



# America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

JUNE 22-29, 2009 \$2.75

## What's Next?

RE-ENVISIONING THE U.S. ECONOMY

CHARLES K. WILBER

# OF MANY THINGS

Last December my family joined thousands of others who stood in long snaked lines to ride the Phoenix Metro Light Rail on its opening day. A New Yorker since 1984 who regularly rides buses, subways and trains, I wasn't sure what a "light rail" was, and imagined it to be a miniature train like you'd find in a theme park. When a full-sized, sleek dual-car train pulled up to the platform, I laughed out loud at my puny imaginings.

That free ride was not only fun, it was a family first. No one in my family, which moved to Phoenix from Ohio in the 1950s, had ever taken public transportation in the city before. Phoenix has always been a car town. Like most Phoenicians we found the words "public transit" foreign; translated, the term meant "slow, infrequent bus to nowhere." Our town was practically cableless and busless and had no trolleys or commuter trains. Every family needed a car, and every business needed a parking lot—a recipe that led to sprawl (500 square miles of it), congestion and pollution. None of that has changed.

But the city itself is changing. With over four million people in its metropolitan area, Phoenix is consciously constructing an urban core. Phoenix has recognized the potential of its downtown to attract tourists and residents who find appealing the rich cultural offerings—the museums, library, civic center, sports arenas, galleries, theaters and cafés. A decade ago, the city designated particular downtown neighborhoods as "historical districts" and offered owners tax incentives to restore their homes. That success spawned new apartment construction nearby, well-attended Friday night "art walks" and street fairs. Then Arizona State University built a spanking new campus downtown, diverting some of its 67,000 students there, with student housing and commercial attractions to follow. The light rail could pull the tourists, students and

residents together into one vibrant city center.

Constructing the light rail entailed risk and controversy. Laying track down the city's main boulevard required uprooting the tall, picturesque palms that lined both sides of Central Ave. But the train promises more benefits than the palms gave. While the initial rail route covers just 20 miles, the train links with a number of buses and park-and-ride lots and moves people seven days a week from a shopping mall on the city's west side down Central Ave., across the Salt River to Tempe (where the main A.S.U. campus is located), ending in Mesa, Arizona's third largest city. If the public uses it, the light rail could invigorate Phoenix. It could also empower a workforce of low-income residents who have been all but trapped until now inside this city ringed by highways.

Just as the financial crisis hit, Phoenix launched its light rail. A shrinking tax base could adversely affect its progress. Then again, the rail might become a transportation lifeline. Once Phoenix was a set of suburbs without a center. Today, with a real public transportation system in place and a plan to develop its core, Phoenix is finally coming of age as a city.

During a visit last month I took a free shuttle bus from the Phoenix International Airport to the closest light rail stop, where a handful of others and I bought \$1.25 tickets from a vending machine. We waited 10 minutes for a train at midday. As diverse passengers boarded, I noticed that several hung their bicycles onto the overhead racks in a bicycle car. I disembarked at stop No. 9 and pulled my rolling suitcase two blocks to my sister's house. It was a breeze.

This jaded New Yorker and long-time public transit advocate even felt a twinge of envy that any trip from the airport could be so quick, so cheap and so easy.

**KAREN SUE SMITH**

# America

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Cover: A man stops as he looks for a job during a job fair at Miami Dade College in Miami, Fla., on March 4, 2009. Photo: Reuters/Carlos Barria

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## ON THE WEB

Jim McDermott, S.J., describes his **journey to Australia** on our podcast, and John Coleman, S.J., reviews the film "**Goodbye Solo**" (right). Plus, from the archives, **Flannery O'Connor** on the "Church and the Fiction Writer."



### Cigarettes, Teens and Movies

Images of glamorous women and rugged men smoking cigarettes have long been a movie staple. In the 1960s, after the U.S. surgeon general determined that smoking and death are related, movie makers began to tone down such images. Depictions of smoking declined from 10.7 per hour of film in 1950 to five in 1980-82, but were back up to 10.9 in 2002. Smoking in movies has now returned to 1950 levels, and health advocates link the change to increased smoking among teens. Such images have continued in blockbuster movies like "X-Men Origins: Wolverine," a PG-13 rated film that shows the character played by Hugh Jackman smoking.

In late May, to counter this kind of appeal to teens, the American Medical Association, together with the Los Angeles County health department, began a deterrence-based publicity campaign with the headline "Which Movie Studios Will Cause the Most Youth to Start Smoking This Summer?" Studies have shown that once smoking has begun, it is likely to continue if the smoker began before the age of 20. They have also alleged that half of new smoking by teens can be attributed to movie actors' smoking.

Images of tobacco use in Hollywood movies, moreover, have global influence. U.S. films account for over 60 percent of box office receipts worldwide. A 2008 Australian study found that 70 percent of top box office films showed characters smoking. In the United Kingdom, where almost all forms of tobacco advertising are prohibited, blockbuster movies, with their smoking scenes, make billions. Hollywood must do better at policing itself to stem this dangerous, youth-threatening trend.

### Bum Stomping

Hoping to stem violent attacks on homeless people, attacks that perpetrators sometimes call "bum stomping," Maryland has become the first state to categorize such assaults as hate crimes. In signing the legislation in early May, Governor Martin O'Malley added homeless persons to the list of protected categories under the state's existing hate-crimes laws. These allow prosecutors to call for harsher penalties for those who attack people not just because of sexual orientation, race, religion or ethnicity, but now also because of their status as homeless persons. The law takes effect on Oct. 1.

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, attacks on homeless people have been increasing nation-

wide over the past decade. Perpetrators are mostly teenagers and young men. In one Florida case last year, a 15-year-old boy killed a homeless man by laying a log across his chest and jumping on it. The coalition reports that in another attack in Florida (incidents have been especially numerous in that state), a surveillance camera recorded one of several teens laughing as he beat a homeless man with a baseball bat. In New York City an assailant poured flammable liquid on a man sleeping on a piece of cardboard outside an East Harlem church. The victim died of his burns.

Maryland deserves credit for leading the way in identifying attacks on homeless people as hate crimes. California, Texas and Ohio are considering similar legislation. It cannot be enacted soon enough as a needed protection for an especially vulnerable class of human beings.

### A Higher Righteousness

Over the course of his career, George Tiller, M.D., performed over 60,000 abortions, specializing in what are euphemistically called "late-term" abortions. His murder at Wichita's Reformation Lutheran Church on Sunday, May 31, has sparked soul-searching among some pro-life advocates. Did incendiary speech against brazen abortionists contribute to an overheated environment that then led to the doctor's murder? Was Scott Roeder, the unstable man who allegedly killed Tiller, egged on by "hate speech"? What moral responsibility do activists and church leaders bear to prevent moral and political criticism on both sides of the abortion divide from escalating into hate speech?

It is not hard to find examples of incendiary speech. Tiller's critics were wont to step up to the line of incitement and then draw back. Bill O'Reilly regularly called the Kansas doctor "Tiller the baby killer" and devoted 29 segments of his Fox television show to vilifying him. "If I could get my hands on Tiller..." he threatened. "Well, you know. Can't be vigilantes.... It doesn't get worse. Does it get worse? No." Bishop Robert Finn of Kansas City is now best known for his proclamation to the Gospel of Life Convention in April: "We are at war!" Though the bishop went on to explain that the struggle is a spiritual one and the means nonviolent, he announced an apocalyptic struggle against evil "that may rival any in time past."

Defenders of life must recall the warning of the Sermon on the Mount: "If a man calls his brother 'Fool,' he will answer for it...; and if he calls him 'Renegade,' he will answer for it in hell fire." For the Gospel of Life to be good news, it must reflect a higher righteousness.

# Community of Disciples

St. Ignatius Loyola suggests that in any exchange, “it is necessary to suppose that every good Christian is more ready to put a good interpretation on another’s statement than to condemn it as false.” To this call for charity, St. Ignatius added that if correction is necessary, it ought to be delivered with respect and kindness. Those qualities of respect and kindness have at times been hard to find in many of the heated arguments in which American Catholics have found themselves embroiled over the past 12 tumultuous months.

Can a Catholic in good conscience vote for Barack Obama? For John McCain? May pro-choice politicians be given Communion? Should the legal fight to overturn *Roe v. Wade* bear the full weight of Catholic political energy; or are there other, more effective strategies for combating the culture of death? Should the University of Notre Dame award an honorary degree to President Obama, or even invite him at all? Should there be more frequent celebrations of the liturgy in Latin; and if so, what version of the Mass texts should be used? Issues like these have always sparked much discussion in the Catholic community, but they are now often dominated by a tone that is decidedly dangerous—harsh and often lacking in respect or courtesy.

This rhetoric has threatened the credibility of the church, as the Catholic tradition of trust and toleration has been de-emphasized. Even a few bishops have made statements like “We are at war” and “Tolerance is not a Christian virtue,” suggesting that any notion of the common good has given way to a sharply defined “us versus them” mentality. Such rhetoric also subtly undermines the Catholic principle of subsidiarity first put forth by Pope Pius XI in *Quadragesimo Anno*, according to which a pluralistic social structure allows and encourages constructive input from a variety of groups on the grass-roots level.

This polarization must stop; otherwise our identity as a faith community will be torn asunder and Catholicism will cease to be an elevating force for change. How can we decrease the polarization? A vital first step is to seek out our common ground in the major civic areas where almost all Catholics agree: religious liberty; the sacredness of all human life; the goal of reducing and eventually eliminating abortion; support for social programs that provide a safety net for the poor; the elimination of segregation, racism and discrimination; and respect for differing religious and social traditions and diverse cul-

tures. Few are the Catholics who do not share these principles, which provide a ready-made common ground.

We also need to find a way to foster civil debate and dialogue on how to incorporate and share our values in a pluralistic society. Recognizing the distinction between moral principles and their application, we can disagree in good conscience on the way such principles are prudentially applied in the public sphere. Even when disagreeing over the concrete applications of moral principles, we also must respect the good will of those with whom we disagree. Tolerance, charity and respect are not “weasel words,” nor are they excuses to paper over legitimate differences among Catholics. Rather, they are essential elements for a church in which members work together toward common goals, by supposing, as St. Ignatius wrote, that everyone is striving to act for the greater good.

Our bishops must take the lead in this conversation in the Catholic community. As the Second Vatican Council noted: “Bishops should make it their special care to approach men and initiate and promote dialogue with them. These discussions on religious matters should be marked by charity of expression as well as by humility and courtesy, so that truth may be combined with charity, and understanding with love.” As many have noted, our bishops also need to be careful that they do not overstep their bounds when they prescribe specific policy recommendations, lest they sacrifice their spiritual authority by appearing to be partisan political figures.

In his book *Models of the Church*, the late Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J., highlighted the image of the church as a “community of disciples.” This image from the early church (Acts 6:1-2) sees every Christian united in learning from and following Christ. Here the church is always a learning church led by the Spirit, not yet in full possession of the truth. A disciple is by definition one who has not yet arrived, but is on the way to full conversion. This more humble view of a pilgrim church always in need of purification and improvement may help to tone down the rhetoric and encourage Catholics to work together in addressing the great issues of our day, especially those involving the culture of life. True dialogue, as Cardinal Dulles noted, enables the church “to understand its teaching better, to present it more persuasively and to implement it in a pastoral way.”



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**About Your Speaker**

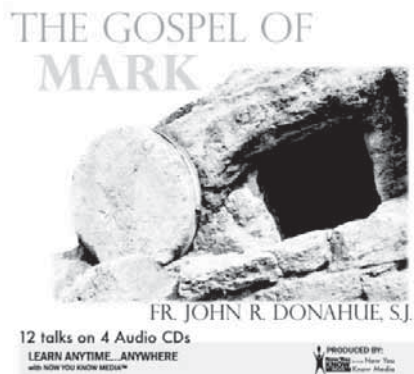
Fr. John R. Donahue, S.J., S.T.L., Ph.D. is the Raymond E. Brown, Distinguished Professor of New Testament Studies (Emeritus) St. Mary's Seminary and University, Baltimore, MD, and is presently Research Professor in Theology at Loyola College in Maryland. Fr. Donahue is past President of the Catholic Biblical Association of America, and has served on national and international ecumenical dialogues. He has taught at the Vanderbilt Divinity School, The Jesuit School of Theology in Berkely, and the Pontical Biblical Institute in Rome.

Did you know that Mark is the only Gospel in which the word that translates to “good news” actually appears? Although the shortest and most plain-spoken of all the Gospels, it is also a crucial independent source on Jesus, His life, and His ministry.

A Catholic priest since 1964, he is the author or coauthor of four books and numerous articles on Mark's Gospel, and won a Catholic Press Association Book Award in 2002. From 1998 to 2001, he wrote the weekly “Word” column on scripture for *America Magazine*.

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# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

CAIRO ADDRESS

## Religious Leaders Praise Obama Speech

**T**he Vatican media and religious leaders worldwide have welcomed President Barack Obama's speech in Cairo, Egypt, as a step toward peace and a new beginning for U.S. relations with the Muslim world. The Vatican's spokesman, Federico Lombardi, S.J., said that the speech on June 4 brought "an element of hope" to the world. "The undeniable political weight of the United States is being employed with clarity toward objectives that are certainly crucial for peace in the world," Lombardi said. He cited several concerns touched upon in the speech, including an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, nuclear disarmament, religious freedom, democratic values, development and women's rights. "These are openings toward directions in which very many people of good will want to cooperate in order to find the right way for humanity," Lombardi said.

The Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, wrote that President Obama "went beyond political formulas, evoking concrete common interests in the name of a common humanity," including peace, security, education, work, family life and religious values. On the question of Iraq, the newspaper said, Obama "marked a break with the past" by citing the need for the United States to use diplomacy and international consensus to solve problems.

Vatican Radio also reported on the

speech, saying that it "went beyond expectations" as a reconciliation effort with Muslim countries. "The words pronounced at the University of Cairo are much more than an extended



hand, but the foundation of a real common platform for launching what [Obama] defines as a new beginning in relations between the United States and the Middle East," it said.

