a different stage of his life than Karol Wojtyła, who was 58 at the start of his. The fundamental Petrine ministry, of course, is to symbolize and support the unity of the church and the communion of the churches. But different popes have different styles, and I suspect that in the years remaining to him, Benedict will exercise that ministry in the style of the teacher and theologian he has always been.

Joseph A. O'Hare, S.J.

Of Many Things

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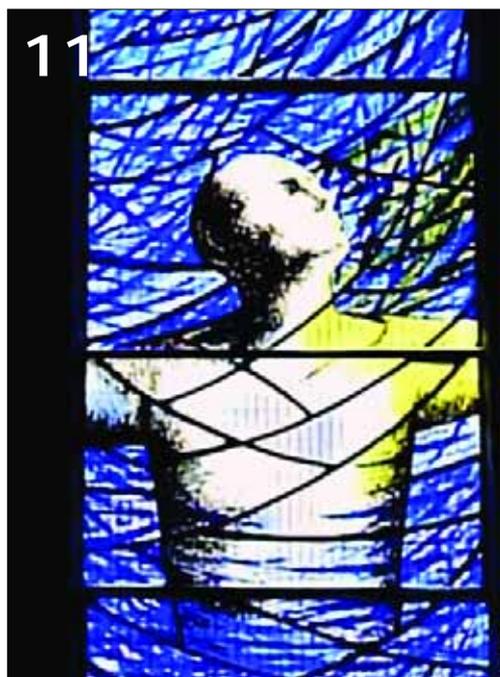
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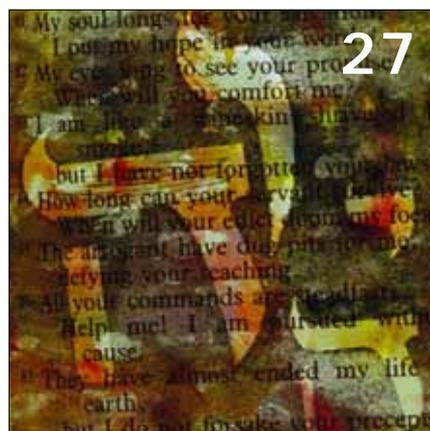
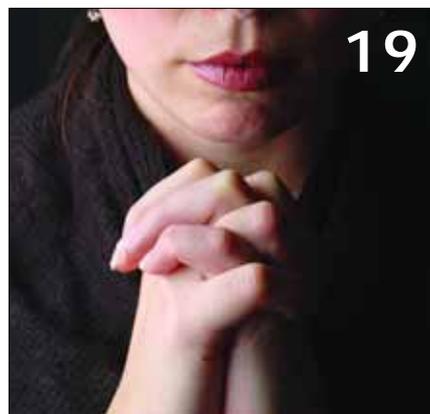
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This week @
America Connects

An audio interview with Roger Haight, S.J., and a discussion of Patrick Symmes's "The Boys From Dolores: Fidel Castro's Classmates From Revolution to Exile." Plus, from the archives, "A Meditation on Death and Life," by William Barry, S.J.

Pictures at a Revolution

One pauses before assigning too much significance to the voting patterns of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. After all, this is the estimable organization that deemed “Doctor Doolittle” worthy of a Best Picture nomination in 1967. Yet sometimes the academy’s choices reflect the national mood in a unique way. Take 1967, a year in which the academy also nominated “The Graduate,” “Bonnie and Clyde,” “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner” and “In the Heat of the Night,” which took home the prize. Watch those films—the subject of Mark Harris’s recent book, *Pictures at a Revolution*—and you will get a good sense of the sexual and racial politics of American society at the time.

Now take a look at 2007. The Best Picture nominees included a morality tale about the awakening of conscience of a corporate lawyer (“Michael Clayton”), an exploration of the American drive to wealth and its devastating consequences (“There Will Be Blood”) and a parable about the persistence of evil (the eventual winner, “No Country for Old Men”). “Juno”—the story of a pregnant teen—was decidedly lighter fare, but succeeded in skewering both pro-life and pro-choice sentiment. So what put filmmakers in such a somber, contrarian mood? Perhaps it was demoralization brought on by the lengthy war in Iraq. Or maybe it was the poisonous rhetoric of the culture wars, which has left a younger generation of artists tired of the same old bromides. It is too early to say, of course. Only with time will the tremors that roil us now emerge as cracks and fissures that we can examine clearly.

Erudite and Exuberant

William F. Buckley Jr.’s death in late February deprived the nation and American Catholics of an erudite, exuberant and often truculent pontificator on American political and religious life. Obituaries detailed the more famous of his many contretemps over the decades, but one of his lesser-known verbal battles involved this magazine. Criticizing John XXIII’s 1961 encyclical on economic development, *Mater et Magistra*, Buckley riffed on a popular anti-Castro slogan of the time in the pages of *National Review*: “Going the rounds in Catholic circles: ‘Mater sí, Magistra, no!’”

“To some of us,” *America*’s editors responded, “it has always been extremely difficult to tell just what Mr. Buckley’s conservatism was trying to conserve...lines spoken to the Pope just shouldn’t sound like lines pitched at

the editors of the *New York Post*,” and they reminded Buckley of “an old, old conservative adage: *Qui mange du pape, en meurt*” (roughly: “He who takes a bite out of the pope dies of it.”) Barbs flew back and forth over several months, during which time one subscriber wrote in to *America* to say: “Cancellation, sí! Refund, sí!”

In a personal letter to the editor of *America*, Buckley defended his position but added: “I take no objection to your denouncing the flippancy as having been in imperfect taste. I am quite prepared to subject myself to the criticism of my elders on such matters.” He also identified the real author of the Latin quip as a “Catholic scholar in Virginia.” Who was that? A former Jesuit, who had left the order four years earlier: Garry Wills.

Name That Child

“What name do you give your child?” With this question to the parents, the priest begins the Catholic rite of baptism. Years ago, one expected in response the name of a saint, like Mary or John. Today, the name may well reflect an entertainer or sports hero, like Jayden, Britney, Reagan, Ashley, Angelina and Kyle. The television show “*Grey’s Anatomy*” has helped make the names Addison, Isabelle, Bailey and Callie more popular. There seems to be a new spirit of creativity in giving names and, indeed, in spelling them. One person found 34 ways to spell Callie—or is it Kallee?

In 2007 the most popular names given for boys were Jacob, Aidan, Ethan, Matthew, Nicholas and Joshua; for girls, Emily, Emma, Madison, Hannah and Hailey. Johnny Cash once sang of a “A Boy Named Sue”; now we hear from Tiger Woods of a girl named Sam—his daughter, Sam Alexis—because Tiger’s dad called him Sam.

True, according to canon law, a baptismal name need not be that of a saint. The only guideline is: “Parents, sponsors and the pastor are to take care that a name foreign to Christian sensibility is not given” (No. 855). How different from many African traditions, in which the grandparents, not the parents, give the name. Names in Africa are very religious too, some with meanings like “love of God” or “gift of God.” In many African cultures, the day of the week on which you were born becomes part of your name. Elsewhere families choose a baby’s name from among the names of parents, grandparents, uncles or aunts. Connections with religious, cultural and family traditions definitely are becoming weaker. Different values are clearly at work in the choice of children’s names. If the Latin tag *Nomen est omen* (“A name is an omen”) is true, what future awaits?

Lost Sheep

A RELIGIOUS SEEKER who found her home in the Catholic Church, Flannery O'Connor once noted that "stories are considered not quite as satisfying as statements, and statements not quite as satisfying as statistics; but in the long run, a people is known, not by its statements or its statistics, but by the stories it tells."

For American Catholics these days, the stories told by the statistics often can be troubling. A recent and much-publicized study by the respected Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, titled *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey*, has reported that fully one-third of native-born American Catholics have left the church of their baptism. While the percentage of Catholics in the United States has remained steady in recent decades at close to 25 percent (and the total number of Catholics has soared from 45.6 million in 1965 to 64.4 million in 2007), these numbers have been buttressed by continuing immigration from Latin American and other Catholic populations. For example, Latinos now represent 45 percent of all U.S. Catholics aged 18 to 29 years. Ten percent of Americans are former Catholics, a population that by itself could make up one of the largest religious denominations in the United States. The church continues to receive new members, long a source of intellectual ferment and cultural vitality, but those raised in another denomination or religion number only 2.6 percent of current Catholics. For reasons not always clear, the church in the United States is suffering an exodus of the faithful unprecedented in its history.

Though much of the mainstream media coverage of the report focused on Catholic losses, the Pew survey reported similarly shocking statistics for Protestant denominations, particularly for the mainline Protestant churches once dominant in American religious life. If one includes switching among different Protestant denominations, around 44 percent of adult Americans now belong to a church different from the one in which they were raised. Half of all Protestants in the United States now identify themselves as evangelical.

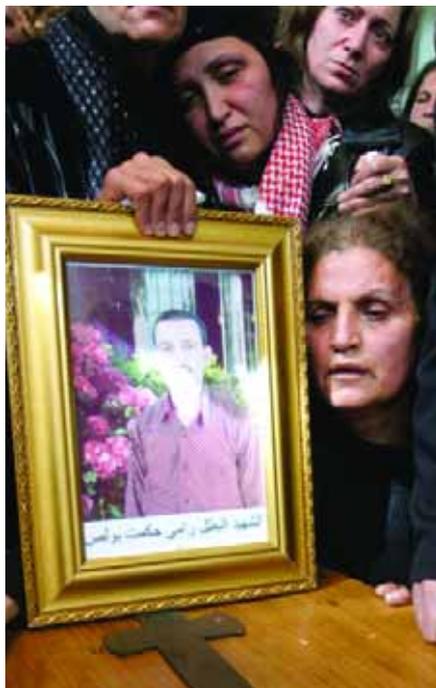
In one sense, this religious mobility is a typical expression of our nation's religious culture; Americans, particularly Protestants, have always been more accepting of fluidity among Christian denominations than other, more religiously homogenous nations. In the case of current and former Catholics, this phenomenon also has much to do

with the continuing entrance of Catholics into the American cultural and economic mainstream. The heirs of an immigrant church have moved in the past half-century out of insular cultural enclaves and achieved financial and cultural acceptance in American society. This trend has been noted by pollsters and cultural critics for years, with its ultimate ramifications unclear but still significant. Suddenly Catholicism in the United States finds itself assailed not by the bigotries of ages past but by the indifference of our current milieu. Have we reached the point where American Catholics are just like everybody else, where Catholicism is nothing more than a "high church" option in a broad spectrum of Christian religious choices?

While many former Catholics have since found a home in another denomination or religion, around half now describe themselves as unaffiliated, which suggests the troubling thought that a primary reason for their exodus might not have been anger at the institutional church or the oft-cited desire for a more personal or emotional experience of faith, but simple apathy. (Most unaffiliated respondents chose not to describe themselves as atheists or agnostics, but said their religious affiliation was "nothing in particular.") A number of Catholics, it seems, have left not because they do not believe, but because they don't care.

IF WE BELIEVE THAT STATISTICS do not define Christian life, but stories do, what is to be done? It will be difficult if not impossible to find consensus on the proper steps needed to confront these losses, but at a minimum it is clear that methods of catechesis need to be rethought. The dismaying evidence that one out of three Catholics no longer participates in the sacramental life of the church is proof enough of catechetical failure in the past two generations. Church leaders should also re-evaluate programs for adult faith formation, heeding the call of John Paul II for a new evangelization of formerly Christian but increasingly secularized cultures. When one out of every four Americans between 18 and 29 says he or she has no religious affiliation at all, it is clear that the de-Christianization so visible in recent decades in Western Europe is also quietly taking place in the United States. These troubling numbers also suggest that the church in the United States needs to focus less on internecine squabbles over Catholic identity and more on outreach and concern for the many who have simply walked away. "Which one of you," Jesus asks in Lk 15:4, "having 100 sheep, and having lost one of them, does not leave the 99 in the open country and go after the lost one until he finds it?"

Chaldean Archbishop Kidnapped in Mosul



A woman holds a photograph of a slain bodyguard during a funeral in Mosul, Iraq, March 1. The guard was among three men killed in the Feb. 29 abduction of Mosul's Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho.

Kidnappers abducted Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of Mosul, Iraq on Feb. 29, and killed the three people who were traveling with him. Chaldean Bishop Rabban al Qas of Arbil told the Rome-based missionary news service AsiaNews that Mosul's archbishop was kidnapped after he finished leading the Way of the Cross. Archbishop Rahho had just left the Church of the Holy Spirit in Mosul and was in his car with three other men when the kidnappers attacked. "The bishop is in the hands of terrorists," Bishop Qas told AsiaNews. "But we don't know what physical condition [the archbishop is in]; the three men who were with him in the car, including his driver, were killed," he explained. "It's a terrible time for our church; pray for us," he said. The kidnappers have reportedly communicated their demands, which were not made public.

From CNS and other sources. CNS photos.

Analyst Criticizes U.S. Role in Middle East

A Catholic political analyst, Wadie Abunasser, said the current U.S. administration is part of the problem in the Middle East, not the solution. "Unfortunately [President George W.] Bush's administration is a failure in the...Middle East, starting in Afghanistan, stretching through to Iraq and moving on to Lebanon and Israel-Palestine," said Abunasser, an Arab who is the director of the International Center for Consultations in Haifa, Israel. "There is a lack of good American understanding of the reality and mentality of the region." Abunasser added that the situation continues to deteriorate because of a lack of sufficient international intervention, specifically by the United States. Despite the numerous visits to the region by members of the U.S. administration, including U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who arrived in Ramallah, West Bank, March 4, Arabs in general and Palestinians in particular do not feel they have benefited, he said. People were not optimistic about Rice's visit, Abunasser added.