CHINA

## Vatican Encourages Reconciliation

**T**he Vatican has published a new commentary on Pope Benedict XVI's 2007 pastoral letter to Chinese Catholics that encourages the faithful to begin a process of spiritual reconciliation even before "a structural merger of official and unofficial Catholic communities can take place."

The 2007 letter contained directives for bridging the gap between those Catholic communities that have registered with the Chinese authorities and operate under state restric-

tions, and those Catholic communities that have operated in a more clandestine fashion, allowing them to profess full fidelity to the Roman church. While the 2007 letter strongly criticized the limits placed on the church's activities, it invited a new and serious dialogue with the government on several key issues, including the appointment of bishops. The new commentary, which was released on May 24, is intended to address questions that have arisen since 2007.

In addition to praying for one

another, Catholics in China must take concrete steps, including sharing pastoral projects and undertaking common initiatives, according to the new document. "It is by means of practical steps that spiritual reconciliation, including visible reconciliation, will gradually occur, which will culminate one day in the complete structural unity," the Vatican wrote. While reconciliation is a journey that will not be concluded overnight, the necessary steps cannot "be postponed because—or on the pretext that—they are difficult since they require the overcoming of personal positions or views."

The new document also reaffirmed Pope Benedict's insistence that some





Watching the speech in Baghdad

**Religious Leaders.** Mario Scialoja, an official of the Islamic Cultural Center of Italy, said Obama's speech signaled a change from the approach of the administration of President

George W. Bush. He said it was especially important that Obama recognized Muslims as a part of American society and called Islam a religion of peace, citing verses from the Koran. "It seems to me," Scialoja said, "that Obama has touched the right chords in the hearts of Muslims and the entire world and that he has opened an era of more receptive and more frank dialogue between the United States and the Islamic world."

In the Middle East, several Christian leaders said they were generally impressed with Obama's speech but wanted action to follow the president's words. "It's a speech that has been needed for a long time, and the U.S. president had the courage to make it," Chaldean Bishop Youssef Sarraf of Cairo said. He expressed the hope that "Islam and the Arab world will know how to receive this extended hand.... It's the beginning of a new process, a new era. Obama really wants to change things, and the image of the United States will benefit from

it," Bishop Sarraf said.

Archbishop Paul Dahdah, apostolic vicar of Beirut, Lebanon, said he hoped the speech would spur real initiatives aimed at resolving the "root of all problems in the region," the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "If that does not happen, the extended hand will not lead to any result," he said.

Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Franciscan priest who is head of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, said Obama was sincere, determined and very balanced in his speech, confirming the U.S. relationship with Israel but signaling a change in strategy with the Muslim world. "This should give an impetus to the search for a solution to the main problem, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," he said.

Pizzaballa added that it was significant that Obama had recognized the potential role of the militant group Hamas in a future peace settlement, asking at the same time that Hamas recognize Israel.

aspects of the state-approved church, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, "cannot be reconciled with Catholic doctrine," particularly its claim to have authority over individual bishops in guiding the Catholic community as well as its professed independence from the Vatican. At the same time the new document, like the 2007 letter, said that registration with the government is acceptable as long as it does not compromise principles of the faith and church communion and as long as it does not force church leaders to perform actions contrary to their consciences.

The commentary re-emphasized the pope's position that determining

whether or not to cooperate with the government is a decision that must be made by the local bishop in consultation with his priests, since government officials in different parts of China place different conditions on local bishops. "The pope neither excludes the possibility of accepting or seeking government recognition nor encourages doing so; the ideal would be to abandon the clandestine condition, but everything depends on the con-

straints imposed," it said.

The new document also stated that individual Catholics have wide latitude in deciding whether or not to receive the sacraments from bishops and priests who are recognized by the government but have not requested recognition from the Holy See. "If the bishop or the priest celebrant is in communion with the pope, the faithful 'should not hesitate' to receive the sacraments from him," it said. If Catholics cannot find



At Mass in Changzhi, China

pastors in communion with the pope and if they feel they need the sacraments at that moment for their spiritual good, the final decision on whether or not to receive them is up to the individual.

## Indian Forces Set to Leave Orissa

Some church leaders have expressed alarm over the Indian federal government's plan to withdraw its forces from Orissa State. "The situation is still very tense and the withdrawal of federal forces will cause panic among people," said the Rev. Ajay Singh, who tracks casualties from Hindu-led violence for the Archdiocese of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar. But some observers maintain that the local police can handle the situation now that Orissa has a secular government. The Indian government announced on June 1 that it would withdraw its paramilitary forces from the Kandhamal district of Orissa within a month. Government forces were sent to the district two weeks after Hindu extremists launched a sustained wave of violence against Christians in the eastern state in August 2008. The attacks claimed approximately 90 lives and left more than 50,000 people, mostly Christians, homeless.

## Saudi Foreign Minister Visits Vatican

Vatican officials met with Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Prince Saud Al Faisal, on June 5 in Rome to discuss ideas that came out of the Saudi-sponsored World Conference of Dialogue in Spain in 2008. Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, met with the prince for the closed-door deliberations. The 2008 conference in Madrid brought together representa-

## NEWS BRIEFS

A British court ruled on June 1 that the social services agency of the Catholic Diocese of Leeds, England, could not continue as an adoption agency unless it assessed **same-sex couples** as potential adopters and foster parents. • Even with a proposed amendment to include public institutions, a New York bill that would temporarily waive the statute of limitations on filing sex abuse lawsuits, called **the Markey Bill**, "remains terrible public policy," according to the New York State Catholic Conference. • Pope Benedict has granted the Vatican Congregation for Clergy new **powers to dismiss from the priesthood** priests who are living with women, who have abandoned their ministry for more than five years or who have engaged in seriously scandalous behavior. The new powers do not apply to cases involving the sexual abuse of minors by a priest; those cases continue to be overseen by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. • **Thomas Berry**, a Passionist priest internationally regarded as the dean of those working to relate ecology to spirituality, died on June 1 at the age of 94. • Franciscan Father **Michael Perry** of the United States was elected June 5 as vicar general of the Order of Friars Minor.



Michael Perry

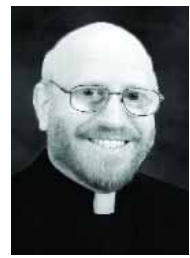
tives of the major religions, including Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism as well as hundreds of religious, political and cultural figures. The conference addressed common concerns for all religions, such as morality and protecting the environment. The Vatican and Saudi Arabia do not have formal diplomatic ties, but King Abdullah met with Pope Benedict XVI in 2007, the first such meeting between a pope and a reigning Saudi monarch. The public practice of religions other than Islam is forbidden in Saudi Arabia, and the Vatican has repeatedly asserted the importance of religious freedom.

## Israeli Ministry Reverses Decision

An Israeli Ministry of Finance decision to seize the funds of several Catholic institutions in Israel in order to force

them to comply with taxation regulations was reversed June 8 after several hours of bewilderment. "The tax assessor was of the opinion that he should collect the relevant taxes, but as a result of consultations with the chief legal advisor of the Israel Tax Authority, it was decided that the matter fell within the framework of the status quo and the situation was rectified," said an official with the Ministry of Finance. "The status quo as stipulated in the Fundamental Agreement between the state of Israel and the Holy See is being fully maintained by the state of Israel," he added. Israel and the Holy See are in the final stages of negotiations on an agreement about the financial status of the church in Israel. The parties met most recently on April 30, just prior to Pope Benedict XVI's pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

From CNS and other sources.



# The Age of Distraction

Consider three vignettes. Each unfolded during a May weekend in Boston. While highlighting the pernicious effects of mobile technology, these incidents say as much about human choices as they do about gadgets themselves.

1) Near the end of a Friday evening commute, beneath downtown Boston, a subway car plowed into the rear of another Green Line trolley, injuring 49 commuters. The operator immediately admitted to being distracted by the act of sending a text message to a friend on his cellphone.

2) Minutes later, two miles west at Fenway Park, fans roared in joy as the Red Sox tied a spirited game against the rival Tampa Bay Rays with a three-run homer off the bat of slugger Jason Bay. The packed grandstand was rocking as I rose to my feet to follow the towering arc of the ball. But two nearby fans did not return my offer of a high-five. They were too busy operating their smart phones.

3) Thirty-six hours later, the Minuteman Bikeway was filling up with joggers and cyclists enjoying the first truly warm weekend morning of the notoriously late-arriving New England springtime. Flowering trees were blooming at last. A great variety of songbirds, just back from winter hibernation, were serenading the eager folks jogging and pedaling along. (Note to self: find a good guide to songbirds of the Bay State.) But many missed the delightful natural concert. Their ears were wired to iPods and Walkmans. I even spied a few parents

sporting earphones, despite the presence of their children inches away, strapped into carrier seats on the back of their bikes.

Anybody with a conscience will be horrified at the serious harm inflicted by the malfasant transit driver. Within days this abuse was addressed by changes in local public policy. If you share my distress at the opportunities missed in the other episodes for human connection and sheer joy, then you will join me in hoping for changes in the personal policies people set for their use of technology. On both micro and macro levels, our society has some hard thinking to do regarding appropriate limits on distracting gadgets.

Full disclosure: I may be the least qualified person to make recommendations on such matters. Although not a pure Luddite, I have somehow steered clear of most of the distractions that enthrall the tech-savvy. I have never been on Facebook or MySpace, the major social networking sites. I have never owned a cellphone or sent a text message. I have blogged exactly four times. I don't know a Blackberry from a Blu-Ray.

But I have seen enough to notice that American society has been grappling of late with the theme of mindfulness, or the lack of it in our world today. On the positive side, I was delighted to learn that my alma mater, Amherst College, recently instituted a "day of mindfulness" on its campus, offering meditation breaks and encouraging students to take a media and technology fast. I was also pleased

to hear the filmmaker Ken Burns, in his recent commencement address at Boston College, issue a warning about how mobile technology disengages people from one another, even as it purports to connect us. I believe we are witnessing at least a modest revival of interest in what Thoreau expressed in *Walden*: a yearning to live life more deliberately.

I offer a final incident from my own city. The beloved leafy Boston Common swarms in springtime with panhandlers. A homeless gentleman seemed inordinately glad for the few coins I fished out of my pocket as I walked down a bending path there recently. He sighed that practically everyone passing by that afternoon was, in his words, "out of reach."

I interpret this to mean that most of my fellow strollers were locked into the interior world of music streaming through ear pods or in cellphone conversation.

Fiddling with a handheld device turns out to be the perfect way to avoid eye contact with a beggar and the perfect excuse not to hear a request for spare change. Now, I hold no particular brief for the practice of panhandling. But the incident did lead me to think of the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke's Gospel, in which the very existence of the needy man at his gate went unacknowledged by the affluent man. If technology is rendering this sort of deliberate oblivion more likely, then let's unplug and make a choice for immediacy.

Our society has some hard thinking to do about the use of mobile technology.

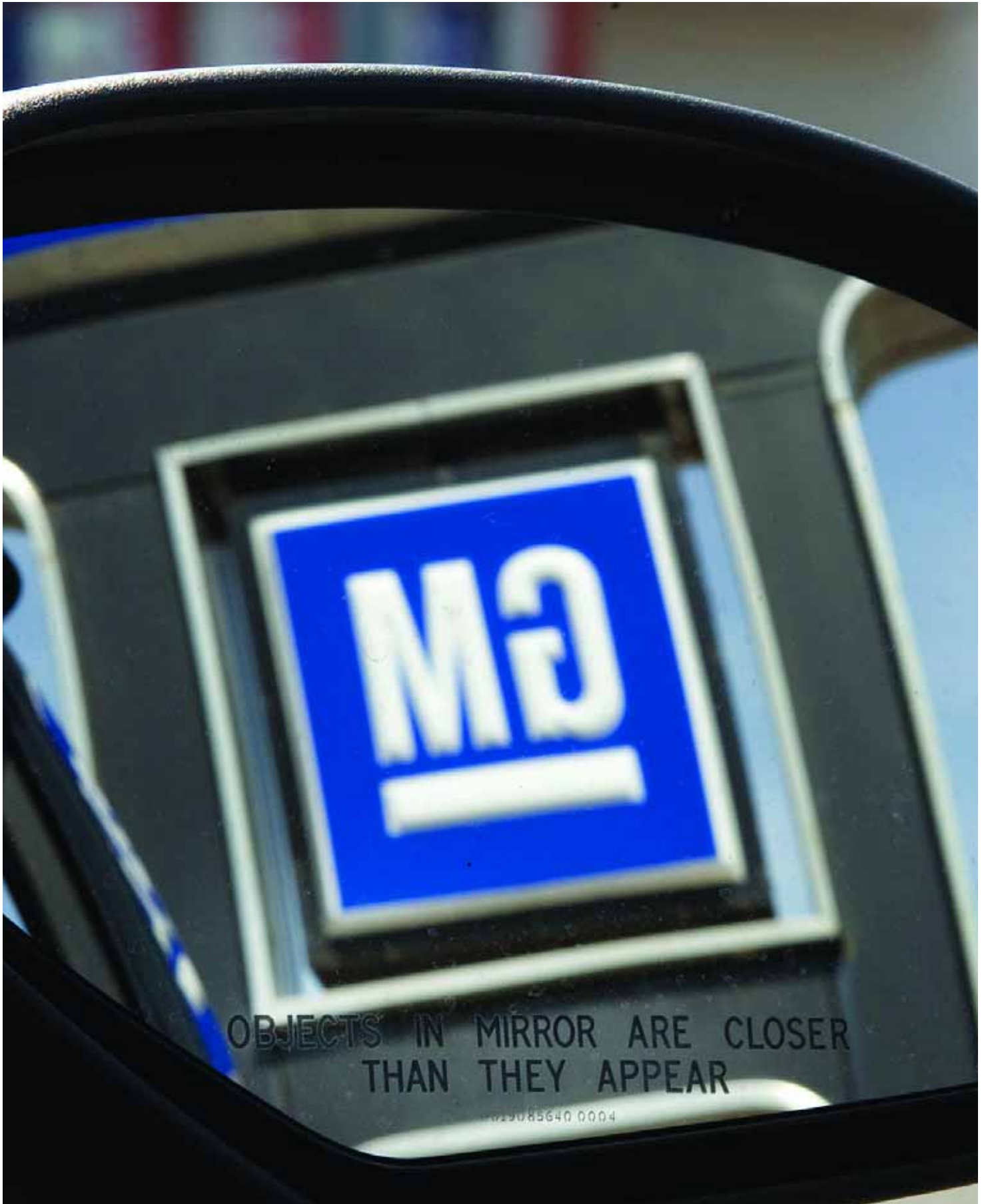


PHOTO: REUTERS/CHRISTINE MUSCHI



WHAT CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING  
OFFERS A NATION OF CONSUMERS

# A New Vision

BY CHARLES K. WILBER

**A**s we look ahead to recovery from the present financial and economic crisis, we must ask ourselves: Do we return to business as usual? Or is this a moment when a re-envisioning of the economy is both possible and necessary? Some would argue that President Obama is already trying to change the social compact from an emphasis on opportunity to an emphasis on fairness. Others, however, look at the economic team the president has gathered and conclude that it includes the same Wall Street professionals who got us into this mess. Still others, myself included, think that the world will never be the same. The consumer-led growth of the past is not viable in a world where every country wants to have the same consumer society, because the demand on natural resources and the environmental strain would be too great. There is no single Catholic response to all of these issues, but Catholic social thought provides guidance for distinctive Catholic responses.

## **Beyond Consumption**

Catholic social thought is rooted in a commitment to certain fundamental values—the right to human dignity, the need for human freedom and participation, the importance of community and the nature of the common good. These values are drawn from a belief that each person is called to be a co-creator with God, participating in the redemption of the world and the furthering of God’s kingdom. From these values emerge two central principles: a special concern for the poor and powerless, which leads to a criticism of political and economic structures that oppress them; and a concern for certain human rights against the collectivist tendencies of the state and the neglect of the free market.

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Among the reasons to be concerned about consumption-driven growth are three prominent points in Catholic social thought. First, excessive consumption by some individuals and nations while other individuals and nations suffer from want is morally unacceptable. A passage from Pope Paul VI illustrates the point: "...the superfluous wealth of rich countries should be placed at the service of poor nations.... Otherwise their continued greed will certainly call down upon them the judgment of God and the wrath of the poor...." (*Populorum Progressio*, No. 49).

Second, excessive consumption threatens the earth's environment, which is also morally unacceptable. Pope John Paul II has written: "Equally worrying is the ecological question which accompanies the problem of consumerism and which is closely connected to it. In his desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, man consumes the resources of the earth and his own life in an excessive and distorted way" (*Centesimus Annus*, No. 37).

Third, treating material consumption as the primary goal of life—that is, focusing on having instead of being—is seen as detrimental to human dignity. Pope John Paul II has written that "all of us experience firsthand the sad effects of this blind submission to pure consumerism: in the first place a crass materialism, and at the same time a radical dissatisfaction because one quickly learns...that the more one possesses the more one wants, while deeper aspirations remain unsatisfied and perhaps even stifled" (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, No. 28).

### Seven Policy Suggestions

If we stop here, we have sound philosophical principles and general guidelines for policy, but any re-envisioning of the economy remains vague and fuzzy. What is needed are specific policies that flow from the Catholic principles. Below I outline seven such policies.

1. *Re-regulation.* The main thrust of public policy since the Reagan administration has been to free up markets by deregulation, tax cuts and the reduction or elimination of social programs. The result has been frequent federal deficits, a dramatic increase in inequality of income and wealth, periodic financial scandals, decay of public services and infrastructure, and the current collapse of the financial services sector. Today, the role of government needs to be rethought. Catholic social teaching insists that "government has a moral function: protecting human rights and securing basic justice for all members of the commonwealth" (*Pacem in Terris*, Nos. 60-62). At a minimum this means govern-

ment must restructure and regulate the financial sector, protect the rights of workers and find ways of using intermediary institutions like churches to deliver social services.

2. *Economic decision-making at all levels of government.* The U.S. bishops' pastoral letter *Economic Justice for All* (1986) argues in its very first paragraph (No. 1) that every perspective on economic life that is truly human, moral and Christian must be shaped by three questions: What does the economy do for people? What does it do to people? And how do people participate in it? These questions should be asked at each and every level of government before any economic policy is enacted or undertaken, paying special attention to the economy's impact on the poor and powerless (No. 24). Weighting costs and benefits with monetary values alone means that the access road will always be put through the poor neighborhood, not the well-off one. Cost-benefit analysis studies need to be restructured in order to answer these questions.

3. *Full employment.* In a market economy, employment—and access to wealth—is necessary to one's identity as a human being. We do not ask someone, "Who are you?" but rather "What do you do?" I am a professor or a carpenter. I work for General Motors or the University of Notre Dame. Therefore, whether through a public employment program or job tax credits to the private sector, a top policy priority must be to guarantee a job to everyone willing and able to work. We should also provide adjustment-assistance to those who lose their jobs because of changes in competitive position, and we should make every effort to keep open plants that can be operated efficiently. A host of other policies are also possible: targeted jobs programs, education and training programs to equip workers with the skills needed for the future, daycare centers for employed parents, and so on.

4. *Universal health care.* Human dignity demands that basic health care be available to all. How we do this is less important than that we do it. My personal preference is to detach health care insurance from jobs, because it is a burden individual businesses should not have to bear. The best way to organize a universal system is debatable; but the Kaiser Permanente system, which has almost nine million patients, might provide important lessons. Their high performance as an H.M.O. has been attributed to three practices. First, they place a strong emphasis on preventative care, which reduces costs later on. Second, their doctors are salaried instead of paid by fee for service, which removes the incentive to perform unnecessary procedures. Finally, they

## The consumer-led growth of the past is simply not viable in a world where every country wants to have the same consumer society.

strive to minimize the time patients spend in high-cost hospitals by advance planning and by providing for care in clinics. This results in cost savings and greater physician attention to patients. And any restructuring of medicine needs to shift the focus from high-tech medicine for the few to basic medicine for all.

5. *Energy conservation.* The most dangerous conflict and the one most difficult to resolve is that between traditional patterns of economic growth and environmental systems. Because we are stewards of the earth, any program for future economic improvement must be based on a wiser use of natural resources and more attention to the impact on environmental systems. At this point particular attention must be paid to reducing fossil fuel burning and to safer disposal of toxic waste. Increased taxation of gasoline and carbon is likely necessary to force conservation. And the additional revenue might also provide new opportunities for combating the federal budget deficit and aid subsidies to public transport that could make it cheaper than private transport. This would bring further energy savings.

6. *Globalization.* Catholic social teaching calls us to recognize that all the peoples of the world are our brothers and sisters. As a result we cannot pursue “beggar thy neighbor” policies in international trade and aid while constructing domestic economic solutions. In addition, Pope John Paul II has argued for social intervention on the international level “to promote development, an effort which also involves sacrificing the positions of income and power enjoyed by the more developed countries” (CA, No. 52). To carry out this effort, “it is not enough to draw on the surplus goods which in fact our world abundantly produces: it requires above all a change of life-styles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power which today govern societies” (No. 58). This strikes at the heart of a consumption-oriented market system.

7. *The church and subsidiarity.* A principal objective of publicly proclaimed laws and regulations is to stigmatize certain types of behavior and to reward other types, thereby influencing individual values and behavior codes. Aristotle understood this: “Lawgivers make the citizens good by inculcating habits in them, and this is the aim of every lawgiver; if he does not succeed in doing that, his legislation is a failure. It is in this that a good constitution differs from a bad one.” While families, peer groups, churches and schools play the most important role in shaping behavior and incul-

cating values, public laws have a role to play as well. While civil law, for example, cannot make people stop holding racist beliefs, it can stop them from engaging in certain types of racist behavior. Over time that behavior (refusing service in a restaurant, for example) becomes delegitimized in public opinion.

## Short-Term Sojourners

At the political level we need to rethink liberal theory, which vests sovereignty in the state limited only by individual rights. A more communitarian view requires that sovereignty be shared with intermediate groups.

Much work must be done at the lower levels, too. The church as an institution must honor its own employees’ rights to organize and to participate. It needs to educate its people in Catholic social thought, including their obligations as persons and as citizens to feed the hungry, house the homeless and so on. The promotion of soup kitchens and Catholic Worker houses and lobbying for social service needs are responsibilities that the laity should be

urged to take on to a greater degree. Much is already being done, but more is needed.

All well and good, some would say, but how can we get these policies enacted and bring the church to change its ways? I do not know. It will require us as a people to rethink the type of society we want for ourselves, our children and our grandchildren. Resource shortages and environmental limits tell us that consumer-driven growth is no longer viable. Globalization is leading to a multipolar world in which the United States no longer controls events economically or militarily. If this makes it possible for the United States to reduce its policing function around the world, lowered defense spending can help pay for the needed health care reforms and other public investments, such as those for infrastructure.

Finally, we must remember that as Christians we are short-term sojourners in this world. It is a temporary dwelling place, where we reside not as citizens with full rights but as aliens or pilgrims whose true home is in a city to come. The church’s tendency to provide religious legitimation to the debilitating and sometimes lethal workings of the market and/or the state must be resisted. Instead, the members of Christ’s body must mount a critique of the iniquities of both the market and the state, and carry out their obligation to love and serve God and their neighbor. **A**



Barack Obama at Georgetown University

# A Tragedy Unearthed

One priest's quest to document the horrors of the Holocaust

BY GEORGE M. ANDERSON

**T**he ground was moving for three days," the Rev. Patrick Desbois told me several times during our conversation at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Conn. The phrase also appears in his recent book, *Holocaust by Bullets*, which won the 2008 National Jewish Book Award. The ground of which he speaks refers to the earth overlying the mass graves at Jewish extermination sites in Ukraine, where the Nazis killed over 1.5 million Jews during World War II. When Father Desbois interviewed witnesses to that Holocaust, they frequently mentioned the moving earth. "It took me a year to understand what witnesses meant," he said. At first he thought they were referring to the shifting of the earth as the corpses decomposed. But during one of his many trips to Ukraine, a witness who as a boy had been conscripted to spread earth over a massacre site shed new light: after being shot and pushed into the graves, many Jews were only wounded (partly because of a regulation allowing for only one bullet per victim to save ammunition). After they had been buried, the witness said, he "saw a hand suddenly rise and grasp the spade he was using." The victims' subsequent death throes caused the ground over them to move for days.

Father Desbois, a historian and adviser to the cardinal-archbishop of Lyons and the Vatican on the Jewish religion, spends part of each year in Ukraine with a team intent on locating as many mass graves as possible. He first came to know of the Ukraine massacres as a boy from stories told by his grandfather, who was held for three years in a camp near one of the extermination sites. As a young priest, Father Desbois began to travel to the same town to uncover the truth for himself.

Now he works with a special sense of urgency, because witnesses who were children and teenagers at the time of the slaughters are dying off. He explained, "We have only six or seven years left to locate and speak to them." He added that there is much work to be done not only in Ukraine but also in Belarus, Poland and Russia. "They want to talk before



they die, so that the world will know what happened." Those not conscripted by the *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units) to spread earth over the bodies might have seen the shootings at a distance from a rooftop or while tending a cow grazing in a nearby field. So vivid are their recollections, he said, that they often describe them as if the events happened yesterday.

## Dangerous Work

Witnesses share the trauma they felt six decades ago with Father Desbois and the team with whom he travels in an inconspicuous van. Because of the draining psychological effects of listening to such stories of death and destruction, each trip lasts little more than two weeks. Father Desbois speaks of a growing need for solitude in his personal life, to be "in silent prayer before God." In Paris, he sets aside at least one day a week for that purpose. "Sometimes I go to a monastery, or else I stay in my apartment, out of reach even

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of the telephone.” The work is dangerous. In one city, someone shot at him from a window. Now he and his team travel with a bodyguard. “Even at home,” he said, “I never enter my apartment without looking behind me.”

The killings typically took place in or near towns and villages, rather than in the dense forests, because the Germans feared that Soviet partisan fighters hiding among the trees might attack them. At the graves the victims themselves had to dig, and there would be several shooters working in tandem with “pushers,” Father Desbois explained. The German



‘They want to talk before they die, so that the world will know what happened.’

soldiers would line up the naked men, women and children in front of the huge grave sites and shoot them; then pushers would topple them over into the pit. Many were shot in the villages, even in the marketplaces. Their clothes would be taken to a local school and sold to villagers.

So total was the acceptance of “the final solution” that German soldiers often took photographs of individual shootings and sent them to family members as souvenirs. Father Desbois said his researchers had found hundreds of these, some from family members who made them available to his team. During a slideshow and lecture for the student body at Sacred Heart University, sponsored by the university’s Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding and the Anti-Defamation League, Father Desbois showed a photo taken by a German soldier of a mother and child being shot in a field. He described a letter that a German soldier wrote

**Above: Parafenyi Bogopolsky recalls life under Nazi occupation in the southern Ukrainian village of Gvozdavka.**

to his girlfriend, saying that it was fun to throw babies into the air and shoot them, because otherwise the babies would grow up to be “our enemies.”

Nor were German soldiers the only ones doing the killing. Father Desbois uncovered what he called “private killings” by Ukrainian civilians. In one village, for example, local families lived in three houses once owned by Jews. Under the German occupation, it became legal for inhabitants to kill Jews on the slightest pretext. Family members occupying these houses today acknowledge what their forebears had done to obtain them. Father Desbois said that by changing a law like the prohibition against killing in a given society, “you change the very nature of that society.”