Implementation of 'Great Continental Mission'

The idea of a "great continental mission," which proved elusive when the bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean met in Aparecida, Brazil, last year, is slowly taking shape, said the prelate responsible for its implementation. Archbishop Hector Cabrejos Vidarte of Trujillo, who heads the Peruvian bishops' conference and serves as coordinator of mission and spirituality for the Latin American bishops' council, or Celam, sees the mission as an ongoing effort that signifies a shift in the way parishes reach out to the faithful. "The idea is that the mission not have a beginning and an end, but that it involve preparation and intensive action over time, along with evaluation," he said. The archbishop foresees a long-term effort spanning at least 10 or 15 years. "The idea is that it be a permanent mission," he said. Referring to Celam, the Latin American Bishop's Conference, he

explained, "All of Celam's pastoral programs are oriented toward the continental mission." At the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean last May, leaders expressed concern that Catholics were drifting away from the church. According to a survey by the Chilean polling firm Latino-barometro in 2005, while three-quarters of the people surveyed in the region said they considered themselves Catholic, only 40 percent said they practiced their faith. What did not emerge from Aparecida, however, was a clear plan for addressing the problem, although the final document mentions the need for renewal of church structures and a greater emphasis on community.

Chávez Supporters Storm Archdiocesan Offices

About 15 hooded supporters of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez invaded the offices of the Archdiocese of Caracas, Venezuela, and held a news conference criticizing government opponents, including the church. The protesters entered the offices in central Caracas just before 9 a.m. Feb. 27, demanding that the media publish a statement of their views on the church and other issues. They threw pamphlets out the building's windows, made announcements with a loudspeaker and did not permit employees to leave the building, Auxiliary Bishop Jesús González de Zarate Salas of Caracas told Catholic News Service in a telephone interview. Bishop González said the protesters were not armed or violent and did not threaten employees or damage property. "We just let time run, so that whatever happened, happened," he said.

Bill Targeting Church in Maryland Withdrawn

A Maryland lawmaker has withdrawn a bill that would have lifted the statute of limitations on civil cases involving sexual abuse of children. Catholic leaders feared that had it become law, the financial toll of such cases would have devastated parishes, schools and ministries. The bill,

Signs of the Times

sponsored by Eric Bromwell, a Democrat, would have created a one-year window during which individuals claiming they were sexually abused as children could file civil suits against the perpetrator and private institutions such as dioceses, parishes and schools regardless of how long ago the alleged abuse occurred. Richard J. Dowling, executive director of the Maryland Catholic Conference, said he was “very gratified” by Bromwell’s decision. The conference is the public policy arm of the state’s Catholic bishops. “Eric Bromwell is one of those delegates who really cares about what his constituents think,” said Dowling. “Here, a substantial number of his Catholic constituents made clear their belief that his legislation targeted the Catholic Church in an unfair way and did nothing to protect children from abuse.”

Vatican Clarifies Formula for Baptisms

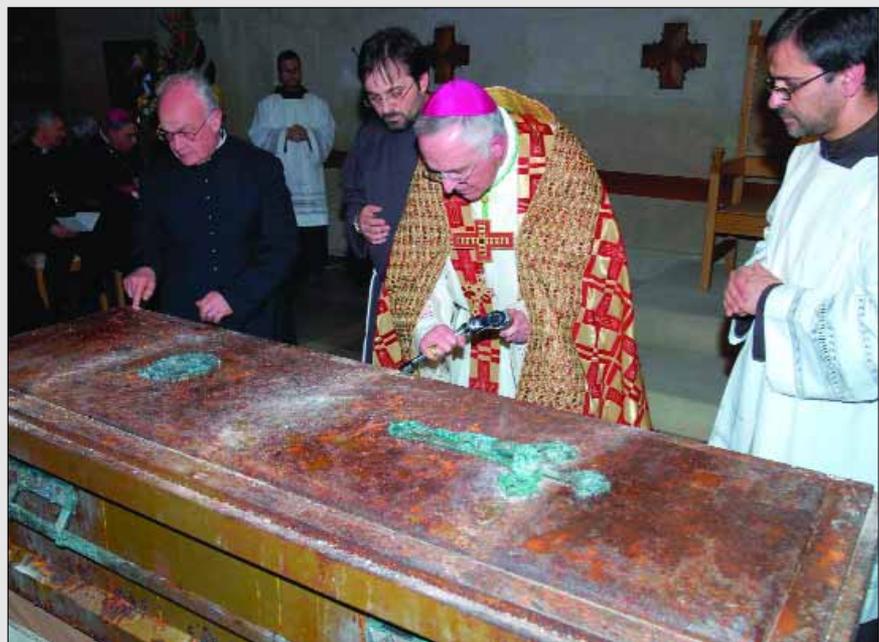
A baptism administered “in the name of the Creator, and of the Redeemer and of the Sanctifier” is not a baptism at all, said the Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Asked whether a baptism performed with that formula—or a similar one referring to the “Creator, Liberator and Sustainer”—would be valid, the congregation answered “Negative.” Asked whether people who were initiated with a rite using these formulas would now need to be baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” the congregation answered “Affirmative.” The congregation said Pope Benedict XVI “approved these responses” and ordered their publication. If either formula—initiated in North America to avoid referring to the Trinity with masculine names—was used, the person is not yet formally a Christian and any subsequent sacraments the person received also are invalid, said Cardinal Urbano Navarrete in a commentary commissioned by the doctrinal congregation. The congregation’s statement was published Feb. 29 as a brief response to questions regarding the validity of baptisms using that formula.

Moral Medical Issues Around Dying

Many Catholics still need to learn about the church’s teachings on end-of-life issues, such as when it might be morally acceptable to reject or terminate life-prolonging treatments, said some participants at a Vatican-sponsored congress. The church teaches that while euthanasia and assisted suicide are always wrong, in some situations the terminally ill or dying can withdraw or refuse treatment and still be in line with church teaching. To help people make informed and ethical decisions, “much work needs to be done in elaborating on the church’s tradition of reasoning about forgoing life-prolonging treatments to make it practical for health care providers and persons who are dying,” said William Sullivan, M.D., director of the Toronto-based International Association of Catholic Bioethicists. Sullivan was one of hundreds of scholars, theologians, religious and health care professionals who turned out for the international congress of the Pontifical Academy for Life on Feb. 25-26, which looked at the scientific and ethical aspects of caring for the terminally ill and dying.

Priest Shortage in Ireland

New figures on vocations published in the 2008 Irish Catholic Directory indicate how quickly the country is headed toward a major shortage of priests. According to the directory, the country lost 160 priests last year—mostly because of death in old age—and had only nine new ordinations. Currently there are about 4,750 priests in Ireland; but if current trends continue, by 2028 Ireland will have fewer than 1,500 priests. “It’s a trend that priests would have known about for some time,” said the Rev. Eamonn Bourke, Dublin diocesan vocations director. “But many laypeople are only beginning to become aware of the implications and the dramatic effect that the fall in vocations will have. It will mean parish amalgamations; it will mean some parishes not having daily Masses; and it will probably mean some parishes not having a Mass every Sunday,” he told Catholic News Service. “Couples will not be able to get married on their own—it’s more likely that they will make their wedding vows with at least another couple sharing the ceremony. The same will apply to funeral Masses.”



Archbishop Domenico D'Ambrosio, center, attends the exhumation of the body of St. Padre Pio in San Giovanni Rotondo, southern Italy, March 2. The body of the saint is to be conserved and put in a new glass coffin and will be displayed for public viewing beginning April 24.



The Road to Emmaus

‘God’s wisdom comes quietly alongside us, where we least expect it.’

WE COULD ENTER this story anywhere, and it would still lead us in its own directions. Very much like life, really. But because one has to start somewhere, I will begin in the middle.

The rain is horizontal, and my umbrella is determined to turn itself inside out. I fight to prevent it from reaching escape velocity, and stumble blindly on among the crowds thronging the main shopping street in Sheffield, the city in England’s East Midlands where I was born and raised. In spite of wind and weather, memories still bubble to the surface of my consciousness, especially as I cross Fitzalan Square. Unlike almost all the rest of the city, this square still looks much as it did when I was a child. For a moment I am back here with my father, and it’s Christmas Eve. For two days he has been freed from work—a mundane and frustrating daily chore that takes him every morning to the East End of the city and the desolate steel mills and dusty offices, euphemistically known as Brightside! (Why do we do that, I wonder, calling our most derelict slums by the prettiest names?) But today he comes home early and we take the tram down to Fitzalan Square to choose our Christmas tree from the market there.

That was decades ago. He is long dead now, and yet he walks with me today across this rain-driven square as if we were still in search of a spruce. And that’s a good place to enter a story....

It wasn’t all spruce trees and Christmas lights, and it wasn’t all daily

MARGARET SILF lives in Staffordshire, England. Her latest books are *Companions of Christ: Ignatian Spirituality for Everyday Living* and *The Gift of Prayer*.

work and tram rides. Every silver lining has a cloud, and the cloud that hung over us at that time was my father’s alcohol addiction. Memories like those of Christmas Eve are like slivers of gold streaking through a rather dark and bewildering forest with not many paths. We became familiar with the coping strategies that families of alcoholics learn; and life continued, between job losses and tightrope walks among creditors. And now, as I look back, I realize that these were the roots and the reasons for my being here in Sheffield on this rainy day in 2008. Because we could so easily have become homeless ourselves, part of my heart has continued to dwell here, in this particular city, alongside the men and women who travel a path similar to my father’s. I am here today to celebrate the opening of a homeless center that I have been helping to support.

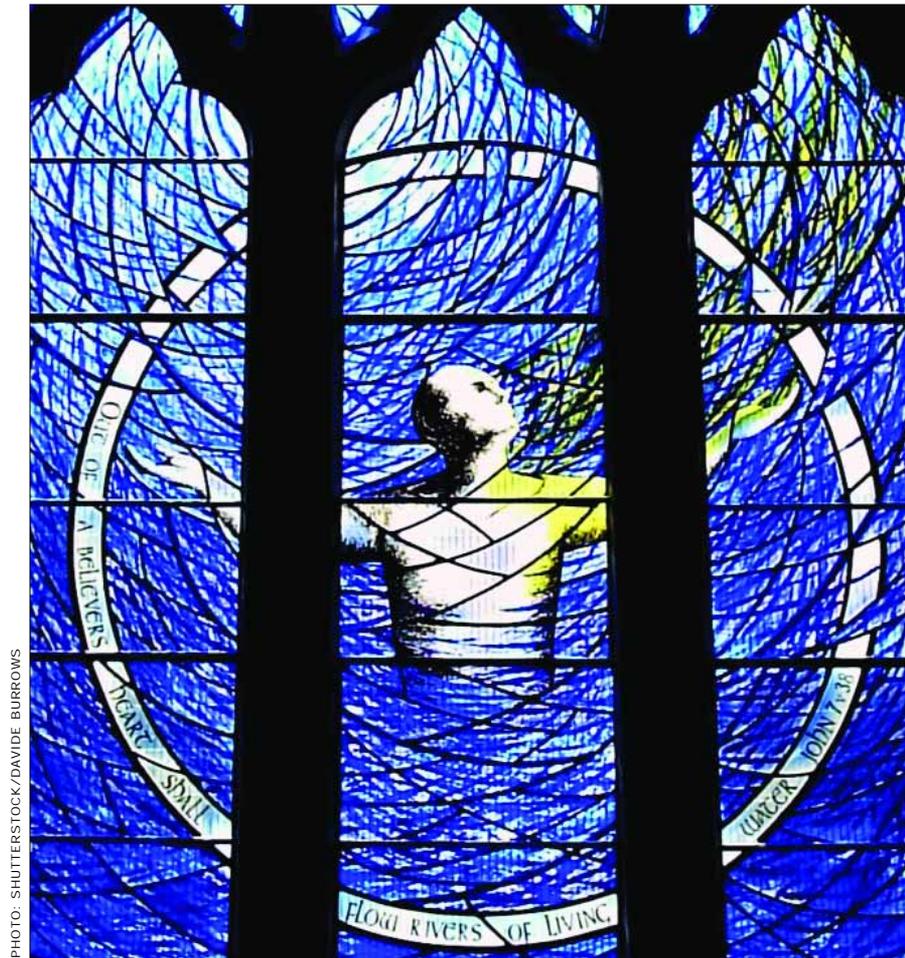
But not just a homeless center. This is an Emmaus house. The Emmaus movement was started by Abbé Pierre in France, who opened his home to beleaguered casualties of the Second World War. It seeks to create homes where those in despair can “find a bed and a reason to get out of it.” The reason to get out of it is that all the companions, as they are called, are expected to contribute in whatever way they can, through their own efforts and talents, and they are required to come off state benefits and form a self-supporting community. They do this mainly by restoring old furniture, mending abandoned electrical equipment and recycling unwanted books, clothes and other goods. The profit keeps them going, and they give any surplus to people who are in even worse situations than themselves. Most of the companions eventually go on to lead independent lives in the mainstream community. Although it is a secular charity, it

is not called Emmaus for nothing. It is about “companions” walking a stony road of despair and disillusionment, and experiencing the presence of one alongside them who reveals that the miracle is real, and that God truly is constantly striving to “make all things new.” The Sheffield house has itself been restored from a derelict steelworks—my father would have known it.

Starting conversations with strangers does not come easily to me, but I found myself sharing lunch with a woman who had no such inhibitions. In no time we were deep in conversation. Sometimes God’s synchronicity leaves me speechless. Here was a woman who had grown up in the same city, and even had the same name as mine. We were both supporting the same project. We exchanged stories, and it was like discovering the mirror image of ourselves. She had attended a no-hope primary school at the “wrong” end of town, and had therefore had no chance at all of moving on to a college prep school, which might have opened the door to higher education, as it did for me. She had been repeatedly told that she was useless and would do nothing with her life. I had been consistently encouraged to achieve the best I could. She had gone through the same pattern of job losses and addiction as my father. And then, by a stroke of grace, she had been invited to help out at a hostel for homeless alcoholics. It was like meeting another incarnation of myself as I might have been, in a parallel universe.