### ‘In the Service of Evil’

In the summer of 1942, the mass graves led to bizarre repercussions for the local non-Jewish population. Some residents wrote letters to the German authorities in Berlin complaining of the stench caused by decaying bodies in the nearby graves. Sometimes the bodies were burned in the villages, and the burning human flesh created fumes that forced residents to leave their homes temporarily. Occupying authorities responded to the complaints by burning the bodies farther away from the villages and burying the bodies deeper.

Anti-Jewish hatred extended also to those who were only partly Jewish. One witness told Father Desbois of a Christian mother who was upset that her daughter had married a Jew. He was away in the army, and one day while her daughter was at the local market the grandmother took the couple’s little children to the Gestapo office and said, “shoot them,” which they did. Such an occurrence reflects what Father Desbois calls “limitless imagination in the service of evil.” In his book, this phrase is used to describe the town of Sataniv, where instead of shooting the Jews, the Ukrainian local police forced them to go down into the large storage cellars below the marketplace, then burned straw to smother them. Not all were asphyxiated, however, and there too the ground above moved for days.

The bodies of those people buried alive were not exhumed until 12 years later. “The whole story stunned me,” said Father Desbois. The bodies were removed then only because the marketplace was being renovated. He and his team verified the facts of this and other atrocity stories by consulting archives in various cities, including those at the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

What is the source of such evil? In our conversation Father Desbois emphasized that we share the same humanity: “It is the same humanity that includes the 20-year-old German soldier and the innocent Jewish children he kills.” We are all the innocent Abel and the guilty brother Cain, he added. In appearing before God, we must keep the faces of both the innocent and the guilty before us. **A**

# Gone Walkabout

BY JIM McDERMOTT



**G**rowing up, I never knew much about Australia. I once had a boomerang—never could make it come back. I guess I had seen pictures of kangaroos. That was about it. For me the world extended only as far as my aunts had traveled. In my mind I could see the Tower of London, its hanging chains and flesh-eating crows; I watched players strut about, waxing eloquent on the Globe stage; and I drove a winding road through the green hills of Ireland. But Australia might as well have been Mars.

And so it remained until about a year ago, when I was sent along with 10 other Jesuits from around the world to Sydney, Australia, to begin the final stage of my formal training as a Jesuit. The purpose of the assignment was part seasoning, part renewal. Put down your packs and spend seven months with other young Jesuits, reflect on your lives in the Society and deepen your relationships with God and with his people. The location was in a sense arbitrary; Australia's program had a great reputation, but there were similar programs for Jesuits all over the world, including several in the United States.

## You Have Now Left Kansas

When we arrived in Pymble, a town north of Sydney, in late January of last year, it looked like any affluent American suburb—stately houses, quiet neighborhoods, parks. Our community residence rested on a verdant, wooded piece of property about 20 minutes from the ocean and 30 from Sydney proper. It was once a school where young Australian

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Jesuits studied theology; today it serves as a retreat house, a retirement community and a home for those who have just entered the Society and also for us. From the walls generations of former residents grinned at us.

It all seemed comparable to what you might find in the States, I thought late that first day, as I sat outside snacking on cookies and wondering if it was going to rain. Then a flock of enormous white cockatoos shot from the trees screaming. Cutting down through the air, they surrounded me like a 1950's gang of pomaded greasers, their beaks opening and closing greedily as they eyed my treat.

At dinner I could barely follow the conversation, just bits and pieces here and there when the older men slowed down between explosions of sound filled with laughter and mad-cap energy. As for the food: I discovered that the Australian spread with the dangerous-sounding name Vegemite, which I put on my bread, though it looked like creamy dark chocolate, actually tasted like deep-salted yeast.

As the sun set, a sound like monkeys laughing hysterically came from the trees behind our house.

The States? I don't think so. Welcome to Oz.

## Australia 101

During our first weeks together, the 11 of us and our directors eased in, told stories to one another of the jobs we had done, the ways we had entered the Society, our families. We took it slow, leaving harder things, the more brittle parts of ourselves, for later conversations. We came to find in one another a place of welcome and rest.

Between conversations I burned through *Down Under*, Bill Bryson's fascinating travelogue about his adventures through the land, the people and the history of Australia.



Australia, it turns out, is a funny combination of old and young. As a landmass it is ancient, much of it worn away to red desert over millions of years. Its first settlers, the Aborigines, arrived by sea between 45,000 and 60,000 years ago, probably from what today we know as the Indonesian archipelago. Their use of boats put them roughly 30,000 years ahead of the rest of the world.

As a nation, though, Australia is quite young. The British first landed a ship here in 1780, roughly three centuries after Columbus arrived in the Americas. When the First Fleet—11 ships consisting of 729 convicts banished to spend the rest of their lives in Australia and 160 marines—landed near Sydney on Jan. 18, 1788, the United States had already become an independent state. Australia's British colonies federated into their own country in 1901.

Today Australia has a population of 22 million and consists of six states and two territories on a piece of land that is roughly the same size as the continental United States. If you were to lay Australia over the United States, it would stretch horizontally from Los Angeles to Detroit and vertically from Seattle to Mexico City. Yet most people live on its coasts; over 13 million inhabitants (nearly 60 percent) live in and around the coastal capital cities alone.

In describing Australia, Bryson frequently returned to the number of different species here that can kill you. Forget lions and tigers and bears; here live some of the most dangerous spiders and crocodiles and sea creatures in the world. The box jellyfish, for instance, is six to eight inches long and feeds on tiny shrimp, but it is the deadliest creature on the planet. One momentary brush with its venomous tentacles, and you really can't ever go home again. Near the Great Barrier Reef there are also critters living in cone shells that

will poison you if you pick them up. We're talking about killer seashells!

By the time I finished the book, I was hungry to know more of this world. And I had decided never to go swimming.

## Sydney

Our lives in Pymble took on a certain rhythm. We prayed together each morning, our chairs set in a circle around a candle flame. Seminars were held on community life, intimacy, the history and character of the Society of Jesus. We became connoisseurs of food courts, movie houses and the Chatswood Mall. Sydney was just a train ride away; but nestled away comfortably in suburbia in those early months, most of us were hobbits in our holes, content to devour our second breakfasts and enjoy a cup of tea with lunch, some port, a morsel (or two) of dark chocolate and some television after dinner.

Eventually, though, each of us found his way into the city for one reason or another. For me, it was to stand in awe before that seashell, ship's sail wonder, the Sydney Opera House. I arrived by train on a blue-sky summer's day, crowds wandering idly up and down Circular Quay. After a short stroll there it was before me, Jørn Utzon's Pritzker Architecture Prize-winning work, shining white in the sun and looking...well, a little small, actually. But probably that was the shock of being "in the postcard," rather than looking at it. I walked slowly around the base, waiting for the angle that would bowl me over.

Off to the left, the Harbour Bridge, the world's widest long-span bridge and tallest arch bridge, bowed across the water, another jewel of Australia. Yet no matter how long I stood there, it, too, did little for me. I went home puzzled at

what I could not see.

Occasion brought me back to the Harbour many times: a walk through the Royal Botanic Gardens at dusk, just as bats with the wingspans of jumbo jets threw themselves from branch-swinging slumbers into the air around me; a hilarious evening with classmates drinking beer and eating pizzas topped with kangaroo and crocodile meat; a night out to a play. And with each return I noticed more—the curves and sudden sharp edges of the Opera House; the stately, understated arc and unexpected hues of the bridge; and the majesty of the harbor itself, an astonishing panoply of lovely, unique inlets, bays and beaches that cannot be taken in all at once.

I spent most of one Indian summer afternoon and an evening sitting on a bench on the Harbour Bridge, looking out on a million boats sailing the harbor. Sunset cast the curls of the distant shoreline in reds and yellows and purples, homes in the distance glowing a brilliant pearl white. In the evening the Opera House shone like a jewel surrounded by the myriad twinkling pinpoints of the city lights.

If you ever travel to Australia, come and sit here on a summer's day.

### **(Really) Far From the Madding Crowd**

After some months together, the 11 of us were sent to parishes and schools to serve as spiritual guides for people interested in making a retreat. Each of us had been asked to consider what sort of location we wanted, not exactly an easy choice when you are in an enormous country and you want to see everything. But the image that came to me was of a stone in hand, thrown as hard and as far as you could—“hucked,” we would have said as kids. No urban setting for me, thank you; fling me wide, as far out as I could go.

I was sent to Cobar, an outback community of about 5,000 people in western New South Wales. Cobar is a mining town 10 hours by bus and train from Sydney; the phrase “back of Bourke,” Australian slang for “the middle of nowhere,” refers to an actual town just two more hours farther on. In the middle of my first week, the parish priest took me to Wilcannia, the next town over. It was a 150-mile drive away. In between, we saw absolutely nothing—no towns, no rest stops, no gas stations, just lots of low brushy trees and hunched birds at the roadside, chewing dead kangaroo.

The parish of St. Lawrence O’Toole, where I worked was a lovely, welcoming community with a grade school where the kids wore broad floppy hats and with parishioners who laughed readily at my bad jokes and the way I said “mate.” Twice each week 10 members of the parish came to talk individually with me about their relationships with God.

Supposedly I was there to help, but mostly I watched in awe as God entered into their lives in very specific and individual ways. It was as though God had been waiting for so long to have this time with them.

On my off day each week the parish priest took me into different parts of the area. I had imagined the outback would offer a sprawling landscape of red soil and blue sky stretching as far as the eye could see—like the Badlands of South Dakota, maybe—strange, otherworldly. In fact, the bush chokes the horizon like giant weeds. From the road you cannot see much of anything but the same ugly trees over and over again. At times you almost feel as though you are in a tunnel. And off the road it’s more and more of the same. Stifling, horrible.

Yet with time, absent a view, a focal point and perspective, you become aware that you are within something much bigger than yourself. Perspective, you discover, gives a sense of mastery, of power. Now you are in something you cannot tame.

In the Aboriginal rite of passage known as “walkabout,” as I have read about it, the young man who agrees to wander into the outback for six months goes forward with no clear destination in mind. It is a dangerously foolish plan, considering how inhospitable the environment can be; but being out there one begins to see the sense of it. The whole concept of a path is ridiculous; there are no tracks that lead anywhere, no straight line that will not get bent and bent and bent again by the sameness of the terrain, no way to avoid being lost. The only way to journey in this world is to give yourself over to it and let it happen.

The months that followed brought many other treasures: 30 days spent making the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in silence, learning to wait for God amid the golden vine-swept hills and burning sunsets of the wine country of South

Australia; the full-on, five-senses dining astonishment that is a trucker’s breakfast in the small town of Hay; five brilliant, challenging weeks in Melbourne; soaring eucalyptus trees, tiny purple wildflowers and nights in which I lost myself in black velvet heavens scattered with the whitest of stars.

Most gifts led back to the same: being led into a world I could not navigate, had not imagined, “a sunburnt country,” as the poet Dorothea Mackellar describes Australia, a bewildering land of “beauty and terror,” and finding it to be the face of God.

When the 11 of us finally parted, seven months after we had first met, it was with embraces and even some tears. Who knew when we would next meet one another, if ever? In one another’s company and in this land of Australia, we had found support and God’s grace. Now it was time to pick up our packs and go walkabout again. **A**

#### **ON THE WEB**

A conversation with  
Jim McDermott, S.J.  
[americamagazine.org/podcast](http://americamagazine.org/podcast)

# Peace Begins Here

Relationships are crucial to building good will in the Middle East.

BY AARON CHASSY

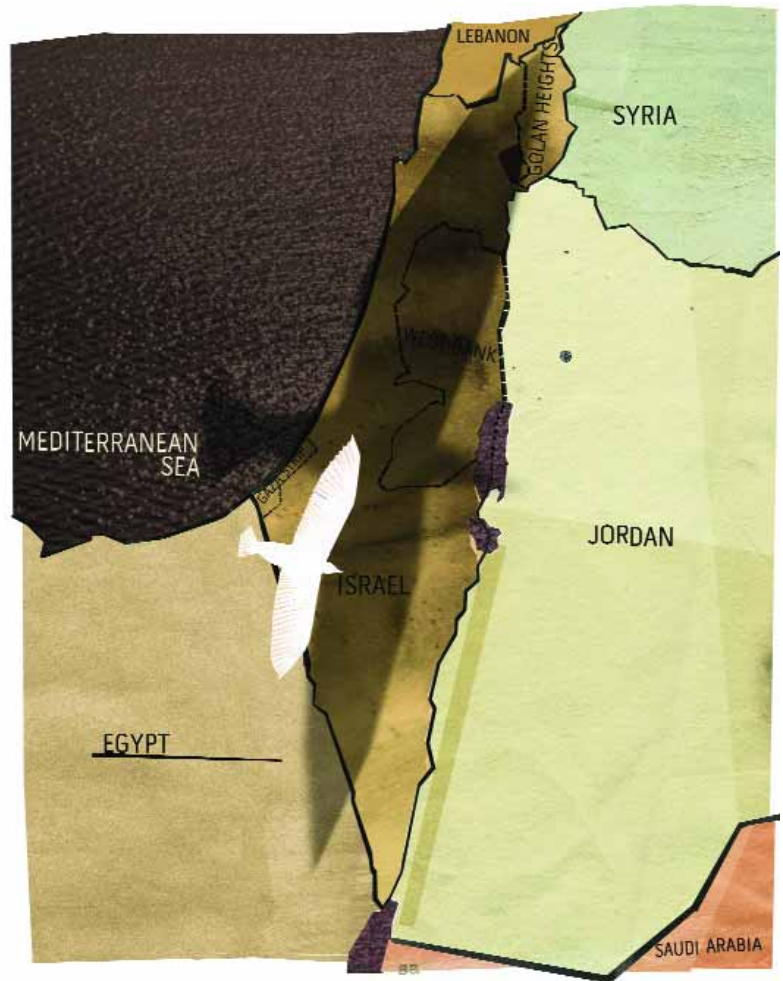
**A**s an American Jew working for Catholic Relief Services, I did not expect to be talking about peace in the Middle East with Palestinian Christians during my first month on the job. But there I was, on a C.R.S.-sponsored regional workshop in Beirut, Lebanon, recently, when I first met two Palestinian colleagues based in the C.R.S. Jerusalem office. I remember how hopeful I felt then about the possibility of achieving peace in the Middle East, in contrast to how I feel now as I reflect on the most recent conflict between Israel and Hamas, which left more than 1,400 Palestinians dead in Gaza, at least half of them civilians. Thirteen Israelis also lost their lives.