This other Margaret is now running a rehab center in the city, and she shines with the presence of God, even though she wouldn’t see it herself. She told me about some of the ways in which she tries to help people break free from their old destructive lifestyles, and she expressed her philosophy to me like this: “If you always think what you always thought, you will always do what you always did and you will always get what you always got.” I thought of Einstein’s wisdom, which says the same thing: “You will never solve a problem with the same mindset that created it.” We laughed at the way her mind and Einstein’s had reached the same conclusion.

God’s wisdom comes quietly alongside us where we least expect it, and every road is a road to Emmaus. **Margaret Silf**



Catholic theology since Vatican II

Lessons From an Extraordinary Era

– BY ROGER HAIGHT –

CATHOLICS SHOULD BE AMAZED by how theology has developed over the past 40 years. From Karl Rahner to Jon Sobrino, from Edward Schillebeeckx to Elizabeth Johnson, the expanded territory covered by the theologians of our era bears comparison to the transition from the monastery to the university in the High Middle Ages.

ROGER HAIGHT, S.J., is visiting professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York. He has recently completed a three-volume work on ecclesiology, *Christian Community in History* (Continuum).

Different theologians would tell the story differently, of course, but the version that follows is not completely idiosyncratic. I present the plot in seven stages (stage three has two parts). At each stage I name theologians who embody the development described and present a lesson or two learned at that stage. I tell this story in an abbreviated form, skipping over much, for the point does not lie in the details but in what has happened cumulatively during this

The expanded territory covered by the theologians of our era bears comparison to the transition from the monastery to the university in the High Middle Ages.

brief period in the history of Catholic theology. I conclude with two urgent matters for Catholic theologians to address.

Theological progress differs from development in technology, where one way of doing things supplants another—the computer making the typewriter obsolete. Instead, in theology one stage takes the former into itself, slowly widening its horizon and deepening perceptions, allowing a complexification of issues that leads to greater understanding.

Our story begins at the end of the Second Vatican Council in 1965. Certainly progressive theology existed before then, most significantly in the “new theology,” which lay under a cloud of suspicion and was implicitly condemned in the silencing of its practitioners in the early 1950s. (Two of them, Henri de Lubac and Yves Congar, were later made cardinals.) The prevailing theology at that time was taught in seminaries from standardized manuals. The distance covered since is best exemplified by the work of Karl Rahner, the most prominent theologian to react against the manuals.

Stage 1: Karl Rahner The Turn to Experience

Rahner’s turn to the human person and experience represents a monumental achievement for Catholic theology. Deep parallels and analogies exist between Rahner’s theology and the Protestant shift at the beginning of the 19th century and the experiential method employed by such Roman Catholic modernists as Maurice Blondel and Lucien Laberthonnière. But while these thinkers failed to gain a hearing in the Catholic Church, Rahner became a 20th-

century church father. His method of theology appealed to a universal structure of human experience, and it became the most significant successor to neoscholasticism.

Lesson 1: The house of Christian meaning lies in the experience of the Christian subject. Many generalizations could be made based on Rahner’s intricate theological method and huge corpus, but I single out an implication of the turn to human experience as the clearinghouse of Christian meaning. The method redirects the focus of theology to the significance that revelation from God bears for our lives in the world today. This may always have been the case, but Rahner’s theology draws out the relevance of revelation for the real questions people are asking.

Stage 2: Schillebeeckx, Metz, Tracy Historical and Political Theology

These three theologians turn to history and intellectual culture in a way that Rahner did not. In 1965 Edward Schillebeeckx, at 51, was an established neoscholastic theologian, 10 years younger than Rahner. Influenced by Vatican II’s embrace of the modern world, Schillebeeckx read secularization theory, hermeneutics and neo-Marxian social theory over several years and reinvented himself as a deeply historically conscious theologian. He wrote comprehensive works on Jesus of Nazareth, on Jesus as savior and the Christ, and on the development of the church. In each case he interpreted past teaching by reading it in terms of today’s cultural experience and questions.

Johannes B. Metz, born in 1928, was Rahner’s student and is famous for opening up the social-political dimension of human consciousness and drawing out its implications for theology. With his fellow political theologians, Jürgen Moltmann and Dorothee Sölle, both of whom grew to maturity in the shadow of the Holocaust, Metz urged Christian theology to take account of the tragic side of social history and to assume responsibility for the direction history takes. Christian theology, these thinkers argued, must take into account the history of suffering so as to minimize suffering in the future.

David Tracy’s attention to method in theology and his far-ranging eclecticism demonstrates the breadth of the Catholic analogical imagination. His ability to converse with virtually the whole range of Western humanistic intellectual culture has preserved the Catholic intellectual tradition in the secular academy as few others have.

The study of these three theologians expands the presuppositions of theology in many ways, but two are worth noting here:

Lesson 2. Human knowledge, classic formulations included, is

historically conditioned and thus particular. The universal relevance of any given idea or value cannot be presupposed. Its source and provenance differ from our own. One needs to interpret in order to draw out the relevance of authoritative witnesses from the past for the present and future.

Lesson 3. Human knowledge represents group interests and bias. This Marxian maxim is presupposed by almost everyone in the West today, whether or not they are educated, and sometimes in a most cynical way. Still, the point is clear: to bear witness to truth, theology too must explain itself. Theology cannot presuppose its own authority; rather, explanation must prove its authenticity by a matching behavior. For this reason Metz recasts fundamental theology as an ultimately practical discipline.

Stage 3: Gutiérrez, Segundo, Sobrino, Ellacuría Latin American Liberation Theology

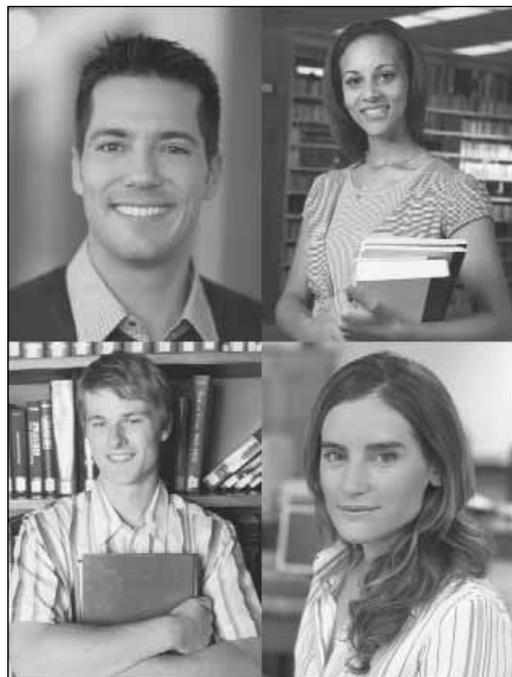
Two fundamental elements reflect the essential logic of liberation theology. The first is negative experience, which leads to an awareness of the dehumanized condition of large numbers of people. The experience has three dimensions: a situation is wrong; we know it could and should be different; the contrast fuels an urge to right the wrong. What does Christian theology say to this situation?

The second fundamental element of liberation theology seeks to answer that question. The response appears embryonically in Luke's parable of the Good Samaritan, which can

be read as dramatizing the principle that love of God is displayed as love of neighbor. The truth of the principle is conveyed with climactic force by the shocking fact that only the Samaritan had internalized it. Modernity adds a conviction that beyond tying up the victim's wounds, true love will make the road to Jericho safe for all. With this addendum liberation theology rewrites the parable for the whole world.

Lesson 4. Social practice is an intrinsic dimension of Christian faith from which one cannot prescind. One of the deepest principles liberation theology presents to the Christian community is that action and practice are not just the consequences of faith, but the intrinsic testimonial of its authenticity. As Ignatius of Loyola postulated in his *Spiritual Exercises*, "Love ought to manifest itself more by deeds than by words" (No. 230). For this love to be effective and authentic, it must be directed against the causes of human suffering.

Lesson 5. Social-ethical considerations are intrinsic to theological understanding. Catholic theology has come to a new realization of the social ethical implications of Christian faith. After a period of separation between theology and ethics, theology has recognized the necessity of accountability. In 1971 the essential link between faith and justice was written into magisterial teaching when the World Synod of Bishops wrote that "action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel" (*Justice in the World*, Nov. 30, 1971).



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Developing Stage 3: Johnson, Copeland, Aquino, Espin, Phan

Rather than chart the rise of the many liberation theologies that have followed the path of Latin American theology, I allude to the work of five figures. In North America, the single most important development in theology, beginning in the late 1960s, has been the flourishing of an extraordinary body of feminist or womanist liberation theology. Elizabeth Johnson's work has been translated and read around the world. Shawn Copeland is perhaps the deepest interpreter of Catholic womanist theology; the relevance of her work transcends the limits of black women's experience.

Maria Pilar Aquino and Orlando Espin are two representatives of many who bridge the exigencies of working for an immigrant community and meeting the standards of the academy. Hispanic theology, like the Asian-American theology of Peter Phan, is paradoxically truly American in being a theology of an immigrant population.

Lesson 6. Theology is and is recognized to be a pluralistic discipline. The lesson of pluralism was learned much earlier in a theoretical way, but these "constituency" theologies, which are more explicitly distinctive and different from others (which can conceal their bias under a cloak of objectivity), demonstrate the fact of pluralism—that is, differences within a common field. They are relevant to all in a community of solidarity in faith.

Lesson 7. Theology is a democratized discipline practiced by a large corps of theologians. The liberation theologies drive home two other facts about Catholic theology, especially in North America. First, from being an almost exclusively clerical discipline, theology has become laicized. A large majority of Catholic theologians consists or will shortly consist of laypeople. Second, the discipline has been taken out of the mouths of an aristocracy of the elite and become democratically diffused among a large corps of well-trained theologians. There are no more standard texts, but extensive bibliographies on everything—a healthy sign.

Stage 4: Catholic Bilateral Dialogues Catholic Ecumenical Theologians

In the 40 years since the Catholic Church joined the ecumenical movement, ecumenical dialogues have accumulated a massive body of data and literature. The results of the dialogues have remained largely unknown to the faithful at large, and these theologians go unheralded. Although church officials have done little with the data commensurate with the effort put into gathering it, the literature still remains a latent source for theology. Estimates of the degree to which Catholic officials are truly committed to the ecumenical movement vary according to the diverse expectations of the appraisers.

Lesson 8. The expanded horizon of the ecumenical movement

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underscores the principle of a hierarchy of truths. This principle, taught at Vatican II, states that truths vary in their relationship to the fundamentals of the Christian faith. Yet the fences defining the boundaries and identities of the churches are set up in different places. This will always be a subject of debate inside and outside particular churches; but the principle is still valuable and must consistently be invoked. Appreciation of it requires measured language and concentration on the heart of Christian faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ. This in turn urges the recognition that many divisions among the churches are based on mistakes about which issues are divisive and which are not.

**Stage 5: Nyamiti, Amaladoss, Pieris
Inculturation in Africa and Asia**

Decolonialization began in Latin America in the 19th century, but a sense of cultural identity and nationalism intensified after World War II. This process has generated a strong sense among non-Western Christians that faith and practice must be reinterpreted using the symbols of the local culture so that Christianity can cease appearing as a foreign and in some measure alienating religion. Around the world inculturation theology has never been so self-consciously pursued as today; it is producing concepts with multiple applications: for example, the idea of “hybridity” as distinct from “syncretism.” Analyses of the multiple relationships that consti-

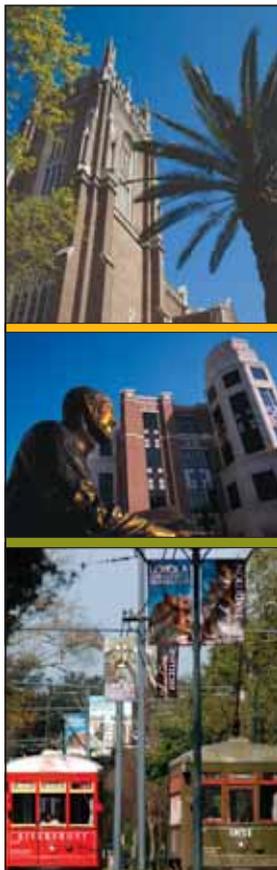
tute persons and groups show that there are no pure, stable identities in history. This softens the almost exclusively negative connotations of religious syncretism. The long-term effects of inculturation can be only dimly reckoned.

As Christians in the Anglican Communion will testify, inculturation is necessary, difficult and dangerous. Yet nowhere is Catholic theology more creative and vital than in projects like Charles Nyamiti’s effort to create an “ancestor christology,” or Aloysius Pieris’s appropriation of liberation theology’s option for the poor for Asia and his simultaneous engagement with Buddhism, or Michael Amaladoss’s dialogue with Indian culture and religion and its application to Christology.

Lesson 9. Catholic theology has transcended the West and become culturally polycentric. This lesson is only partially internalized within the Catholic Church. A billion-member organization produces a wide global consciousness; today’s large corps of Catholic theologians spans continents. The prevalence of shared languages, like English and Spanish, allows theologians to read each other across cultures. Such cross-fertilization of concerns and insights holds enormous promise for theology.

**Stage 6: Dulles, Knitter, Clooney
Comparative Theology**

Comparative theology explicitly recognizes pluralism in its



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effort to understand a subject. It is an analogous term that allows for many different fields of application and methodological strategies, but the essential insight remains the same: theological understanding must be conscious of difference and able to integrate it into any given understanding.

This foundational insight can be seen in the work of theologians as different from one another as Avery Dulles, with his identification of multiple models of theological themes, like church and revelation; ecumenical theologians, usually working in commissions, who compare and contrast in seeking commonality; Paul Knitter, whose theology of religion compares Christian theological approaches to religious pluralism; and Francis X. Clooney, who practices Christian theology through a comparative dialogue with texts of other religions on a common theme.