In Beirut, after meeting my two new friends Khalil and Vivian, both Palestinian Christians, we decided to go to dinner together. Khalil already knew about my religious background, but Vivian did not. I thought it was important for the sake of openness to let her know, so I managed to find a way of introducing the fact that I am Jewish. After a brief pause, they both shared with me their own experiences and hopes about building peace between Palestinians and Israelis.

By the end of our conversation, a number of things became clear to me. For example, Khalil and Vivian were both committed to living their own lives according to the same principles they espouse and apply in their professional lives, working for Catholic Relief Services as peace-building advisers. They are following Gandhi's quiet, powerful exhortation: "Be the change you want to see."

I could see that there was no hint of animosity, anger or resentment toward me or any Jew—American or Israeli—as a result of the U.S.-backed Israeli policies that have caused undue suffering for many Palestinians. Most of them are innocent victims who have no interest in participating in acts of terror against Israel and just want to go about living their lives.

I realized that if my two colleagues, who are living with this conflict daily and experiencing the damage and trauma it wreaks on them and their loved ones, can renounce hatred, why can't I? What was I holding on to that made me want to "win" the debate with them in our discussions of



these admittedly thorny issues? Why must there be a winner and a loser?

I no longer had any interest in participating in any discussion in which we, as individuals, would be identified as being on opposite sides of such a "debate." I realized the futility of trying to outdo each other either in justifying who was more right or who had been more wronged. Maybe there is some way of objectively determining which group—

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AARON CHASSY is a senior technical adviser for governance and civil society issues at the world headquarters of Catholic Relief Services in Baltimore, Md.

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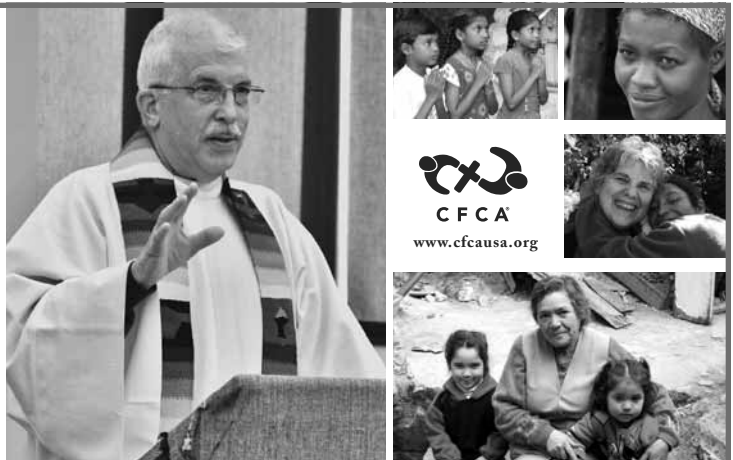
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Israelis or Palestinians—has suffered the most at the hands of the other, but that debate has kept both groups spinning around endlessly in an escalating cycle of violence. I realized that this debate also enables opponents of peace on both sides to claim the mantle of victimhood while demonizing the other as the perpetrator. This approach allows them to avoid accountability for their actions and to continue to incite and perpetuate violence with relative impunity. Instead of supporting peace-building efforts, both sides wrap themselves in a cloak of bigoted righteousness so that they can shout down (and sometimes shoot down, as we have seen) proponents of peace as being sellouts—naïve, self-hating sympathizers—to the “other.”

Finally, this experience reinforced my commitment to peace-building and conflict transformation, which in my more cynical moments I, like opponents of a peaceful solution, have dismissed as naïve and futile. Now, after dinner with my two colleagues, I am even more determined to try to figure out how we can help create a platform where we can catalyze more of these small personal connections for an even greater number of people, building on them and aggregating them to create a more inclusive network for peace and justice. It is in these relationships, interacting with each other in meaningful ways, that people will recognize for themselves that violent conflict of any kind is not only politically inconceivable but also personally unacceptable. **A**

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# Detroit's Patron

BY DAVID NANTAIS

The Solanus Casey Center is an urban oasis on Detroit's east side, situated among signs of death and decay. Much of the surrounding neighborhood is a distressing collection of crumbling homes and vacant lots, stark reminders of the 1967 summer riots when Detroit burned. To the west is Mt. Elliot Cemetery, one of the largest Christian burial grounds in the city. As desolate as it is, this setting is an ideal location for a memorial to Venerable Solanus Casey, a Capuchin Franciscan who devoted his life to serving the city's poor, sick, outcast and suffering people. Father Solanus had an ability to see potential and beauty in people and situations where others saw only human refuse and devastation. The city of Detroit itself is much in need of realizing the potential it holds beneath its grimy exterior, and Father Solanus would make an especially appropriate patron saint.

Bernard Francis Casey, known as Barney, was born in Prescott, Wis., on Nov. 25, 1870, to an Irish immigrant family. As a young man, he had a momentary experience of the brutality of the world that radically shifted his concept of life. While at work as a trolley conductor in Superior, Wis., he once saw a drunken sailor standing over a woman lying on the tracks; the sailor held a knife in his hand and yelled at the woman, threatening her life. Casey realized that this incident



Solanus Casey, standing at left

was not an isolated one—that the world was full of such violence. He also realized he wanted to make things better. He prayed for the sailor and his victim, and a few days later told his pastor that he wanted to become a priest.

At St. Francis De Sales diocesan seminary in Milwaukee, Casey floundered academically in courses taught in Latin and in German. After four years there he was advised to enter a religious order instead. He entered the Capuchins at St. Bonaventure's Monastery in Detroit on Christmas Eve 1896. He received the habit and took the name Francis Solanus, by which he would be known for the rest of his life.

Solanus's superiors believed that his struggles with academic work during formation would prove an impediment to full priestly status, so they ordained

him a "simplex" priest, one who could neither preach nor hear confessions officially. He performed rudimentary duties like serving as porter at the monastery. Yet Solanus fully embraced his mission and greeted each person with such joy and respect that it evolved into a ministry of hospitality and spiritual counsel. Because of his gentle nature, which put people at ease and encouraged even the despairing to hope, Solanus earned the nickname "the holy priest."

## The Counsellor

Father Solanus's caring presence and reputation for listening intently to each person also drew thousands to the monastery. "Do we appreciate the little faith we have?" Solanus once asked a friend. "Do we ever beg God for more?" Solanus counseled his visitors to do both. He welcomed alco-

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PHOTO: CNS/MICHIGAN CATHOLIC

holics and the homeless in the same way he welcomed local dignitaries like Mayor Frank Murphy. By looking beyond the superficial—a person's drunkenness, addiction, poverty, grief or uncouth behavior—Solanus showed people their reflection as "beloved" in God's eyes.

One person who made the short pilgrimage across town to St. Bonaventure's was my grandmother's sister, Mary Louise. She brought my aunt Debby as an infant to Father Solanus because the child suffered from a painful skin condition, and home remedies had proved inadequate. Soon after the visit to Father Solanus, Debby's skin cleared up. When I recently heard my Great-aunt Mary Louise recount this story, I was amazed not only by the outcome, but by her faith in the humble Solanus, whom she still reveres.

During the Great Depression, unemployed men lined up outside St. Bonaventure's asking for food; Solanus helped to provide soup and sandwiches. Soon the few dozen men the Capuchins fed each day grew to hundreds. Father Solanus worked at the soup kitchen, recruited volunteers and elsewhere begged for food and funds to keep the kitchen open. One day food supplies ran short and the staff became concerned that a riot might break out. Solanus assured them that God would provide and invited the men in the line to join in praying the Our Father. Within min-

utes a bakery truck pulled up, full of donations for the soup kitchen. "Nobody will starve as long as you put your confidence in God," said Solanus.

Today the spirit of Solanus Casey is alive at the Capuchin soup kitchen, which has found new ways—like the Earthworks project—to peel back the surface of blight and expose the richness and potential within. One of the first of its kind, the Earthworks project grows hundreds of pounds of food each season on 1.5 acres of urban garden, some of it to feed the homeless and some to sell for revenue. Earthworks is not only an agricultural endeavor but also a community development project like dozens of others sprouting up around the city. Neighbors

cooperate to clear vacant land (some formerly occupied by a crack house) and recruit local kids to lend a hand and make connections with the earth. To gaze upon soil permeated with pollution (the E.P.A. calls them brownfields) and see possibility—that is the spirit of Father Solanus.

### Soon a Saint?

Solanus long practiced his ministry of presence, listening and praying. He never turned people away; in fact, he wanted to see them as soon as they arrived, even at the expense of his own plans. But the ministry exhausted

him. Sometimes he would fall asleep while praying in the monastery chapel and startle his fellow Capuchins when he awoke and sat upright in the pew.

When Father Solanus passed away on July 31, 1957, people lined up for two straight days to view his body before burial. Detroit had lost a saint.

It was inevitable that the cause for Solanus's canonization would be introduced, considering how much he was loved and the thousands of people he had helped. A petition to begin the process was filed under Cardinal John Dearden in 1981. Six years later, Solanus's body was exhumed and found to be intact. It was transferred

to a new coffin and reinterred in a tomb beneath the floor of St. Bonaventure's, in what is now part of the Father Solanus

Casey Center. Each year hundreds of people visit, leaving their requests for prayers and favors on folded pieces of paper above Solanus's tomb. In 1995 Pope John Paul II declared Father Solanus "venerable."

His cause for beatification, according to Richard Merling, O.F.M.Cap, director of the Father Solanus Guild, requires one medically verified healing miracle. A number of documented miracles have been sent to Rome, and the guild is awaiting approval. If Solanus is canonized soon, he could become the first U.S.-born male saint.

Detroit has suffered for a long time, and recent financial problems, a crumbling urban infrastructure and a corrupt former mayor have deflated the spirits of many residents. If Father Solanus were alive, he would be saddened, I think, but he would not stand idle. No, he would encourage people to search for the budding grace of God, present among them like a lone flower in bloom among the weeds and trash of an abandoned city lot. **A**

### ON THE WEB

David Nantais on Detroit's woes.  
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# Ready or Not...

My uncommon father

BY JOAN SAURO

In our family album there is a picture of my Aunt Nell with Baby Richard on her lap, sitting at our kitchen table. If it weren't for the photograph, I would scarcely believe that they and my Uncle Sam lived with us when I was 8. Presumably our two families cooked and ate together, washed and hung clothes on common lines, went shopping at the A&P, swam at Lewis Park and cooled ourselves on lawn chairs under the front shade tree. But I have no recollection of any of this, although a photograph verifies the shade tree. Nor do I remember my aunt crying of loneliness up in the back bedroom my parents gave them—only my mother's telling me many years later that Aunt Nell was homesick for the Ireland she had left as a war bride.

All I remember of my Uncle Sam is the sight of him from the back, as he walked in his white shirt and dress pants down our front steps and past the shade tree on his way to night work at the telegraph company. In the yard he passed through the mountains of hard yellow dirt and rocks that my father dug and hauled, box by box, out of our cellar.

My father came home from the fac-

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JOAN SAURO, C.S.J., a teacher of literature and workshop leader for adults and children, is an award-winning author and illustrator. She lives in Syracuse, N.Y.



tory to work in the cellar, essentially a crawl space, while my uncle went to the telegraph office, and we children played hide and seek in the hills my father heaped outside our house. Over the months the mountains grew, the chasms deepened, and we discovered better ways to hide from each other. One lone voice cried loud and clear:

“Apple, peaches, pumpkin pie, who’s not ready, holler I.”

Down in the cellar where he dug on hands and knees, my father heard the chant. Head to toe in soot and choking on it, the man in the black hole wanted to holler “I.”

With the whole house on his back, my father wanted to holler he was not ready, not for the four growing, jumping children playing on the work of his hands that could not work long and fast enough. By day he ran a punch press machine at the Auto-Lite Sparkplug factory. On Friday nights he set up pins at the bowling alley; Saturday nights he stocked the A&P shelves.

My father wanted to holler he was not ready when his teenage son crashed the family car and there was an ugly scene at the police station. Not ready when his other son fathered a child out of wedlock. Not ready when his firstborn abruptly left home at 17 and went off to a convent, of all things. Not ready when his daughter-in-law died at 40, and why, he wondered, didn't God take him instead?

He wanted to holler not ready when his wife roamed the block in her nightgown, then settled on the lawn across the street and waited for the Sears truck to deliver the new refrigerator she had decided to order for the neighbors.

My father wanted to holler not ready, but there was no time, no time

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at all the afternoon he keeled over in front of the television set. All he had wanted to do was raise the volume on a Yankees game.

But it's ready or not, here I come.

One day a few years before he died, I baked my father three pies—apple, peach and pumpkin. We sat at the table down in the basement he had carved out of the earth. He had since poured a cement floor and spread out hunks of old kitchen linoleum like chapters of family history under our feet. The walls were the same unfinished grey blocks they always were, but my father had installed a washer, dryer, stationary tubs, the stove he used for canning the tomatoes he grew and a bronze crucifix above the stove.

My father had no idea that all of his life he had personified the saving love of the figure on the crucifix for us. The twisted hands and bent body were the same. So were the lessons they taught: to dig deep, to lay a firm foundation, to treasure the old even as the new moved

in upstairs, to see with simple eyes of faith. Such comparisons would have puzzled my father. Perhaps it was enough that I told him that he was not the common man he liked to say he was.