Lesson 10. The expanded horizon of the religions opens up new sources for Christian insight. Everything appears differently once we realize that we are united by a common religious quest for meaning, which cannot be reduced to a single philosophical or theological framework. Rahner's anthropocentrism takes on new meaning against a background of a new hope for human reconciliation, where religion might help unite rather than divide people. Can religion cease being competitive and become reconciling?

Stage 7: Toolan, Haught, Edwards Cosmologically Sensitive Theology

Educated people worldwide realize that the mid-20th century understanding of the cosmos is hopelessly out of date. In its place is a narrative of how the universe began that can be dated with precision. This story is awesome and religiously evocative. The mathematics of the size and age of our universe defies the human imagination.

A new understanding of ourselves as part of this universe has significant implications for theology, as great as the shift from a Jewish understanding of God and salvation to a Greek interpretation of both. David S. Toolan has explored the impact of the new scientific world on our Christian spiritual identity; John Haught interrogates the connections between the methods of science and theology; Denis Edwards places the doctrines within this new context of interpretation. It will take some time and much discussion before these new interpretations can be proffered, criticized and digested by the community at large. It is not too early, however, to draw at least one lesson from the beginnings of such a new Christian self-understanding.

Lesson 11. A new cosmic expansion of consciousness produces a new theocentrism. The size and complexity of the universe suggest something so massive, both on a macro level of astronomy and a micro level of subatomic reality, that the imagination seems spontaneously drawn into ideas of infinite creative intelligence and power. Where are we as a

human race in all of this? Anthropocentrism seems so inherent in human thinking that it cannot be escaped. The anthropic principle notwithstanding, the space-time coordinates of human thinking have been so expanded that it almost seems intrinsically wrong to see ourselves as at the center. Gradually this new framework is moving toward a new theocentrism for Christians. This is one of the new, growing frontiers in Christian theology.

The Future of Catholic Theology

Many conclusions can be drawn from the story of the development of Catholic theology over the last 40 years. Two areas of concern have special urgency for the Catholic Church; without special attention to them the church's health will be affected.

The first involves the doctrines of the Christian faith as formulated in the Roman Catholic communion, often referred to as articles of the Creed. Not enough creative effort is going into the theological interpretation of these doctrines so that they will make sense to people in the developed societies of the West. The Western world needs inculturation in its theology, too. Meanwhile, the new corps of Catholic theologians is occupied with questions of lesser importance in the hierarchy of truths, like: Can we even get along in a pluralistic community? The result is a kind of theological illiteracy among the laity and the clergy regarding the work of the academy. Even otherwise well-educated Catholics cannot find answers to their questions, and many are drifting away.

A second exigency lies in a need for a critically conscious piety or spirituality. Can Catholic spirituality find a place in a global human conversation that spans many religious traditions? Can it accommodate a picture of the universe that contemporary children take for granted? Or does religious piety require a more narrowly defined and enclosed self-understanding? Does a movement toward a more open and diffuse conception of the God-human relationship automatically result in a loss of religious devotion?

Theologians need to explore more fully the ways in which an open theology grounds a strong religious identity and a vital Christian spirituality. A critical understanding of how Christianity can be universally relevant and at the same time open to other religious experiences confirms rather than threatens one's Christian identity. Our professed faith in precisely the God of Jesus should convince us that openness to other churches and other religions is a proper Christian spiritual attitude. New times and new theologies call for new forms of spirituality. **A**



An audio interview with Roger Haught, S.J.,
at americamagazine.org.

Shadows in Prayer

The seven D's of the spiritual life

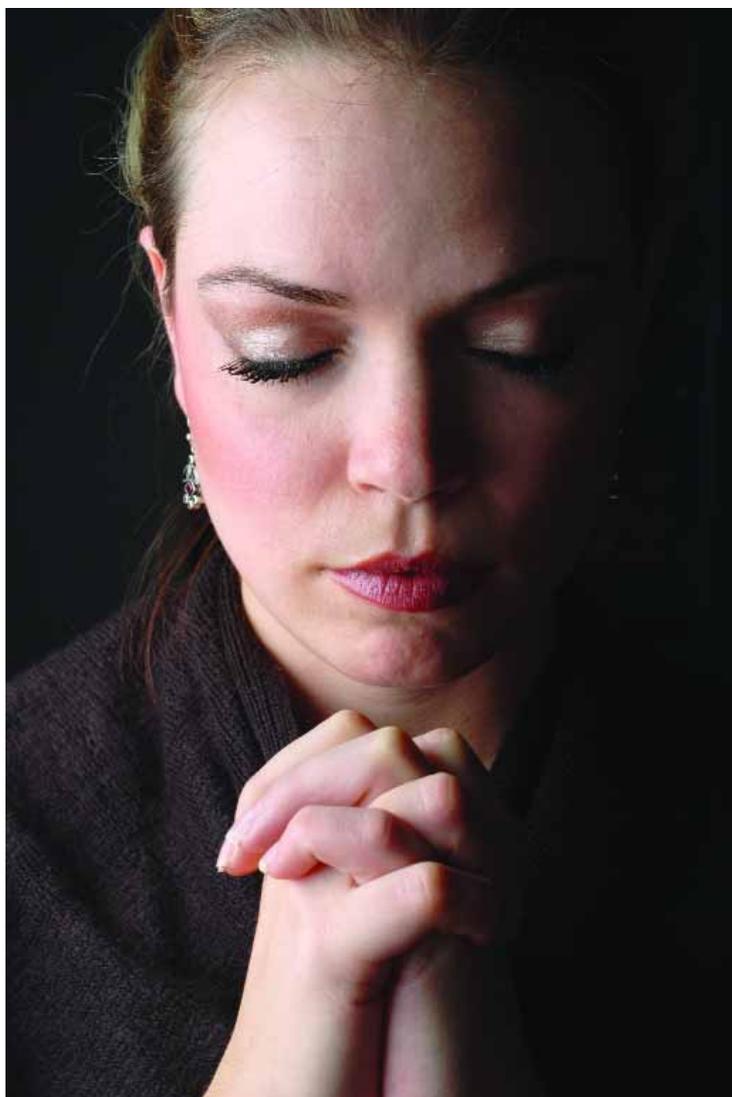
BY JAMES MARTIN

ONE CHALLENGE for readers of *Mother Teresa:*

Come Be My Light, the collection of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta's letters published last fall, is to distinguish among the terms darkness, dryness, desolation, doubt, disbelief, depression and despair—the “seven D's.” On a popular level, some journalists, media analysts and bloggers conflated Mother Teresa's “darkness” with “disbelief.” Christopher Hitchens, the atheist author of *God Is Not Great*, was not the only one who asked, after reading selections from the book, whether the “saint of the gutters” was a closet atheist. Even devout Catholics had difficulties grasping how Mother Teresa, considered a paragon of faith, could have suffered from a feeling of abandonment by God. While some Catholics saw her example as one of remarkable fidelity, others were disturbed to read such lines as, “I have no faith.” One woman asked me, “How can I expect to pray at all, when even she couldn't believe?”

Such reactions show how easy it is for the media and the public to be addled sometimes by the complexities of the

JAMES MARTIN, S.J., is acting publisher of *America* and author of *A Jesuit Off-Broadway: Center Stage With Jesus, Judas and Life's Big Questions*.



spiritual life and, also, how confused terminology can become, even among those familiar with prayer.

The “seven D's,” however, are distinct, and Christian spiritual masters have long used specific terms to refer to distinct experiences. One may experience dryness without depression (for example, during a retreat when one suspects that the period of dryness in prayer is temporary). One may encounter darkness without disbelief (as did St. Thérèse of Lisieux, who continued to believe despite spiritual aridity near the end of her life). Experiences can overlap, too. Darkness can lead to occasional doubt, as in the case of Mother Teresa. And depression can lead, as even atheists and agnostics know, to despair.

Darkness Visible

Darkness has been an important theme in Christian spirituality since St. Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century. Perhaps the most often quoted source on the topic is St. John of the Cross, a Spanish mystic. Ironically, he may be the most misquoted as well, as illustrated by frequent references to the “dark night of the soul.” His original 16th-century poem is called simply *Noche Oscura*, “Dark Night.”

“Dark night,” however, is only one way of describing a particular state of feeling isolated from God. Around the

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/MEHMET ALCI

same time St. John was writing, St. Ignatius Loyola wrote of “desolation” in his *Spiritual Exercises*. So even the most educated Christian can be forgiven for wondering: Are the two saints talking about two phenomena that are the same, or similar or different?

To add to the confusion, where one spiritual director uses “darkness,” another might use “dryness” to describe the same experience. “And sometimes directors can be presumptuous, too,” says Jane Ferdon, O.P., who has trained spiritual directors in California for 20 years. “People may say that they are in darkness, and we spiritual directors assume we know what they’re talking about!”

Perhaps confusion stems not only from an imprecise, overlapping and shifting use of terms but also from a failure to recognize that everyone who prays will at some point encounter many of these states.

What are these states? How do they affect our relationships with God? Lent is a good time to reflect on these categories, not only as a way of taking stock of our spiritual life but also as an invitation to meditate on Jesus’ own expression of isolation on the cross, “My God, my God, why have

you abandoned me?”

What follows is a brief overview of the seven D’s, beginning with some simple definitions, followed by comments from past and present spiritual masters.

Darkness, dryness, doubt, disbelief, depression, desolation and despair often go together—but not always.

Definitions and Descriptions

1. *Darkness* is a feeling of God’s absence after having developed a personal relationship with God. For St. John of the Cross, there were two types

of “dark nights.” The “dark night of the senses” is an experience of one’s own limitations and the removal of attachments to the consolation felt in prayer. It is “an inflowing of God into the soul whereby he purges it of its habitual ignorances and imperfections,” wrote St. John. At a later stage, some experience the “dark night of the spirit,” which is a more profound challenge to faith. But both are steps toward deeper union with God.

Janet Ruffing, R.S.M., professor of spirituality and spiritual direction at Fordham University, describes St. John’s dark night as a “mystical experience of God that overwhelms our normal way of apprehending God, and leads

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not only to an increase in faith, hope and love, but also eventually into a place of light.” She believes that while almost everyone who prays seriously will encounter the dark night of the senses, relatively few will experience the dark night of the spirit.

An experience of darkness can be a gateway to finding God in the *nada*, or nothingness, and an entry into the *via negativa*, the negative way. Ruth Burrows, a Carmelite nun, writes in her book *Essence of Prayer* that God “wants us to trust him enough to live with him unafraid, totally defenseless in his presence. We can truly say that John of the Cross’s teaching has as its sole aim to bring us to this inner poverty.”

A person in darkness feels isolated from God. Yet with patience (whether or not one can identify which “dark night” one is experiencing), one can let go of the need to feel God’s presence constantly and gradually move through the darkness to discover greater intimacy with God.

2. *Dryness* is a limited period of feeling emptiness in prayer. “Dryness is more temporary than darkness,” says William A. Barry, S.J., author of *God and You: Prayer as a Personal Relationship*. Anyone who prays will at times feel dryness in prayer, when nothing seems to be happening. “There is little in the way of sensible consolation,” Father Barry said in an interview.

These natural parts of the spiritual life can increase our

appreciation for richer moments. One never knows what kind of inner change occurs during “dry” times, and being with the living God in prayer is always transformative. As a Jesuit novice, I once confessed to my spiritual director that nothing was happening during my prayer. It seemed a waste of time. “Being in the presence of God is a waste of time?” he asked.

Much as even a close friendship goes through some quiet or dull times, so our relationship with God may go through dry patches. But being with a friend in such times is necessary if the friendship is to be sustained and grow in intimacy.

3. *Desolation* is feeling God’s absence coupled with a sense of hopelessness. St. Ignatius Loyola describes it as “an obtuseness of soul, turmoil within it, an impulsive motion toward low and earthly things, or a disquiet from various agitations and temptations.” It is more than feeling dejected or sad. “Desolation is often confused with simply feeling bad,” says Barry. “But it’s more accurate to say it is a feeling of estrangement from God.”

Margaret Silf, a columnist for **America** and author of *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality*, notes that desolation has a quality of isolation. “Those in desolation are turned away from the light of God’s presence,” she told me, “and more focused on the shadows.” Father Barry agrees. “In desolation it’s more about the person than it is about God,” he says. “Ultimately this leads to despair.”



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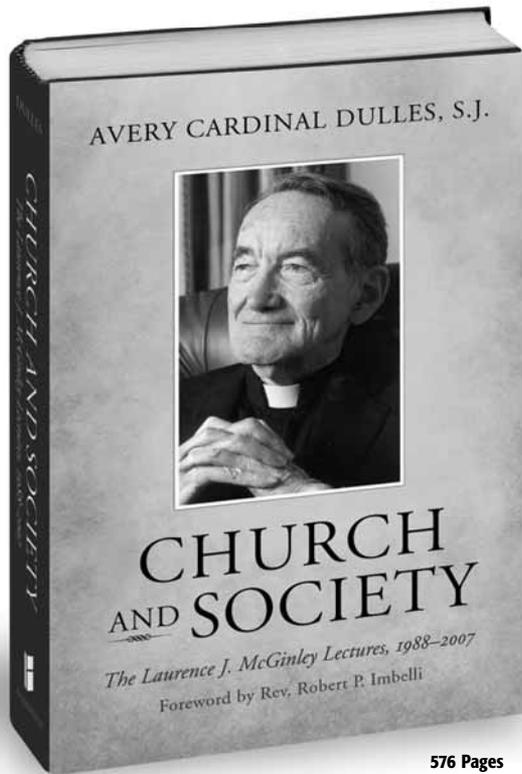
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Desolation is distinct from St. John's dark night. In desolation, writes St. Ignatius, one is moved toward a "lack of faith" and is left "without hope and love." In the dark night the opposite is happening, as one moves toward complete abandonment to God. "For the one experiencing this, it may be easier to see this in retrospect," says Janet Ruffing. "But in the Ignatian worldview, the dark night is actually consolation."