That day my father put his canning materials aside to make space at the kitchen table, which served quite well in the basement. He pulled up two stools and waited.

I spread out the three pies I had baked, cut my father a slice of each, and served him on three separate plates. "Abbondanza!" he cried, his face shining. Such abundance there in the basement.

Relishing the moment, he tried a little of each pie, his elbow on the table and the fork in midair, waving a little, as if he were pondering. At the end, he gave me one of his crafty smiles, lowered the fork and pointed, "Here's the winner."

No contest, really. And we both knew why: the peaches were from his trees. **A**

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## GRACE AND THE GROTESQUE

*Flannery O'Connor on the page and on the screen*

With the opening of the Flannery O'Connor archives at Emory University in 2007, and now the publication of the first major biography, by Brad Gooch (*Flannery*, reviewed *Am.* 3/30-4/6), many people are rediscovering this enigmatic Southern Catholic writer.

What we have known for a while may not sparkle, but it still intrigues. Flannery O'Connor was devoutly

Roman Catholic in a rigidly Bible-belt South. An only child, she was adored by her father, who died when she was in high school. Flannery inherited his lupus and died herself before the age of 40. For a brief time, she had a romance with a traveling Bible salesman, which later inspired her story, "Good Country People." She lived most of her years on the family farm in Georgia in an eccentric style, surrounded by her mother, friends who came to visit, and

the peacocks, ducks, geese and chickens that she often trained.

O'Connor was a storyteller whose characters represent the strangest sort of people on earth. She shows us ugly characters and reveals the ugly parts in us all. "We're all grotesque," O'Connor confidently said in answer to a question about why her characters were odd, often even physically disfigured.

She wrote about what needs forgiving in human life and often depicted violence to do so. O'Connor once expressed admiration for a local Georgia pastor who pinned a real lamb to a wooden cross and then slaughtered it before the eyes of his congrega-



Brad Dourif and Ned Beatty in John Huston's 1979 film "Wise Blood"

PHOTO: COURTESY CRITERION COLLECTION

## Sarah's List

*God said to Abraham, "As for Sarah..." Gen 17:15*

Listen to me, Lord. I have a list.  
You said to Abraham:  
*Go, leave your fathers' graves!* To me,  
no word. You promised him,  
toothless at ninety-nine, a son. A son  
of ours? We laughed. Sixty years  
you locked my womb and then  
told Abraham you would unbolt it.  
To me, no word. Would Abraham  
grow fat, shriek, spread his legs  
across the birthing stool? Is he the eagle,  
I the guttersnipe, that his lordship's  
wedded spouse must overhear the news  
hidden behind a tent flap?  
Do I exaggerate? You turned your face  
to this old woman only  
to accuse me of a niggling lie. Note!  
The single time you spoke to me.  
Do I exaggerate? The promise,  
tell me! Where's the seal? In the snip  
off Abraham's foreskin, but no mark  
upon my breasts. And who consulted me  
when you bid him burn my son  
on Mount Moriah? Still I exaggerate?  
Why did your hand-picked Abraham  
twice turn me over to the harem of kings?  
Am I a cow in heat needing to be mounted?  
Why did I not see light in your light?  
Why did your truth not set me free?

**KILIAN McDONNELL, O.S.B.**

*Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B., is a theologian, ecumenist and president of the Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research at Saint John's University. Now 87, he began writing poetry on biblical personages and themes at 75. His third book of poetry is God Drops and Loses Things. This poem is first runner-up in this year's Foley Poetry Contest.*

tion as a teaching lesson. She also believed that Protestants understood the Mass in ways that were lost on many of her fellow Catholics.

O'Connor felt that it was necessary to shock. "When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do," she said, "you can relax a little and use more normal ways of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw large and startling figures."

I recently asked Uwem Akpan, S.J., the Nigerian priest whose collection of short stories, *Say You're One of Them*, was likewise shocking in its portrayal of violence in the lives of children in Africa, for his thoughts on this odd regional American author. "I'm fascinated" he said, "by her incredible understanding of the dynamics of sin and grace in the modern world. I find her work very sacramental and powerful. I'm happy, too, that she was a person of faith who refrained from writing didactic and saccharine stuff."

O'Connor's South is sacramental. In "The River" a drowning becomes a kind of baptism. In other tales, small and everyday acts of violence become means of grace, refuting the heresy that sees the world as dualistic. Various groups—including many modern spiritual writers—have argued that the material or created world is somehow necessarily evil, while the spiritual world that fights against it from without rather than from within is inherently good. And so, the theory goes, the more spiritual we become the more we are able to remove ourselves from the world. O'Connor sees it differently. She constructs characters who encounter grace in the midst of what is considered most material and base. Grace is impossible, in an O'Connor story, apart from what we encounter in and through our bodies in the midst of the

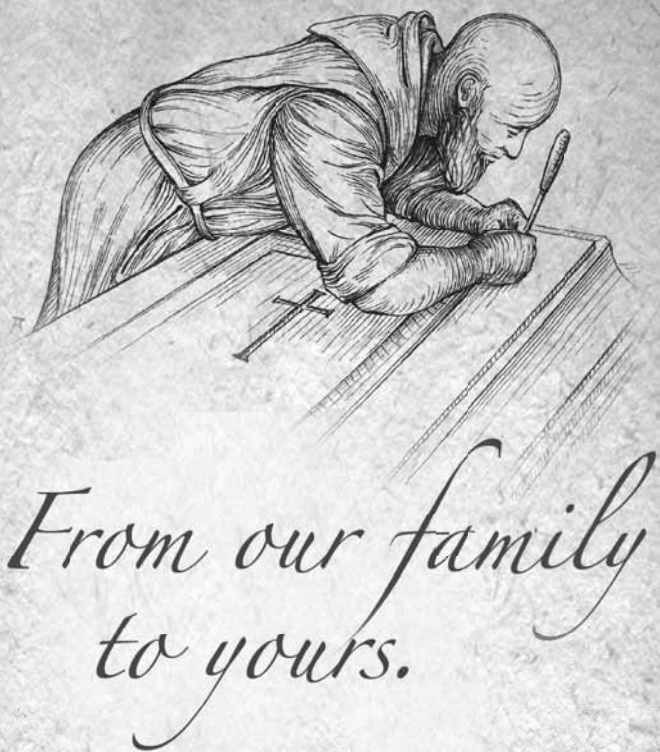
mess, but more importantly, in the darkness of life.

Several of Flannery O'Connor's stories have been made into films. In the 1970s, a few Chicago-based artists produced short films from her short stories; these are often available in VHS format at public libraries. More notable is the feature film made by Universal Studios and directed by John Huston in 1979: "Wise Blood." With a screenplay written by Benedict Fitzgerald, the son of O'Connor's best friends, Sally and Robert Fitzgerald, "Wise Blood" is faithful to the novel of the same name.

Starring Huston and Ned Beatty, it tells the hilarious story of Hazel Motes, a young, ambitious, uneducated man who is determined to be successful after returning from a war. He decides that, being a Southerner, the quickest way to succeed is to become a country preacher (he believes he'll succeed because a cab driver has already mistaken him for one). We see Motes attempt to establish what he calls "The Church of Truth Without Jesus." The film communicates the central themes of O'Connor's work: the messiness of revelation, that Christ came to reach sinners, that gross sin has a better chance than prim righteousness does of leading to sublime revelation. "Wise Blood" was released on DVD last month.

"Good Country People"—that tale of a Bible salesman who has a brief affair with a well-educated woman with a wooden leg—was made into a short film by Gary Graver, who went on to become a Hollywood cinematographer with Orson Welles. (Graver also made "adult" films under a pseudonym; the bizarre nature of O'Connor's work attracts all sorts of people!) Today you can find Graver's 10-minute black-and-white short, made in the 1960s, on YouTube.

O'Connor's stories are almost always funny, despite the violent, sometimes upsetting turns they take,



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always aiming toward some sort of revelation or salvation.

Many people will remember another of her characters, *The Misfit*, from her story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." In the story, a bitter old grandmother reaches out to console a hardened criminal, *The Misfit*, just before he shoots her dead. Only after she has been murdered does the reader learn how she finally saw the truth.

Sweet images for God are almost always torn down by O'Connor. We may see God as big and kindly, strong and comforting, warm and supportive, like an unconditional friend. But O'Connor shows us other sides to the divine-human relationship. The Christian becomes material in the hands of the sculptor, who will lop off

and chip away as he sees fit. This is one reason for the strong reactions for and against O'Connor's storytelling. We are not supposed to like what she shows us. Too often, our God has become domesticated, like a dog on a leash or a spoonful of sugar.

O'Connor was intrigued by the fact that we rarely see Jesus with nice, sophisticated, religious people. We more often see him handing out grace to the people he hangs out with: tax collectors, prostitutes, the sick, the flawed, the rejected and those who have to work so hard to make a living that they do not have time to study the Scriptures. The well-behaved and

respectable were the people who most angered Jesus because they were fooling themselves and others. It is impossible, when reading O'Connor, to sustain the nonsense of popular television preachers like T. D. Jakes and Joel Osteen—that the closer we follow Christ the prettier we will become, the wealthier we will become, and the more friends we will have. Jesus says the opposite.

One lasting problem surrounds O'Connor's legacy. Her attitude toward people of color—in her case, her neighbor African-Americans in Georgia—has been trumpeted by some as enlightened and by others as typically racist for her time and place. She wrote a story called "The Artificial Nigger," for instance (in 1955—nine years before the Civil Rights Act), which can be seen through either lens.

I asked an African-American Catholic storyteller friend of mine what she thinks. When Claudia Mair Burney first read "Everything That Rises Must Converge," she was stunned by the "unblinking, hard look at racism." But when she turned to O'Connor's letters to "get to know her better," she found another shock: "I came upon a letter in which she, as glibly as her characters, referred to African Americans as 'niggers.' That single word illustrated how very different Ms. O'Connor and I were after all. I closed the book."

We will most likely never know Flannery O'Connor's real attitudes toward race. Brad Gooch's *Flannery* offers hints, but not many. This was a woman writer who was complicated. But even on this issue, Claudia Mair Burney's experience with O'Connor shows how she can challenge and startle a reader to see things in a new way:

I recently re-read "Everything That Rises Must Converge," and

### ON THE WEB

A review of the film "Goodbye Solo."  
[americamagazine.org/culture](http://americamagazine.org/culture)

## CULTURE IN BRIEF

# THE NEW HOLLYWOOD

In 1967 a movie like "Doctor Dolittle" seemed like a sure thing to Hollywood. Moguls were looking for that kind of big-budget, multi-hour extravaganza to pull people away from the TV.

Yet as Mark Harris shows in his almost criminally entertaining book, *Pictures at a Revolution* (Penguin Books), just out in paperback, the influence of the French New Wave cinema, coupled with the "youthquake" of the 1960s, ushered in a spare and energetic style of filmmaking, exemplified by "Bonnie and Clyde," which would soon appear in U.S. theaters.

Harris uses the creative process behind the five films nominated for Best Picture in 1967 (which, in addition to "Dolittle," "Bonnie" and "Graduate" were "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" and "In the Heat of the Night") to underscore larger cultural changes like violence in mass entertainment, sexual mores

and race relations.

*Pictures* also provides a master class on how (and how not) to make a movie, or how to work on any sort of complex artistic venture. Harris limns the larger-than-life personalities of the day, including Warren Beatty (clever and driven), Mike Nichols (brilliant but opaque), Katherine Hepburn (haughty but image-conscious), Sidney Poitier (stoical but fretful about taking on too many "nice" parts) and Rex Harrison (absolutely impossible).

Harris's study is a canny piece of social criticism that reads like an immensely enjoyable magazine article. After finishing it you will never again watch Rex Harrison without being reminded of his drunken quip to the Ethiopian ruler Haile Selassie, who visited the sprawling "Doctor Dolittle" set during a U.S. visit: "How do you like *our* jungle?"

JAMES MARTIN, S.J.

this time, I met myself coming and going. With increasing discomfort I found that I identified with the mother, son, and black woman wearing an identical hat. I am proud, naïve, self-congratulatory, angry, and guilty, though a part of me feels I've done nothing wrong. I am as complicated as the story, characters, and O'Connor herself. Now I see that, like a double-edged sword,

"Everything That Rises Must Converge," with its violent climax and ending that results in a death, has the remarkable ability to slowly, and with deft blows, kill the racist within me.

JON M. SWEENEY is the author of *Light in the Dark Ages: The Friendship of Francis and Clare of Assisi*, and *Cloister Talks: Learning from My Friends the Monks*, forthcoming from Brazos. He lives in Woodstock, Vt.

BOOKS | DONALD J. MOORE

## 'THE WHOLE WORLD IS AGAINST US'

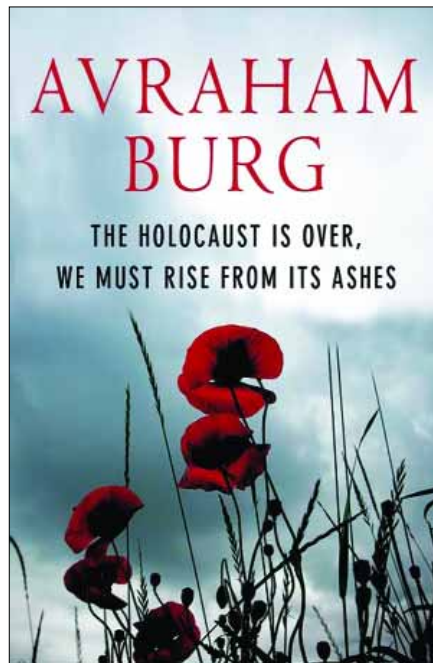
### THE HOLOCAUST IS OVER, WE MUST RISE FROM ITS ASHES

By Avraham Burg  
Palgrave Macmillan. 272p \$26.95  
ISBN 9780230607521  
Translated from the Hebrew *Victory Over Hitler* by Israel Amrani

Shortly before Martin Buber emigrated to Palestine from Germany in 1938, he was hailed by the Zionist Union of Germany as a scholar who "taught us that to be a Zionist, to be a Jew, and to be a human being are a single unity." Avraham Burg, who seeks to emulate Buber and Abraham Joshua Heschel in his confrontation and critique of Israel, could well be described in similar terms: He is a Zionist who sees in Judaism a responsibility for the welfare of all humankind. "Never again" must not be limited to Jews but extended to all suffering victims in the world.