The desolation Ignatius describes may seem far removed from the lives of average Christians. But it is a common, painful state experienced by many people, coupled as it is with feelings of "gnawing anxiety," as Ignatius puts it. He counsels that in these times one should, among other things, redouble one's efforts in prayer, remember times when God seemed more present or remind oneself that it will eventually pass. He also reminds us that all the fruits of prayer are really gifts from God, which we cannot control.

4. *Doubt* is an intellectual indecision about God's existence. Many believers face doubt at some point in their lives. "Most people are relieved to be able to talk about doubt in spiritual direction," says Ruffing. "But no one reaches adult faith without doubt. And frequently people encounter doubt and then move toward a faith that is more complex, paradoxical and, ultimately, more adult."

Doubt is a supremely human experience, shared by nearly every Christian since St. Thomas the Apostle. Recently, in John Patrick Shanley's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, "Doubt," a priest (who faces his own doubts and the doubts of his parishioners about his background) points to this universality in a homily: "When you are lost, you are not alone."

5. *Disbelief* is an intellectual state of not accepting the existence of God. Some commentators concluded that because Mother Teresa suffered darkness, she did not believe in God. Once, in her letters, she bluntly wrote, "I have no faith." But, as Father Barry explains, "She was still praying and writing letters to God."

Sometimes disbelief is a way of discarding old images of God that no longer work for an adult believer. Margaret Silf reflects on her own experience: "I've been through times when all the old props have fallen away, and have felt that I just couldn't go on believing. So what to do? Bolster this old system, or let things be and see what happens? For me, this finally enabled me to break through to a deeper level of faith, which I would call trust." Disbelief is a serious challenge in the spiritual life. If the journey ends at that point, there will be little space for God. The key is to continue seeking, even in the midst of disbelief.

6. *Depression* is a profound form of sadness. In the medical and psychological community, it has a more technical definition. "It's a clinical category that is often able to be

treated medically,” says Barry, who is also a psychologist. “We don’t want to spiritualize primarily psychological problems,” says Jane Ferdon. “But today,” she adds, “we can also psychologize spiritual issues. So it’s very important to discern the root causes of depression.”

In “The Dark Night and Depression,” an essay in Keith J. Egan’s book *Carmelite Prayer*, Kevin Culligan, a Carmelite priest, writes that in the dark night there is an acute awareness of one’s own incompleteness. However, in this darkness one seldom “utters morbid statements of guilt, self-loathing, worthlessness, and suicidal ideation,” as one does during a period of clinical depression.

So one can be in darkness but not be depressed. What about the other way around? Father Barry responds, “Rarely is the clinically depressed person able to experience consolation in prayer.”

Therese Borchart, who writes a blog on depression, “Beyond Blue,” for the spirituality Web site Beliefnet, has suffered from depression herself. She understands it from both a theoretical and a personal point of view and agrees with Barry. “When you’re depressed you feel so angry at God,” she told me. “For some people it can lead you closer to God, as you struggle to express your anger and also cling to God as a last hope. For others it can distance you and lead to turning away from God. In general, though, depression usually leads to darkness and dryness in prayer.” Clinical depression needs to be treated by medical professionals as well as to be addressed in a spiritual setting.

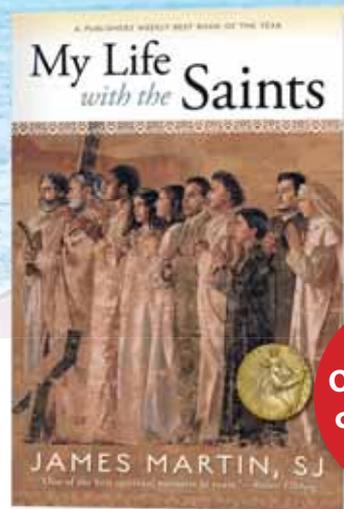
How do spiritual directors and counselors distinguish between darkness and depression? “When I’m with depressed people, I feel swallowed up by their depression,” says Janet Ruffing. “It’s the opposite with people going through the dark night. Once, I accompanied one of our sisters, who was dying, through an experience like this, and in her presence I felt God’s luminosity—though she couldn’t touch it at all.”

Sadness is different from depression. As Barry notes, “Sadness over a painful reality in your life can be a sign that you are in touch with God.” Jane Ferdon says, “These are some of the people who are the most alive, since they are feeling deeply.”

7. *Despair* is a feeling that all is, and will remain, hopeless. The Trappist monk Thomas Merton defined despair in his book *New Seeds of Contemplation* as “the ultimate development of a pride so great and so stiff-necked that it accepts the absolute misery of eternal damnation rather than accept that God is above us and that we are not capable of fulfilling our destinies by ourselves.” The form of despair Merton describes implies that we know better than God does, and what we “know” is that things can never get any better. Such pride leads to a spiritual dead end: despair.

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Poem

Lignum Vitae

What wood is this?

Olive or oak, cedar or pine?
Unsuited for the cabinet maker's art.
Unfit for turning, inlay, elegance,
too warped for any honest use,
door frame or ladder or carrier's cart.

What wood is this?

Sold cheap to minimise the grower's loss.
Too many knots, too twisted,
no good except for firewood or a cross.

What wood is this?

Rough joints, rope lashings
hold it together for the task ahead
and the carpenter's hands
that might have shaped it
as they shaped the world
are made to drag it through the streets instead.

What wood is this?

It is the wood of death,
the wood of life.

Bernard Fyles

BERNARD FYLES, a graduate of Cambridge University, worked for 35 years as a teacher and headmaster in English Catholic schools.

poverty, facing a life-threatening illness or confronted with some other tragedy, despair may seem a rational response. It can also stem from depression. "When you are depressed you are often without hope," says Therese Borchard, "and this can lead to despair."

Jane Ferdon thinks that sometimes despair is not a spiritual dead end, but appropriate. She remembers one woman describing her painful circumstances by saying, "I feel like I'm walking among the living dead." Ferdon always asks people if they can find God in this state. "Also, it's important to know if the despair is a reflection of something else, say, aloneness or depression, and what happens when the person brings that despair to prayer. Sometimes the person doesn't want to pray about it, and if not, why not? That may be where Thomas Merton's notion of pride comes in."

Ferdon respectfully disagrees with Merton in definitively identifying despair with pride. "It may be that pride is actually the opposite of what is happening. Despair can be an experience of letting go of our need to control everything, and it can lead to change, revitalization and even consolation." So while a despair that says, "Nothing can change" is perilous in the spiritual life, a despair that says, "I can't do it by myself" could lead to growth.

Distinctions and Deliverance

One need not be a scholar of Christian spirituality, a spiritual director or a person under spiritual direction to see that disentangling these spiritual strands can be encouraging, clarifying, consoling and freeing. Understanding that most of these experiences are common can encourage us by reducing anxiety. "These are stages in everyone's spiritual life," says Janet Ruffing. Knowing that these stages are not identical can be clarifying and help us discern the correct responses to different events in our spiritual lives. (St. Ignatius, for example, prescribes definite steps to take when one is in desolation.) Being able to bring such experiences to prayer can be consoling, since it can deepen our relationship with God, in the same way that speaking about a thorny problem with a friend can strengthen a friendship and lead to greater intimacy.

Finally, knowing that all these experiences can lead us to God can free us from fear, which can cripple our spiritual lives. For the God by whom Jesus felt abandoned on the cross is the same God who delivered Jesus from death, giving him new life. "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" is the beginning of Psalm 22. A few lines later, though, the psalmist sings another song. "For he did not hide his face from me, but heard me when I cried to him." 



From the archives, "A Meditation on Death and Life," by William A. Barry, S.J., at americamagazine.org.

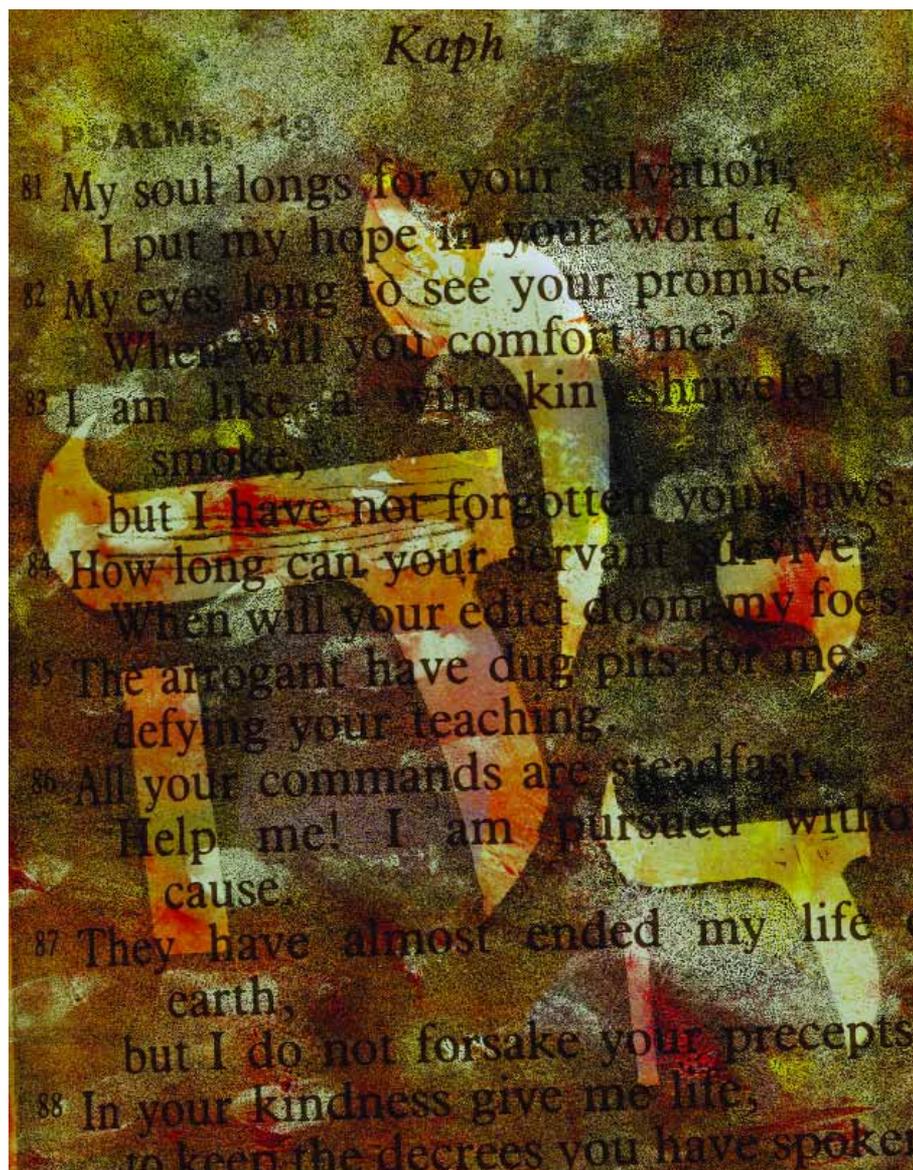
God's Awesome Silence

Understanding the psalmist's anguish

BY DANIEL F. POLISH

NO BOOK OF THE Hebrew Scriptures is more beloved than the Psalms. Many Christians carry with them a book containing the four Gospels and the Book of Psalms. But no book of the Hebrew Bible is regularly bound by itself, except the Psalms. The psalter is treasured. Pious Jews often carry a small volume of *Tehillim* (Psalms) or keep a copy on their nightstands (in Israel today many have substituted there a microfiche card of the entire book). Other books of the Bible might be studied, but the psalms are recited with a special devotion. We may assume that a book that inspires such religious devotion must express a profound sense of God's nearness and concern. And many psalms do exactly that ("Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me"). Yet many others express the precise opposite perspective: a gnawing sense of God's distance or even absence.

RABBI DANIEL F. POLISH, former director of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, is now spiritual leader of Congregation Shir Chadash of the Hudson Valley in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. He is the author of *Bringing the Psalms to Life* and *Keeping Faith With the Psalms* (Jewish Lights).



We encounter this spirit in many psalms:

Why, O Lord, do you stand aloof?
Why hide in times of distress?
Ps 10:1

Awake! Why are you asleep, O Lord?
Arise! Cast us not off forever!
Why do you hide your face,
forgetting our woe and our
oppression?

For our souls are bowed down to the
dust,
our bodies are pressed to the
earth.

Arise, help us!
Redeem us for your kindness'
sake.
Ps 44:24-27

I sing to God my rock:
"Why do you forget me?
Why must I go about in
mourning, with the enemy
oppressing me?"
It crushes my bones that my
foes mock me,
as they say to me day after
day,
"Where is your God?"
Ps 42:10-11

"Where is your God?" indeed. The religious spirit of these ancient texts seems far removed from the attitude of reverence and obedience we expect to find in religious texts. The dominant tone is not God's nearness and accessibility, but God's distance and absence. It is not the comforting, protecting God of

ART BY SEAN OUIRK

Psalm 23 we encounter, but a God who has virtually departed from the scene. If we were to describe the religio-emotional state of the author, it would not be in terms of “quiet confidence” in God, or certitude and trust. Rather we would describe the author’s spiritual frame of mind as anxious, perhaps distraught.

The Painful Silence of God

Ingmar Bergman, who died in 2007, was widely regarded as a great master of the cinema (his biographer, film historian and critic Peter Cowie, called him “probably

the nearest equivalent to a Shakespeare or a Rembrandt that the cinema has produced”). Bergman was the son of a Lutheran pastor. While on occasion his films were humorous or light, Bergman’s most powerful creations were meditations on life and death, the difficulties of establishing true human relationships and a profound theological question: the silence of God. One subset of his oeuvre is referred to as the “Silence of God” trilogy.

Bergman is emblematic of the many people who encounter experiences like those described by the psalmist—the

silence of God—and understand it to signify God’s complete absence. We do not hear from God, they would maintain, because there is no God. For them, the inescapable conclusion of encounter with the awesome silence is atheism.

Is it possible that the Book of Psalms could be an atheist tract smuggled onto the nightstands and into the pews of the pious? Is an acute sensitivity to the deafening silence of God a royal road to denial of God? Or is it something else entirely? For certainly there is a very different way to understand a profound sensitivity to the silence of God.

That question was thrust upon the public consciousness with the publication of *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light* (Doubleday). We learned that Mother Teresa was overcome for decades with a powerful sense of loneliness, even abandonment. God was not close to her, but unutterably remote, silent, unavailable. Ultimately, she found herself unable to pray. She wrote her confessor:

As for me, the silence and the emptiness is so great, that I look and do not see,—Listen and do not hear—the tongue moves [in prayer] but does not speak... I want you to pray for me—that I let Him have [a] free hand.

Many expressed shock that so publicly pious a woman would experience such a sense of distance from her God. Others accused her of hypocrisy, of masquerading as a woman of faith while secretly having none. Some assumed that Mother Teresa was an atheist, understanding the silence of God—and her own reciprocal silence—in the same way as Ingmar Bergman.

Yet the difference between Mother Teresa and Ingmar Bergman is profound and telling. There is another sense in which we can understand the silence that Mother Teresa “heard” and which so many of us hear as well. It is a very different path opened for us by the Book of Psalms. For even the most pained of the psalms does not imagine that God is not. Rather, the anguish is an agonized expression of a keen awareness of God’s reality, but God’s distance from us. God most certainly “is.” But God is not close to us.

Recognizing the gap that separates God and us can arouse emotions analogous to the lovesickness that, in a secular setting, lovers experience when separated from the object of their love. It is not at all a denial of the beloved, God, but a profound affirmation of God—and even of our relation with God—attested to by our sense of separation.

A Loving Connection

In the Hindu tradition such lovesickness for God is one of the seven *bhavas* (forms of love) by which human beings can relate to the deity, all derived from the very human experiences we encounter in the journey of our lives. We can love God as a child loves a parent, or as a parent loves a child. We can love God with the emotion spouses feel for one another. And we can love God with the same emotions as those of a lover who longs to be reunited with an absent loved one.

This conjunction of anguish at separation and, at the same time, the affirmation of the unbrokenness of the underlying connection finds expression in many of the psalms. The God of Psalm 13, for example, is far off, but not dead to the psalmist. Instead, the psalmist cries out to the beloved God to pay heed and be present in a way that God has not been. It is a profound sense of God's being and God's ability to heed and help that provide the emotional energy of this psalm. Indeed, the anguish we hear in the first verses stands as a powerful statement of faith in God and devotion to God.

It is this same kind of affirmation through anguish that we hear in one of the most familiar of the psalms, Psalm 22. We know well the searing pain of the opening words, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Christians recognize the cry as one of the seven last words of Christ, as recorded in Mt 27:46 and Mk 15:34. One can easily imagine a learned Jew of that time quoting these words of the psalm and evoking the emotions associated with them. So the words have become symbolic of an anguished sense of distance from (a perhaps uncaring) God.

One can imagine a casual reader (in a fantasy movie reel playing in my mind, that casual reader is Ingmar Bergman) coming upon these words and misconstruing them as the pathetic lament of someone who has lost faith. But the rest of the

psalm makes such a glib assumption impossible. Instead of treating the non-being of God, or the disappearance of God, it grounds the pain on a powerful affirmation of God's presence in the world and God's ability to be present to humanity. The pain of the opening verses, then, is a deep recognition that God can help but has not. It is belief of the most profound, if painful, kind.

Such anguish can easily be misconstrued as the opposite of faith. In reality it is a tortured expression of profound faith, perhaps what the 16th-century Spanish

mystic St. John of the Cross called the "dark night" of the soul.

'What Does That Matter?'

The Hasidic master Menachem Mendle of Kotzk—called the Kotzker Rov—(d. 1859) spent the last years of his life in self-imposed isolation. Some maintained that he had withdrawn to spend all his time in communion with God. Others recognize that he withdrew from human contact in response to the way he felt God had withdrawn from him. His anguish became an expression of the

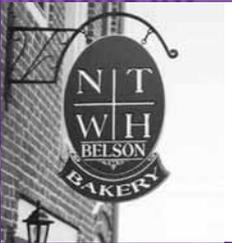
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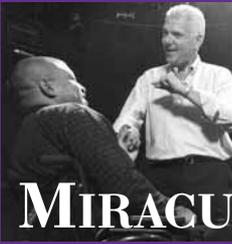
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depths of his faith. His silence—and God’s—became the hallmark of his own pained piety. Martin Buber recounts an episode from the years before the Kotzker Rov removed himself from the world. A disciple came to him:

“Rabbi,” he complained, “I keep brooding and brooding, and don’t seem able to stop.”

“What do you brood about?” asked the rabbi.

“I keep brooding about whether there really is a judgment and a Judge.”

“What does it matter to you?”

“Rabbi! If there is no judgment and no Judge, then what does all creation mean!”

“What does that matter to you?”

“Rabbi! If there is no judgment and no Judge, then what do all the words of the Torah mean!”

“What does that matter to you?”

“Rabbi! ‘What does it matter

to me?’ What does the rabbi think? What else could matter to me?”

“Well, if it matters to you as much as all that,” said the rabbi of Kotzk, “then you are a good Jew after all....”

If it matters to you as much as all that, then you are a person of faith after all. That seems to be the sense in which the Book of Psalms takes our anguish at the awesome silence of God. It seems the spirit in which we can understand the agony of others, even those who, like Mother Teresa, once had a profound experience of God before a long period of God’s silence and the distance it represents.

If it matters to you as much as all that, then you are a person of faith after all: that is the spirit in which each of us can deal with our own encounter with God’s silence. When it descends, may we wrestle with it, struggle to move beyond it and recognize our own anguish for what it is: a mark of the most profound kind of connection to, and love for, God—even when God is silent. **A**

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The God Who Can Save Us

A Theological Journey

Christian Faith and Human Salvation

By Ghislain Lafont, O.S.B.
Translated by John J. Burkhard, O.F.M. Conv.

Liturgical Press. 151p \$15.95 (paperback)
ISBN 9780814652138

Ghislain Lafont is a Benedictine monk of la Pierre-qui-Vire in France and formerly professor of theology at the Ateneo Sant'Anselmo in Rome. Born in 1928, he has had a long theological career in Europe but has received little attention in the United States. *A Theological Journey (Promenade en Théologie)* is only the third of his 10 books to appear in English translation. Described by its author as a “short, synthetic initiation,” the book has a deceptively simple appearance. Although *promenade* in French suggests a leisurely stroll, and the presence early in the book of definitions of such basic terms as “council” and “heresy” reinforces that impression, the book is more like a strenuous hike on a mountain trail, and the reader receives no help when it comes to “onto-theology” and “constitutive rupture.”

A Theological Journey begins from Martin Heidegger's saying, “Only a god can save us.” Christian faith responds to the perennial human need for salvation—how to escape or transcend “all-embracing evil” by finding meaning in suffering. It answers that the god who can save us is “the God who saved Jesus Christ from the dead.” Contemporary theologians have tended to start from either the question or the answer, with the liberal tradition (e.g., Paul Tillich) beginning from human experience while the neo-orthodox (e.g., Karl Barth) and the post-liberals (most recently Robert Barron) start with Christian revelation. Lafont begins with both the human search for salvation and the death and resurrection of Christ, holding the two starting points in a creative tension.

Sometimes it is helpful in reading a difficult book to start with its index. Here the author cited most often is Thomas Aquinas, and the modern author cited most often is G. W. F. Hegel (who is, I

think, the influence Lafont feels most strongly). In the book's first part, a survey of the history of Christian theology, Aquinas appears as the culmination of ancient and medieval theology, working out the implications of Christian revelation in terms of a stable, harmonious world, but at some cost to human freedom and the historical dimension of salvation. Modernity, which Lafont dates from the early 14th century, shifts the focus from timeless truth to human autonomy and history. Initially, modernity saw humanity as both “triumphant” and “wretched”—“triumphant” in Enlightenment philosophy that celebrated human advances in science, technology, the arts and statecraft, but “wretched” as Protestant thought emphasized the uselessness of our works and awareness grew of the great evils that human freedom brought about. Catholic thought, meanwhile, lacked creativity and did not so much respond theologically to the questions of modernity as erect “a monument of doctrine” against them.

It was Hegel, at once theologian and philosopher, who integrated the triumph and the wretchedness. His dialectic, in which each thing finds its identity only through its negation and the consequent “emergence of a new state of affairs that both addresses and transforms the old state of affairs,” made possible the recovery of “the negative element in Christian revelation—the cross of Christ.” Subsequent Christian theology, Lafont believes, has been dominated by the image of the cross, considered as the “kenosis or self-emptying” of God. “Dialectical modernity,” however, tends (in Hegel's Absolute Spirit and Marx's classless society) toward an equilibrium in which history is no longer “open to new possibilities.” Hence it is perceived by its successor, “critical modernity” (what others call “postmodernity”), as “death-dealing.”

In the second part of the book, titled

Book Reviews

“Theology in Outline,” Lafont proposes a way forward that both affirms freedom and offers hope in the face of “the suffocating power of evil that...neither Luther nor Hegel were able to exorcise from the world.” Central to his approach is a distinction between “tragedy” (*tragédie*) and “drama” (*drame*). For Lafont, *tragédie* is the inevitable suffering that results when freedom must limit itself in order to enter into relationship and community. *Drame* refers to human failure—the refusal to enter into communion, the affirmation of the self at the expense of the other—and the consequences of that failure. This resists rendering in English, in which tragedy is a kind of drama, not something to be contrasted with drama. In French, however, *le drame* can refer to a genre that is distinct from both tragedy and comedy and is characterized by suspense and calamity.

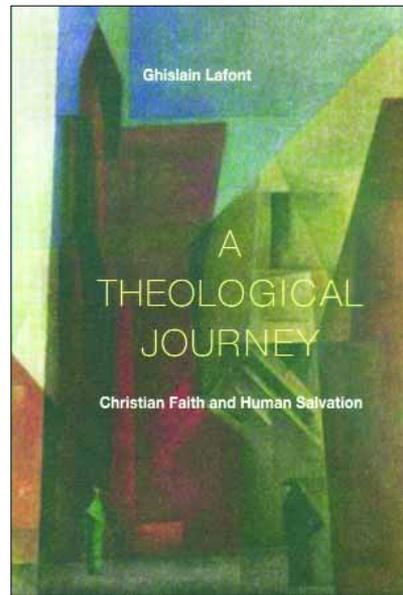
The translator, John J. Burkhard, expresses Lafont's contrast as between “tragedy” and “tragic misfortune,” but the latter is misleading. “Misfortune” happens to us, while *drame* is of our own making. (A French speaker whom I consulted sent me to a Web site in French on the *drame* of Lindsay Lohan's life. In English, too,

The Reviewers

William J. Collinge is the Knott Professor of Theology at Mount Saint Mary's University, Emmitsburg, Md., and the author of *The A to Z of Catholicism*.

The Rev. Patrick J. Brennan, former director of the Office for Evangelization of the Archdiocese of Chicago, is the pastor of Holy Family Parish in Inverness, Ill. His most recent book is *The Mission Driven Parish* (Orbis Books, 2007).

Tom Deignan, the author of *Irish Americans: Coming to America*, is a columnist for The Irish Voice and Irish America magazine.



we would call it “drama,” and we would regard it as a result not of some misfortune but of Lohan’s own choices and actions.) So I am going to render *drame* as “drama.”

Lafont’s outline of theology is contained in two chapters, corresponding to the two “languages,” or thought-frames, of history on the one hand and of creation and being on the other. Contrary to Hegel, Lafont believes these cannot be integrated into a single system. As in the physics of light, we have to set particle-language and wave-language side by side without synthesis, so in general, “The human spirit cannot in any domain arrive at discourse that is both true and exclusively one.”

In keeping with modern thought, and with biblical thought as well, he begins with history, the meaning of which is revealed in the death and resurrection of Christ. Finite human freedom, Lafont says, cannot coexist with other freedom, either human or divine, without the “tragedy” of renouncing itself, dying to itself, in order to allow the other to be. The encounter of freedoms generates a conflict that is beneficial, in that it opens a space for love. But human history is equal-

ly the story of reason acting without love, and this causes the “drama” of sin. The cross of Christ reveals that the meaning of death is “the self-less invocation of God by humanity,” and the resurrection is “the pure invocation of humanity by God.” “Drama” is transformed into the tragedy of love.

History read in the light of Christ reveals that “God is love”: God can only be God in the complete giving of self. This giving is internal to God—the eternal self-giving that constitutes the “immanent Trinity” (the Trinity as it is in itself)—but revealed in the Incarnation of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit (the “Trinity of the economy of salvation”).

Admonishing caution in the use of language about God, Lafont is leery of the tendency to transpose language about the self-emptying and suffering of Christ into talk about the suffering of God (Lafont mentions no living theologians by name, but Jürgen Moltmann comes to mind). In God, Lafont says, there is neither the tragedy of finitude nor the “drama” of sin.