The publication of this book in Hebrew prompted a tidal wave of criticism not only because of its content but equally because of the impeccable Zionist credentials of its author. Burg's father, Yosef, was a longtime Israeli cabinet minister under David Ben-Gurion. In 1988 Avraham Burg was

elected to the Knesset, later appointed head of the World Zionist Organization and of the Jewish Agency and then named Speaker of



the Knesset. In 2001 he came within a few votes of winning the leadership of the Labor Party. Yet in all of this there was a gnawing discontent. His decision to leave politics in 2004 came when he realized that despite all its success, Israel was "a kingdom without prophecy," with no compass and no direction. Zionism, Burg thought,

should offer to the world an alternative political model, a rejuvenated Judaism with a universal appeal that would make Israel a "light unto the nations." Scarcely anyone in Israel is talking in these terms, and one major reason for this is that Israeli society has become a prisoner of the Shoah.

Burg traces the wavering of the Zionist ideal to the 1960s, beginning with the trial of Adolf Eichmann, one of the principal architects of Hitler's Final Solution. The trial became an "all-Israeli" affair, and for Burg a turning point both personally and collectively. Eichmann was convicted of genocide against the Jewish people and executed by hanging in May 1962. Voices calling for an international tribunal and judiciary and for a wider participation of non-Jewish witnesses went unheeded. Instead of recognizing the Shoah as a crime against all of humanity and linking Jewish suffering with all other innocent victims of racial fanaticism, Israel embarked on the road to exclusive possession of the Shoah. Instead of seeing its horrors in a more meaningful, universal light, Israel made it a source of its isolation from the world, reinforcing the idea of perpetual victimhood.

Burg points out that since the Shoah has become Israel's exclusive property, no other people may lay a claim to it. It has become at once a weapon in the service of the Jewish people but also the source of their imprisonment. Monopolizing the Shoah, he argues, has been a disaster for Israel and for Judaism. Security has become Israel's primary goal, and everything done in the name of security is condoned. Burg makes clear that Jews should be at the forefront to protest and struggle against mass killings, violations of human rights, and injustices wherever they occur—in Rwanda or Darfur, Tibet or East Timor, in the United States, in Palestine or in Israel itself.

Monopolizing the Shoah has led to

a state of hysteria, leading Israel to brand its opponents with the Nazi swastika. From the Palestinian Liberation Organization to Hamas to Iran, every threat to Israel is perceived as a threat to its existence. In the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, Menachem Begin described Yasir Arafat as the “two-legged beast,” the same term he had earlier used to describe Hitler. Begin told the Israeli cabinet that Israel had no choice but to fight because the alternative was Treblinka. The P.L.O.’s National Charter was likewise likened to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, prompting the Israeli novelist Amos Oz to point out the danger of recreating Hitler in order to kill him again and again. Yet after the Hamas victory in the 2006 election, Benjamin Netanyahu announced that Israel was confronting a new *tzorer*, the term used to describe enemies like Hitler. Burg deplors these and similar efforts to reincarnate “the Nazi spirit into the Arab body.” And one can scarcely glance at an Israeli newspaper without seeing remarks about the threat of annihilation posed by Iran’s nuclear program. In fact, a nuclear Iran is a threat not just to Israel but to the whole of the Middle East and beyond. Such policies and attitudes are another compelling reason for Israel to free itself from the prison of the Shoah, which falsely connotes to Israel that “the whole world is against us.”

The most disturbing aspect of this intellectual imprisonment is found in the similarities Burg perceives between the Weimar Republic and contemporary Israeli society. Those were the years when the German people were deceived and misled by the beginnings of National Socialism. They did not take Hitler and his provocations seriously until the disaster was upon them. Burg fears that Israelis are also turning a blind eye to what is happening in their midst. The use of the term Arab in Israeli parlance is often derogatory, signifying something or

someone that is inferior, as was the German word *Jude* in the pre-Hitler years. Are the wall scribblings in Israel, *Arabs Out or Transfer Now*, any less sinister than *Juden Raus*? Will the most recent stories coming from Israeli Defense Forces soldiers about their actions in Gaza, or the ever more frequent claims by Israeli settlers as they appropriate more properties in the West Bank that they must “redeem” the land, or the policies of population transfer openly advocated by Israel’s new foreign minister, Avigdor Liebermann, give any more validity to Burg’s concerns about racism in Israel? There is no clear answer to that ques-

tion. But Burg warns his readers: “It happened to the Germany of Schiller, Goethe and Mendelssohn,” and it can happen “also to us.” He pleads with his fellow Israelis to open their ears and eyes and hearts.

There is a vast treasure of unfulfilled potential represented by the State of Israel. Yet the author is fearful that what was possible in the land of poets and philosophers is possible “here too, in the land of the prophets.” A chilling thought indeed.

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DONALD J. MOORE, S.J., is director of interfaith relations at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Jerusalem and professor of theology at Fordham University in New York City.

PETER HEINEGG

## WHAT WILL WROUGHT

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### SHAKESPEARE AND MODERN CULTURE

By Marjorie Garber  
Pantheon, 368p \$30  
ISBN 9780307377678

In an oft-quoted passage in his *Essay on Criticism* (1711), Alexander Pope muses about one of his great heroes, Virgil, making an epochal discovery about his great hero, Homer: “But when to examine every part he came,/ Nature and Homer were, he found, the same.” Three centuries later, the Harvard professor Marjorie Garber ventures a similarly bold claim: “Shakespeare makes modern culture, and modern culture makes Shakespeare.” Really? What about Descartes, Newton, Hume, Marx, Darwin, Einstein and the other usual suspects? Couldn’t we amend that to “major parts of modern Western culture”? Harold Bloom tried this thunderclap routine a decade ago

in *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, where he flatly declared, “Personality, in our sense, is a Shakespearean invention.” Oh these academics, always trying to cause a sensation.

Actually, Garber is not. After that initial over-the-top assertion, she settles down to the more modest task of pointing out some of the myriad ways in which Shakespeare sheds light on our world and vice versa. And with her formidable wit and learning she does a bang-up job.

Focusing on 10 of the greatest plays and proceeding thematically, not chronologically, Garber links each one to a different topic: “The Tempest” (ringing the changes on “man,” including racial, ethnic and other identity issues), “Romeo and Juliet” (youth), “Coriolanus” (alienation, political and otherwise), “Macbeth” (interpretation of the riddles of language, gender and





power), "Richard III" (fact versus fiction), "The Merchant of Venice" (authorial intention, anti-Semitism and so forth), "Othello" (racial and other differences), "Henry V" (heroic exemplarity), "Hamlet" (the mysteries of character) and "King Lear" (sublimity).

One can already hear the complaints: What happened to the comedies? (Perhaps their affirmation, however ironic, of patriarchal order and traditional marriage makes them less relevant—too conservative—for moderns.) Where are the unmatched poetic splendors of "Antony and Cleopatra"? (Perhaps not tragic enough, too sensuously blissed-out.) What of "Henry IV," especially Part 1? (Falstaff is mentioned briefly—but perhaps the incarnation of Old Vic is too classic and un-self-doubting a figure.) We could go on. But wait, Garber's book is an essay, not an exhaustive survey.

And she brings to it a dazzling breadth of reference, from the canonical and expected (Dr. Johnson on Cordelia, Freud on Hamlet, Brecht on Coriolanus) to the laughable contemporary (Roz Chast's New Yorker cartoon of Romeo and Juliet instant-messaging each other: Juliet: xoxoxoxo-oxxxooxxx gtg. Romeo: k). Garber presents an impressive history of Shakespearean performances that seems to squeeze in every major filmed or live production of the past half-century. She knows directors, actors and (naturally) critics; and she integrates their vision of Shakespeare into both the historical traumas (the Holocaust, for example) and the philosophical dilemmas (existentialist absurdism) of modernity, as well as into the "timeless" texts.

This includes, for instance, reflecting on the shift in approaches to Caliban (from vicious brute to heroic postcolonial rebel) or Shylock (from caricature to noble victim) or Othello (as played by whites in blackface to

real blacks). It means exploring the notable careers of actresses who played male Shakespearean leads—Charlotte Cushman as Romeo, Sarah Bernhardt as Hamlet—the perfect counterpart to the boy actors playing women in the 17th century. It means delving into the profusion of present-day Shakespearean spinoffs: Laurents-Sondheim-Robbins-Bernstein's "West Side Story," Barbara Garson's "MacBird," Tom Stoppard's "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead," Edward Bond's deliberately repellent "Lear" and even back to Cole Porter and the Spewacks' "Kiss Me, Kate," with that unforgettable ditty "Brush up your Shakespeare." Garber has seen everything. And it involves, as she demonstrates in her long chapter on what is now widely thought to be Shakespeare's greatest play, "King Lear," studying how our own changing experiences send us back to the work and let us see things we neglected or

underestimated before (the harrowing vistas of cosmic pessimism), which in turn adds depth and complexity to the work.

So does Shakespeare still wear the "not of an age, but for all time" crown bestowed on him by Ben Jonson? Shouldn't a modern feminist have problems with the idealized perfection (and passivity) of heroines like Cordelia, Desdemona or Miranda? For all his gender-bending, didn't Shakespeare fail to perceive the radical injustice of Western sexual arrangements? Curiously, Garber does not address such issues.

Still, the bottom line here is not Shakespeare's magical trans-temporal relevance, but Garber's knowledgeable ability and charm as a guide. Who knew that high-priced management gurus ran so many training programs based on the speeches of Henry V—"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers," etc.? Today's budding executives



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are taught that just as the king had his old comrade Bardolph hanged for robbing a church, so bosses sometimes have to fire their buddies. Garber knows how Shakespeare fits into high school curricula, the current cinema, pop culture and every imaginable detail of American history.

One might wish that Harvard's William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of English and American Literature would not use "like" as a conjunction and that she would check her French tags and the dates of some events a bit more carefully; but maybe that's the sort of *sprezzatura* that goes with being

so hip. She has ably negotiated the always slippery field of popularization, where explaining too little is pedantic and explaining too much is gauche, where you are never quite sure how much your audience knows (so she defines "enjambment" and "stichomythia"). Finally, as readers familiar with her *Dog Love* (1996) or *Shakespeare After All* (2004) know, Garber is lively, lucid and full of laughter—not a bad combination in these dark times.

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PETER HEINEGG is a professor of English at Union College, Schenectady, N.Y.

LESLIE J. HOPPE

## THE GOSPEL TRUTH

### THE FINAL DAYS OF JESUS

#### The Archaeological Evidence

By Shimon Gibson  
Harper One. 272p \$27.99  
ISBN 9780061458484

Each year at Easter time, one of the news magazines will feature a cover story on Jesus, taking advantage of reader interest as Christians remember Jesus' death and resurrection. The publication date for Gibson's book suggests that HarperOne is imitating that marketing strategy. Gibson is a professor of archaeology at the University of North Carolina in Charlotte and has considerable field experience in Israel. His goal is to examine the historical Jesus, using the results of excavations as primary evidence, but the bulk of the book derives its information from ancient texts like the Gospels and the writings of Josephus rather than the findings of archaeology. (Gibson admits that "the Gospels are the main source of information we have for the final week in the life of Jesus.")

The problem with using literary

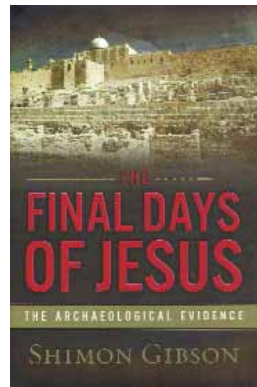
evidence to reconstruct Jesus' final days is that the ancient writers do not provide the kind of detail that makes it possible to draw firm historical conclusions. One example is the location of Jesus' trial before Pilate, the subject of the book's fifth chapter. The path of the Via Dolorosa that pilgrims walk in Jerusalem today assumes that Jesus' trial took place in the Antonia Fortress, a military barracks built by Herod the Great at the northeastern edge of the platform on which the Temple stood. Pilate's residence was in Caesarea Maritima. When he came to Jerusalem, it is unlikely—though not impossible—that he stayed in a barracks. He probably stayed in the Herodian Palace, but the evidence that is adduced to support this conclusion comes from Philo and Josephus and not from archaeology. Gibson asserts that Jesus' trial took place at the Herodian palace, but there is nothing in the archaeological record to support

this assertion.

Gibson also weighs in on the question of the location of Jesus' tomb. Though the Garden Tomb located outside the Old City of Jerusalem remains a popular site for evangelical pilgrims, there is a general consensus that Jesus' tomb is located within the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. But this conclusion is not based on archaeological evidence so much as on the pre-Constantinian tradition about the location of Jesus' tomb. Gibson notes correctly that there are other tombs in close proximity to the structure venerated as the tomb of Christ and suggests that Joseph and Mary were buried in one of those tombs. There is absolutely no textual or archaeological evidence to support this speculation. Still, that a professional archaeologist is making such an assertion gives it a scientific veneer despite the lack of evidence.

Given the book's subtitle, readers would expect Gibson to deliver evidence. If one had only the archaeological record of first-century Jerusalem to go by, one would not even know that Jesus existed. Jesus left behind no monumental structures or inscriptions etched into stone. There are no material remains that can be unequivocally linked to Jesus. Though the tradition identifying the location of Jesus' tomb is early, the tomb itself bears no evidence of having been the resting place of Jesus' body. The value of relics such as the true cross derives from the veneration of many generations of believers—again, not from archaeology.