Against the current of postmodern theology, Lafont holds that there is a place for theological speculation on God and

creation—the more static approach that is characteristic of ancient and medieval thought—although it “must be inscribed at the center of reflection on time and covenant.” “God does not exist apart from or before the gift,” but even so we may say—as postmodern theologians are often unwilling to say—that God “is.” And what God imparts in creation is a “true though limited participation” in God’s self-gift. If it were not thought of in terms of creation, finitude would be something evil. Metaphysical theology, then, “far from obscuring the meaning of history, provide[s] the criteria for reflecting on it and living it.”

In the preceding paragraphs, I have surveyed Lafont’s trail as if from the air, overlooking the mountainside life that gives the hike much of its interest. I have passed over the trail spurs that lead into ecclesiology, liturgy, ethics and globalization. There is much in this short book that rewards reading and re-reading. My hope is that the publication of *A Theological Journey* will stimulate American theologians to engage with this challenging and too-little-known European thinker.

William J. Collinge

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From Good to Great

Keeping the Covenant

Taking Parish to the Next Level

By Thomas P. Sweetser, S.J.

Crossroad. 288p \$19.95

ISBN 9780824524661

Thomas P. Sweetser, S.J., has written a readable, helpful follow-up to his *The Parish as Covenant*. *Keeping the Covenant: Taking Parish to the Next Level* builds on his foundational theology and spirituality of parish as articulated in the previous book, but adds to that vision many new, practical steps that can be used by pastors and parish leaders for improving parish life.

Sweetser, director of the Parish Evaluation Project in Milwaukee, Wis., begins by reminding us of what a covenant is: a bond of love that exists between God and God’s people. Then he speaks of the parish as a covenant, or an experience of

the covenant that exists between God and us. There is an implicit critique of the high individualism and isolationism in both American spirituality and culture in general. The author focuses on the crisis of American Catholicism today, with the number of Catholics attending church on weekends now lower than the Protestant average. Yet despite the church's crisis situation, Sweetser speaks of the new life that can emerge and how necessary the organism of the parish is for us to grow in this covenant with our fellow believers and God.

Much attention is devoted to the importance of a parish discovering its mission and being able to articulate that mission in clear, simple ways. The author suggests practical steps for a parish to follow in order to formulate its mission statement—a process that should involve as many people as possible. Sweetser recommends that once articulated, a mission statement must be celebrated and used regularly to remind the parish of where the covenantal community should be going.

In his last book, with its forward thinking on the subject, Sweetser stressed that the pastor can no longer be the sole focus of authority, that pastoral authority must be shared with one or two other people. (Such has been my own experience in pastoring for the last 13 years, working with a staff of ministry directors.)

The second section of *Keeping the Covenant* contains valuable information on structuring for more effective staff meetings. The author offers insightful guidelines about parish governance, dividing parish ministries into commissions, and guiding those commissions for decision-making, evaluation and planning on a common leadership night held monthly. One exceptionally good way to bring more people into leadership, Sweetser suggests, is to move toward a nomination weekend, in which parishioners are

encouraged to nominate people for new leadership roles on various commissions as positions open.

At my parish, for example, there are eight leadership groups (we call them leadership communities). All of our ministry groups have been re-named ministering communities, to reflect—on a smaller scale—the experience of small Christian communities whenever any parish body meets. Sweetser suggests that a staff person be assigned to each of the commissions—serving as an agent of empowerment, rather than control, for the various areas of ministry within a given commission.

Sweetser also speaks of the pastoral council as the glue that holds the parish together, with the pastor truly sharing authority and responsibility with all its members and not diminishing the role of parish leaders to that of mere “advisors.” He also reiterates an idea from his previous book: that on leadership night both pastoral council and leadership commissions can meet in a two-and-a-half-hour period. (Some parishes, however, might find such a gathering unwieldy and perhaps unproductive.)

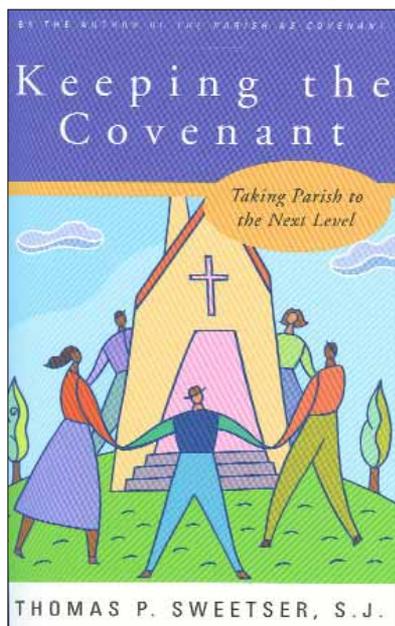
In terms of pastoral planning, Sweetser emphasizes, “asking the folks” is the first step. Parishes need to listen to their people—their needs, their wants, their desires, their experiences of their parish. He views parish leadership as both art and science: the art dimension being development of both intuition and imagination, the science dimension dealing with the culture of discipline that is needed in any organiza-

tion if it is going to be effective.

Space precludes commenting on every area covered in this important book—e.g., adjusting to change, holistic stewardship, parish clustering, sharing time and talent, transition of a pastor and multicultural parishes. What underlies every area, however, are the twin themes of partnership and ownership. Such is the hallmark of a truly covenantal parish.

I strongly recommend *Keeping the Covenant* to pastors, staffs, leadership groups and pastoral councils. This book will help move parishes that are stuck, enabling them to grow and flourish.

Patrick J. Brennan



In Dublin's Fair City

The Deportees

And Other Stories

By Roddy Doyle
Viking, 256p \$24.95
ISBN 9780670018451

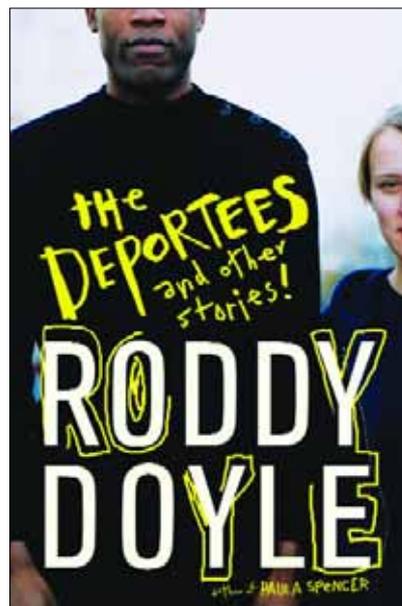
In his 2007 book, *Ireland Now: Tales of Change From the Global Island* (Univ. of Notre Dame Press), William Flanagan

described the disorientation experienced by an Irish-American tourist in western Ireland. Everywhere he stopped, Pakistanis or Indians were running the shops and hotels. There were people with Eastern European accents. Eventually, the befuddled tourist asks, “What’s become of Ireland?”

With *The Deportees*, his first collection of stories, Roddy Doyle sets out to answer this

question in a raucous, if at times superficial, manner.

For two decades now, Doyle has been sending out fictional dispatches about the state of Ireland—or at least Dublin. He



was thrust into prominence in 1986 with *The Commitments*, later made into a scruffy, well-received movie by the director Alan Parker.

One of the more memorable lines from the book had one character, “a working class Dublin musician performing in a soul band,” calling the Irish the “niggers of Europe.” In a short but useful foreword to *The Deportees*, Doyle says that given Ireland’s profound economic, ethnic and racial changes, he would not even think to use that line today. “The line,” Doyle admits, “would make no sense.”

The stories in *The Deportees* first appeared in *Metro Eireann*, a weekly Irish newspaper edited by Nigerian journalists.

The first thing readers need to know is that Doyle’s stories follow strict conventions. They unfold in 800-word chapters, each with a Dickensian, cliff-hanger ending. This is fairly restrictive, so readers should not pick up this book expecting the type of raw complexity Doyle exhibited in his *Barrytown Trilogy* (*The Commitments*, *The Van*, *The Snapper*), or his more recent forays into historical fiction (*A Star Called Henry* and *Oh, Play That Thing*).

Yes, the stories are plotted very tightly, and some characters (particularly several of the noble new immigrants to Ireland) seem shallow or stereotypical. Still, there is much to praise in *The Deportees*. The stories often have the feel of a sharp sitcom or short film screenplay.

Doyle’s humor, meanwhile, is in top form, even in the opening story, “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner.” The plot is hardly inventive—it basically updates the Hepburn-Tracy movie—but the execution, coupled with the spectacle of the story’s traditional Dublin Da being harried by his reflexively progressive daughters, more than makes up for the shortcomings.

The title story, meanwhile, revisits the main character of *The Commitments*, Jimmy Rabbitte. He is more or less happily married now, yet is suddenly itching to round up a band again. This time, though, it will not be a bunch of working-class Dubs but instead a multicultural group meant to reflect the New Irish. The story ends with a scene of global music ecstasy, seemingly meant to drown out a menacing racist who has been threatening Jimmy. Again, the specific devices Doyle uses to execute the story could be stronger, but the effect is powerful. As with many stories in this collection, the whole of *The Deportees* generally is stronger than the sum of its parts.

Bear in mind, as with much of Doyle’s work, American readers should be prepared to slog through a good many Dublinisms, from “howyeha” to “hoor” to “cop on.”

One of the book’s stronger stories, which transcends Doyle’s stated interest in the new Irish melting pot, is “New Boy,” which unfolds in the reliably compelling setting of the classroom and schoolyard. On his first day in class, the young black immigrant Joseph is harassed by a classmate (named Christian, no less). The bully goes so far as to call the boy “Live-Aid,” a reference to the African relief concert organized by Irishman Bob Geldof. Efforts by the teacher to shield young Joseph naturally only make things worse. But by the end, for better or worse, boys will be boys. Christian and Joseph realize that rather than attack each other (like the boys in *Lord of the Flies*), they can instead focus their collective energy on the bumbling woman in the front of the room. In



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this sense, the differences arising from national origin seem less significant when compared to the much more profound sense of alienation that springs from the human condition—even when you are a meek (or snotty) 11-year-old boy.

As Doyle and by now countless other observers have noted, Ireland has undergone a radical transformation in the past 20 years. It will take decades to assess the ramifications authoritatively. This “most distressful country” is peaceful and prosperous. This once devoutly Catholic nation is increasingly secular. This land of *cead mile fáilte* (“a thousand welcomes”), which has sent its children abroad for centuries, is now asking indelicate questions about foreigners.

The new Ireland will certainly soon inspire Joycean works of epic fiction. Until then, you can turn to Roddy Doyle for hilarious, acidic observations about 21st-century Ireland. **Tom Deignan**



Margaret E. Crahan and Nelson P. Valdes discuss “The Boys from Dolores,” at americamagazine.org.

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Amy-Jill Levine is E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Professor of New Testament Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Department of Religious Studies, and Graduate Department of Religion. Her most recent publications include *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (Harper San Francisco, 2006), *The Historical Jesus in Context* (Princeton University Press, 2006), and the fourteen-volume series, *Feminist Companions to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings* (Continuum). She has recorded "Introduction to the Old Testament," "Great Figures of the Old Testament," and "Great Figures of the New Testament" for the Teaching Company.

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Positions

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The Associate Vice President will also work closely with the Vice President and the division's Collaborative Ministry Office and its online ministries in promoting the Jesuit, Catholic mission and identity of the University.

The Associate Vice President must be a Roman Catholic, with a minimum of a master's degree in a related field, such as theology, divinity, ministry or counseling. He or she should have significant experience with administration in ministry, preferably in a Catholic college or university, especially having expertise in planning, program development and staff supervision. Service in Jesuit higher education and experience of Ignatian spirituality is strongly preferred. An appreciation of Catholic social teaching and a commitment to the service of the poor is necessary. A demonstrated facility for serving in a cross-cultural, multi-faith environment is preferred.

To apply for this position, please complete the online application, attaching a cover letter with an extended description of any experience in Jesuit higher education or of Ignatian spirituality at: <http://careers.creighton.edu>. The position is open until filled.

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liturgical, spiritual, outreach and social activities. Responsibilities include promoting social justice through the student service program, alternative spring break trips, and social justice education. Bachelor's degree with two years' ministry experience required; master's degree in theology or ministry preferred. Successful candidate should be able to demonstrate good interpersonal, organizational and communication skills along with dedication to their own personal, spiritual growth. Ten-month/year position to start Aug. 15. For more information and to apply, visit www.cshjrjobs.com. All applicants must be authorized to work in the United States at the time of an offer of employment. AA/EOE.

COORDINATOR OF YOUTH MINISTRY to develop and direct shared high school/junior high programs for two active parishes in the Cleveland area. Applicant should be committed to the eight goals of comprehensive youth ministry, possess pastoral and organizational skills, a background in theology and catechesis, and previous youth ministry experience. \$40,000 to \$50,000 with benefits. Job description is available at www.divineword-kirtland.org. Résumé can be submitted by April 30, 2008, to: Rev. George Smiga, St. Noel Church, 35200 Chardon Road, Willoughby Hills, OH 44094.

DIRECTOR OF THE OFFICE OF ASIAN MINISTRY. The Diocese of Richmond seeks a full-time Director for the new Office of Asian Ministry. The selected candidate will collaborate with parishes and diocesan offices in the evangelization, formation and training of Asians. The Director will also collaborate with the Office for Black Catholics and the Office of the Hispanic Apostolate in order to assess and meet the needs of the community. Additional information is available on the diocesan Web site, <http://www.richmonddiocese.org>. Interested applicants should submit a letter of interest and diocesan application to pbarkster@richmonddiocese.org or by mail to: P. Barkster, H.R. Administration Coordinator, Catholic Diocese of Richmond, 7800 Carousel Lane, Richmond, VA 23294-4201.

PRESIDENT. The Haitian Project, a Catholic N.G.O. that owns, supports and operates a tuition-free, Catholic co-educational secondary boarding school for economically underprivileged, gifted Haitian children is seeking a President.

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For more information visit www.haitianpro-



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PRINCIPAL. Holy Trinity School, a coeducational Roman Catholic elementary school rooted in the Jesuit educational tradition, seeks a principal commencing in the 2008-9 school year. Holy Trinity Parish, located in historic Georgetown in Washington, D.C., and administered by the Jesuits since 1794, has a long history of service to the Washington metropolitan community. Founded in 1818, Holy Trinity School currently enrolls 330 students—from diverse ethnic, racial, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds—in Nursery through Grade 8. The school's faculty and staff, distinguished by their professional experience and enduring commitment to Holy Trinity, are dedicated to the spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical development of every Holy Trinity School student.

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Other qualifications: The successful candidate

will be an experienced and inspirational educator committed to Catholic and Jesuit education. He or she will have the demonstrated capacity to provide successful educational, religious and administrative leadership to the entire school community and to forge effective working relationships with the parish community, neighborhood and other schools in the D.C. metropolitan area. He or she will have superb communication and interpersonal skills; substantial experience in faculty and staff hiring, evaluation and professional development; and a deep understanding of individual learning styles and curriculum theory and development for early childhood through middle school. He or she will demonstrate unquestionable personal integrity and a deep respect and appreciation for children.

If you are qualified and interested in this position, please consult the Web site of the Archdiocese of Washington (www.adw.org/employment) for the required application materials and send by March 30, 2008, the completed application and references to: Director of Professional Development Programs, Archdiocese of Washington, P.O. Box 29260, Washington, DC 20017; e-mail: whelanl@adw.org; Ph: (301) 853-4552; Fax: (301) 853-7670.

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unteer catechetical leaders in the 18 small parishes of Region 10 through consultation, resourcing and implementing the diocesan catechetical norms, and Pathways, the diocesan catechist certification process. The regional minister will also promote adult faith formation in the region and oversee the Region 10 resource library. The selected individual will have a master's degree in religious education, theology or pastoral ministry and have at least three years' experience as a catechetical leader, preferably with small and/or rural parishes. For a position description and additional information regarding this position, contact Dennis Beeman, (804) 359-5661, ext. 113; dbeeman@richmonddioocese.org.

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the Institute of Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry faculties on admissions decisions and outreaches to the local, national, and international communities in order to recruit for STM programs, including religious communities, university recruitment fairs, and conferences of national ministry organizations. He/she meets with potential students considering application to STM programs and serves the primary contact with all prospective students.

Requires a minimum of Master's degree in Theology, Ministry, Education or related field. Three to five years of experience in admissions and recruitment or a related field in higher education, preferably at a school of theology or a graduate professional school. Travel is required in this position.

Please apply online at www.bc.edu/bcjobs and reference job number 7131.

Boston College is an affirmative action, equal opportunity employer. In concert with our Jesuit, Catholic mission, Boston College is dedicated to the goal of building a culturally diverse and pluralistic faculty and staff committed to teaching and working in a multicultural environment and strongly encourages applications from women, minorities, individuals with disabilities and covered veterans.

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experience and three years as assistant principal.

Additional qualifications preferred include: knowledge/experience in school finance and development activities; strong communication skills to work well with advisory board and pastor; understanding and support of multi-cultural and inclusive education. Salary is negotiable, based on experience and degree.

Persons wishing to apply for the position should submit a written expression of interest, accompanied by a résumé, official transcripts and three letters of recommendation, directly to the Search Committee. Materials should be received by Monday, March 31, 2008.

Please direct all correspondence to: Search Committee, St. Aloysius Church, 219 West 132 Street, New York, NY 10027.

ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA, Catholic Student Center, Des Moines, Iowa, is seeking full-time **DIRECTOR OF MUSIC AND LITURGY** to serve on our campus ministry team. St. Catherine is a faith community of students and nonstudents, with a strong tradition dedicated to prayerful liturgical celebrations. Applicant should have education and experience in Catholic liturgical theology. We seek a candidate with a background in music, music ministry and choral direction with organizational skills, strong spirituality and willingness to work in a collaborative setting on campus ministry team. Requirements: Practicing Catholic, bachelor's degree in religious studies, liturgy or equivalent. Knowledge and experience with Catholic liturgy and music and good communication and organizational skills. Preferred: Master's degree in liturgy; practicing musician, either piano or guitar; experience in campus ministry. Send letter of interest, résumé and names and addresses of three references to: Search Committee, St. Catherine of Siena, 1150 28th St., Des Moines, IA 50311. Applications accepted until the position is filled.

ST. LEONHARD'S INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH-SPEAKING ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH, Frankfurt, and St. Mary's Parish of English-Speaking Catholics, Liederbach am Taunus, Germany, in accordance with the Diocese of Limburg, seeks a **PASTOR** to lead our diverse communities starting in mid-2008. Combined membership across the metropolitan area is about 1,000 parishioners from several dozen nationalities; in addition, St. Leonhard's, located in Frankfurt's historic city center, provides a spiritual home to Catholic tourists and business travelers. Both parishes boast teams of volunteers to assist at Mass as lay ministers or organize outside activities, such as retreats and social events. The preferred candidate will be experienced and blessed with an open attitude, as happy providing spiritual counsel to individuals and guidance to groups as he is celebrating Sunday and holy day Masses. Parish Web sites are www.stleonhards.org and www.st-marys.de. For further information, please contact Tom Lavell and Corby Sturges at email@stleonhards.org.

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Letters

Further Questions

Thank you for Gerard F. Powers's "Our Moral Duty in Iraq" (2/18). It would be worthwhile for leaders of our country and our military first to reconcile with those people whose loved ones we violated. This would, I hope, lead to some real discussion about Iraqi autonomy over its resources and government. Powers asks "what policies and strategies best serve the interests of the Iraqi people," but not what Iraqis (including the leaders) actually want. To do what we think would be good for Iraqis without asking what they want the United States to do for them may lead only to more negative feelings toward our country.

*Rob Gularte
Gonzales, Calif.*

Future Burdens

In "Church Teaching and My Father's Choice" (1/21), John J. Hardt makes it clear that he does not like the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's response regarding artificial nutrition and hydration and that he must obey the pre-emptive decision of his father, who has concluded—while in perfect health—that he could never endure the terrible burden of a feeding tube, carefully inserted into his side by a medical professional.

Perhaps Hardt should sit down with his father and suggest to him that such an anxious approach to death may not really be, as he apparently thinks, "the fulfillment of a promise sealed in his baptism." Christ gave us the example. He did not abandon the will of his Father in heaven, even though he knew that his side was soon to be pierced in a way far more "burdensome" than any of us will ever have the misfortune to endure.

*(Dr.) Edward J. Furton
Ethicist and Director of Publications
The National Catholic Bioethics Center
Philadelphia, Pa.*

Lesser of Two Evils

Thank you for the excellent articles by Thomas A. Shannon ("At the End of Life," 2/18) and John J. Hardt ("Church Teaching and My Father's Choice," 1/21).

These pieces reflect an unavoidable

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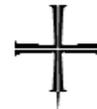
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Letters

challenge implicit in the story of modern, high-technology medicine. We are required to use medical interventions to reach wanted effects even as we recognize the risks of other, unwanted, harmful effects. We must constantly weigh the probabilities of beneficial and harmful outcomes of medical interventions, so we seek a humane, not reckless, proportion of help and harms.

Managing our dying has become inevitable in our era of effective technology-based medicine—not, of course, by inflicting death (deliberately starting a new lethal process—euthanasia) but certainly by managing pain and discomfort with potentially lethal medicines (which we take for granted as morally permitted in palliative care of the dying). More and more often, we must manage our dying by allowing one rather than another lethal process to “win the race” and produce the death that is inevitable—sooner rather than later.

*James F. Bresnahan, S.J.
Boston, Mass.*

Image of God

Thank you for Karen Sue Smith’s “Artful Contemplation” (3/3). I returned home this afternoon from teaching a class where we had discussed art and morality in the context of Leo Tolstoy’s essay “On Art.” I had struggled to articulate how one can enter into the experience of the artist and come to a greater awareness of self, others, the world and God through fine artwork. In the mail was the current issue of **America** with Ms. Smith’s article. I was delighted by her suggestion that art images abound as fertile ground for reflection and prayer. In her description of first seeing van Gogh’s paintings from Arles, she nicely captured the essence of what I wanted to say. We have long become used to turning to spiritual reading as a source of prayer, but it is refreshing to think of a visit to the Cloisters, or any art museum for that matter, as a source of contemplation.

*Donald Casey
Mahwah, N.J.*

Invisible Footprints

I agree with Lori Erickson (“The

Letters

Mysteries of Lourdes," 2/25) that places of pilgrimage can be truly inspiring. At Lourdes the faith in God, the hope of cures or blessings and the true charity toward other seekers are all quite palpable. There are many other places where people's faith and love seem to live on and permeate the entire site. Assisi is one of them; the spirit of Francis can still be felt there. I also find this in many old churches because of all the prayers, love, fears and sorrows that have been brought there through the years.

I experienced something different but equally impressive at Dachau. The pain and suffering, the anger and agony are so strong there that the very stones seem to moan.

Human beings seem to leave invisible footprints wherever they go. But, like Lori Erickson, one has to go with an open mind and an open heart to make contact with them.

*Lucy Fuchs
Brandon, Fla.*

Soldiers of Christ

While appreciating the position of Patricia McCarthy, C.N.D., against accepting ads recruiting military chaplains (Letters, "War Profits," 2/11), I must disagree. I have been opposed to our invasion of Iraq and many aspects of the prosecution of that war, but I believe that Catholic priests are needed to minister to the men and women who serve in our armed forces. I also support **America's** acceptance of money for ads for priests to minister to our military. It would be irresponsible not to provide them with ministry.

There have been warriors in whom God has worked and does work. In our quest for peace, we are still called to love and minister even to those with whom we disagree.

*Mary Frost, S.D.S.
Oregon, Wis.*

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The Word

The Women at the Tomb

Easter Sunday (A), March 23, 2008

Readings: Acts 10:34, 37-43; Ps 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23; Col 3:1-4; Mt 28:1-10 (or Jn 20:1-9)

“Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid!’” (Mt 28:10)

FOR CHRISTIANS, EASTER Sunday is the most important day on the calendar. We believe that the resurrection of Jesus has changed everything. The special Easter word is “Hallelujah” (from two Hebrew words that mean “Praise the Lord”), and it expresses the joy and happiness we should feel (even if we are unsure of its etymology and exact meaning). But the first Easter as it is described by Matthew (and the other Evangelists) did not start out that way.

Imagine yourself walking beside Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” early on Easter Sunday. They were going to the tomb (a burial cave cut out of the limestone surrounding Jerusalem) where they supposed that Jesus’ corpse was laid out on a niche or platform. They wanted to complete the preparations of his body according to the Jewish burial ritual of the time. The reason for the “spices” was to keep down the smell. They assumed that Jesus’ body would decompose over a year’s time; then they would gather his bones and place them in a stone box called an ossuary.

The two Marys were surely confused and discouraged that morning. Their teacher and friend Jesus of Nazareth, renowned for his wisdom and compassionate healing, had been executed as a criminal by crucifixion, one of the cruelest punishments known, one reserved for rebels and slaves. The two women had hoped that Jesus would win over their people by his wisdom and goodness. They had hoped that he would bring about the kingdom of God on earth, but now he was

DANIEL J. HARRINGTON, S.J., is professor of New Testament at Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, Mass.

dead. These women had stayed at the site of his crucifixion. They saw him suffer; they saw him die; they saw where he was buried. Now all that remained for them was to go to the burial cave provided by Joseph of Arimathea and help give Jesus a proper burial. Their lives, once full of hope, had been thrown into chaos and confusion.

But to their astonishment, they found the tomb both opened and empty. None of the rational explanations—that the women went to the wrong tomb, that Jesus had not really died and somehow had revived and walked away or that someone had stolen his body—made sense of all the facts. An angel at the site told them, “Do not be afraid. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said.” The amazing, spectacular and miraculous explanation was that God had raised Jesus from the dead. With the greeting “Do not be afraid,” the angel echoed the words of another angel to Joseph in his confusion over the conception of Jesus at the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel, as well as Jesus’ own reassurances to his confused disciples and the crowds during his public ministry.

Yet Matthew’s account does not end with the empty tomb. Rather he recounts that on their way to tell the other disciples about what they saw at the tomb, the women encountered the risen Jesus and “did him homage”—a verb especially prominent in the story of the Magi in Matthew 2 and one that recurs in the account of the risen Jesus’ appearance to his male disciples in Galilee. The risen Jesus greets the two Marys with the words that the angel used, “Do not be afraid.” Matthew’s Gospel begins and ends with this hopeful and comforting message.

These words did not dispel entirely the women’s confusion. The risen Jesus



ART BY TAD DUNNE

did not lay out a clear and secure path for their immediate future. The women did not know then how the story of Easter was going to turn out, as we do some 2,000 years later. Still, the words “Do not be afraid” gave them hope and comfort. The words inspired them to remain faithful to their beliefs and hopes about Jesus and his movement, to move forward in their own lives and to help spread the good news about Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. By fulfilling the risen Jesus’ commission to tell the male disciples to go to Galilee, Mary Magdalene has come to be known as “the Apostle to the Apostles.”

On this Easter day, the risen Jesus offers us the same message of hope and comfort, “Do not be afraid.” The problems in our personal lives, our church, our country and our world will not be solved overnight and disappear. Because of them, we may well remain confused and discouraged amid what may seem like chaos to us. But the promise of Easter is that in the end life triumphs over death, good conquers evil and hope overcomes despair. The message of the risen Jesus this Easter, as on the first Easter, is one of hope and comfort. As the risen Jesus said to the women on their way from the tomb, so he says to us: “Do not be afraid.”

Daniel J. Harrington

Praying With Scripture

- How is your life this Easter? What has you confused and discouraged?
- In what sense is Mary Magdalene the Apostle to the Apostles?
- What is your response to the words, “Do not be afraid”?