Archaeology cannot help in reconstructing what happened during Jesus' final days in Jerusalem. The best it can do is re-create the world of first-century Jerusalem on the basis of the material remains left behind by the city's inhabitants. The results of scientific excavations have expanded our knowl-



edge of the world in which Jesus, his disciples and his opponents lived. Archaeology has illumined the physical setting of the Jerusalem Jesus visited. Still, what we know of Jesus' final days comes from the literary record—principally from the four Gospels.

In his trial before Pilate, Jesus explains that his kingdom is “not of this world” (Jn 18:36). Herod the Great and the Roman occupiers of

first-century Jerusalem left a lasting imprint on the city. Excavations have uncovered the impressive scale of their building activities. Jesus, by way of contrast, left nothing behind except a message—a powerful message that has transformed the world. It is our fascination with his message that impels us to want to know more about Jesus of Nazareth, and so we turn to archaeology for answers. We should not ask

archaeology, however, to do more than it can. Over the past 100 years of excavations in and near Jerusalem, our knowledge of the ancient city and its inhabitants has grown greatly, but it has yielded nothing on the final days of Jesus.

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**LESLIE J. HOPPE, O.F.M.,** is provincial minister of the Assumption Province of Franciscans, in Franklin, Wis.

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Preferred start date: summer 2010. For more information call or send e-mail to John Reid, Presidential Search Consultant for The Reid Group at (206) 432-3565 or [JReid@TheReidGroup.biz](mailto:JReid@TheReidGroup.biz).

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## LETTERS

### Bush's War

In "A Death in the Family" (5/18), David O'Brien seems to absolve George W. Bush of responsibility for the invasion of Iraq by saying it is not his war. Yet we invaded only because the Bush administration lied to us about the reason for the invasion. The fighting in Afghanistan can be called our war because we were attacked by elements in that country. The death of our service men and women is a tragedy, and their sacrifice must be appreciated. But those responsible for their deaths and the deaths of so many Iraqi civilians cannot so easily be absolved.

(REV.) FRANK ECKART  
Toledo, Ohio

### Give Me Scripture

Thank you for your articles on liturgy and preaching (5/25). I can appreciate, as Edward Foley, O.F.M.Cap., points out ("Scripture Alone?"), that homilies do not always need to flow from the Scriptures. However, I personally long for a homily rooted in Scripture. Some of our younger clergy provide us, week after week, with homilies that would have us believe that church tradition began in the 19th century, that only the hierarchy receive the Holy Spirit and that there is but one social justice issue that merits attention.

CAROLYN CAPUANO, H.M.  
Canton, Ohio

### The Whole Story

I agree with the "fundamental Roman Catholic principle" of Edward Foley, O.F.M.Cap., that liturgy determines the readings and not vice-versa ("Scripture Alone?" 5/25). But I think a second principle, or at least a corollary, emerges in the Sundays of

Ordinary Time, in which the liturgy pursues a semi-continuous reading of a single synoptic Gospel.

In this B cycle year, for instance, when we hear John's sixth chapter proclaimed in order over five summer Sundays, wouldn't the preacher take this invitation to develop the rich layers of meaning that grow and deepen each week as a key to the celebration? In line with Father Foley's principle of using not just the single pericope but the whole liturgy of the Word, why not bring the larger Gospel units and theology of Mark into the Sunday preaching during Ordinary Time?

The homily must not become a Bible study session. The preacher is called on to bring the words and deeds of Jesus into clearer focus using all the literary and theological resources at his disposal.

(REV.) JAMES EBLEN  
Seattle, Wash.

### Homily by Committee

It is a shame that it took a South African Jesuit to bring to the attention of the U.S. church the fact that their bishops in 1982 called for the establishment of homily preparation groups ("Preaching in a Vacuum," 5/25). In *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* the bishops stated "that working with a homily preparation group will help to ensure two things: that the homilist hears the proclamation of the good news in the Sunday Scripture readings as it is heard by the people in the congregation; secondly, that the preacher is able to point in concrete and specific ways to the difference that the hearing of this good news can make in the lives of those who hear it."

In 2004 the chairman of the U.S. Conference of Bishops' Priestly Life and Ministry Committee, Bishop

Timothy M. Dolan, was going to "update and bring *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* into conformity with the 2003 *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*." I would recommend that the new chairman consult with a Jesuit who was on the drafting committee in 1982, John J. O'Callaghan, S.J., as well as Bishop Richard J. Sklba, who also was a member, to get the ball rolling again. Their input would at least assure that this urgent call will not go the way of the dodo bird.

Both homiletic professionalism and the preacher's respect for the intelligence of the congregation demand that these homily preparation groups be established in every parish. After all, priests need all the help they can get in their overworked ministries. Let's hope that they all have the humility to accept this opportunity.

JIM CASEY  
Upper St. Clair, Pa.

### Talking Back

So Chris Chatteris, S.J., wants feedback on the Sunday homily? How curious! I frequently find the Sunday sermons maddening. Occasionally I feel like jumping up off the pew and shouting, "But that's not true!" or "How do you know that?" More often, however, I am lulled to inattention by vague generalities, and although I fight valiantly against them, I succumb to daydreams. Even when I happen to agree entirely with the church's teaching on a certain issue, I am all too often chagrined by the weakness of the priest or deacon's argument. "Because the church says so" doesn't do it for me.

If a priest or deacon encounters a "block" when preparing a sermon, why not spare the congregation some suf-

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fering and simply read a piece of uplifting or socially redeeming literature—Chekhov’s “The Lament” perhaps—or a two-minute poem or song? Short and to the point can be powerful.

CHRISTOPHER X. O’CONNOR  
*Albuquerque, N.M.*

### The Kiss

Thanks to Jim McDermott, S.J., for his commentary on the sign of peace (“Hand in Hand,” 5/25). Even in the old days, the kiss of peace was utilized in certain liturgies, though not in a typical parish. It occurred only in a solemn Mass with deacon and subdeacon (or as we said in our Boston neighborhood, “a Mass with three priests”). Yet since the only solemn Mass most Catholics ever attended was a funeral—where the “kiss” and the preceding prayer were omitted along with the final blessing—few people had ever seen it before it “suddenly” appeared in 1970.

R. P. BURKE  
*Bexley, Ohio*

### On the Hook

Re your editorial, “Too Big to Bail” (6/8): Allowing A.I.G. and poorly managed banks to fail might have been, and might still be, in the nation’s best interests. In the case of A.I.G., the government could have chosen to underwrite more traditional operations, whereas high-risk, second-party bets on the success (or failure) of other institutions could have been allowed to take their natural course. So long as these institutions remain “too large to fail,” we will always be on the hook.

Timothy Geithner and Ben Bernanke may be men of integrity, but they have too many friends in the banking and finance sectors to look out for our interests objectively. In addition, they and President Obama appear to be overly concerned with preserving the image of the United States and in pacifying our foreign creditors.

Propping up the financial sector is

only buying the United States time to re-establish a more self-sustaining economy that does not require constant deficit spending; it will not solve our fundamental economic problems.

JOSEPH A. D’ANNA  
*Los Alamos, N.M.*

### Not Dead Yet

“Ave atque Vale” (6/8) was most enjoyable and persuasive, but Thomas G. Casey, S.J., is wasting his word processor. Neither English nor any other tongue is ever likely to supplant Latin as the official language of the Vatican for reasons that have nothing to do with culture, linguistics, history or even theology. Latin is pre-eminent because it is the hieratic language or argot of the Roman hierarchy, the language of power. It divides the elite from the hoi polloi. Apart from Vatican bureaucrats, classical scholars or people who have chosen to learn it, nobody speaks, reads or writes Latin for any reason.

There is no room here to review and counter the arguments for the domi-

nance of Latin in the church, but it would not make any difference anyway. There is no salvation outside Latin. The wonder is that we got our vernacular liturgies. So count your blessings. And remember what the school boy used to say: “Latin is a language/ as dead as it can be; it killed all the Romans/ and now it’s killing me.”

PETER FARLEY  
*Freeport, N.Y.*

### Latin Sí, Inglés No

Thomas G. Casey’s suggestion that English be adopted as the official language of the church reflects an unfortunate lack of understanding and sympathy for those cultures that speak languages derived from Latin. Such a move would cause intense anger and resentment among that vast percentage of the world’s Catholics who speak the language of St. Teresa of Ávila and St. John of the Cross and who would be astounded at seeing the language of Thomas Cramner and the English Reformation being adopted by the Catholic Church.

ELIA MALGIERI  
*New York, N.Y.*



# Reaching Out; Grace Unleashed

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), JUNE 28, 2009

Readings: Wis 1:13-15; 2:23-24; Ps 30:2-13; 2 Cor 8:7-15; Mk 5:21-43

“Your faith has saved you. Go in peace” (Mk 5:34)

When illness lingers on and on with no relief or when death looms at the threshold of a child's life, it can cause sufferers to take measures that are out of the ordinary. In today's Gospel, a synagogue official pleads with Jesus for his dying daughter. This scene is unusual in that most other religious leaders in the Gospel are painted as opposing Jesus and ultimately trying to do away with him. This leader, however, is a desperate father on the brink of losing his beloved 12-year-old daughter. Ordinarily he would not humble himself at the feet of an itinerant healer, but because his daughter's life hangs by a thread he will try anything. The crowd surrounding Jesus parts for Jairus, as he implores Jesus to come and lay his hands on his daughter, hoping beyond hope that he can make her live.

As Mark is wont to do, he intertwines a story of another person whose interminable suffering causes her to step beyond her normal behavior, too. This woman has gone to doctor after doctor, only to have her hopes rise and be dashed yet again, as her illness kept growing worse. For 12 long years she has been seeking a cure. Having exhausted her monetary resources and her dignity, she forsakes the professional doctors and follows after a popular healer. Exerting her last

energy, she wriggles through the crowd that presses in on Jesus and grabs his cloak from behind. With hope almost gone, she will try anything.

In both cases, people with status and resources take the unusual step of leaving their accustomed social circles and reaching out to an itinerant preacher and healer. Jairus was a well-respected leader of the faith community. The hemorrhaging woman had once had money to spend on doctors. In desperation, both cast off their last bit of reserve, risking trust in Jesus. Both beg for his healing touch, and they are not disappointed.

God's power to heal flows freely through Jesus into the bodies of these two suffering females. Both are restored as beloved daughters. The Gospel healings are dramatic enactments of God's will for life to the full for all, as the first reading asserts. God does not rejoice in death; rather, God formed humankind to be imperishable.

The Gospel story leads us to grapple with a mystery: Why does God, whose love is so visible in healing touch, not prevent the death of beloved daughters and sons? With his choice of words in describing the hemorrhaging woman, Mark draws her in lines parallel with Jesus, pointing

toward the mystery of his suffering and death. Mark uses the verb *paschein* (v. 25) to describe her suffering, the same verb that Jesus uses to speak of his own passion (8:31; 9:12). In the third passion prediction Jesus says he will be scourged (10:34); she is healed of her “scourge” (*mastix*, vv. 29, 34; translated in N.A.B. as “affliction,” in N.R.S.V. as “suffering”). Finally, she tells the “whole truth” (v. 33) to Jesus, the truthful teacher (12:14, 32). Just as her faith



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Reflect on a time when you have taken extraordinary steps to reach out for Jesus' healing power.
- How can faith bring salvation and healing even in the face of death?
- • •
- Reflect on startling ways in which others have called forth God's power in you.
- How can we encourage the giftedness of others in our local communities?

ART: TAD DUNNE

both saves and heals her (the verb *sozein* in v. 34 has both connotations), so Jesus' faithfulness to God brings salvation and healing through and beyond death.

This Gospel does not focus on the boundaries Jesus crossed by letting an unclean woman touch him. Many have read this story in light of Lev 15:19-30 and its proscriptions concerning a woman with discharges “beyond the time of her impurity.” Yet the account in Mark does not say where on her

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body the woman's hemorrhage was, nor is ritual purity made an issue in the text. In fact, as a healer, Jesus was always touching and being touched by people who were ritually impure. Most Jews would have been ritually impure most of the time. The only time when it was necessary to be in a state of ritual purity, was when one was going to the Temple. Then, ritual washing and waiting until sundown would remove most kinds of impurities.

Instead, the focus in the Gospel is on faith in the divine power to heal and save that flows through Jesus, which is sometimes manifest in physical healing, and which is mysteriously at work even when beloved daughters and sons pass through death.

#### FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), JULY 5, 2009

Readings: Ez 2:2-5; Ps 123:1-2, 2, 3-4; 2 Cor 12:7-10; Mk 6:1-6

*"My grace is sufficient for you,  
for power is made perfect in  
weakness" (2 Cor 12:9)*

**H**ave you ever done something you never thought you could do, but could because someone else believed in you and urged you forward? On the contrary, have you found yourself hampered by others' preconceived notions and lack of confidence in you? In a certain sense, these are the experiences of Paul in the second reading and of Jesus in today's Gospel.

Paul has had extraordinary revelations and has accomplished incredible things in his apostolic ministry. Yet he has a sense of true humility concerning these unusual gifts. They are not due to any power or qualifications of his own. Rather, he knows that they are pure grace, sheer gift from God and undeserved. Paul has done things in his ministry that he never imagined

doing because God's gifts have been recognized and called forth in him. Paradoxically, these uncommon gifts do not endow Paul with any privilege or cause him to become puffed up. Instead, the exercise of his gifts for mission have brought him great suffering: insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities.

He writes of "a thorn in the flesh" given him. Biblical scholars have long puzzled over the nature of this "thorn." An ancient interpretation understands it as "the thorn of the flesh," that is physical desires or concupiscence, that plagues Paul. Others have thought it to be a physical malady or a kind of suffering related to his ministry. The latter is a real likelihood when we look at the context of this passage.

It is part of the "fool's speech" that begins in 11:1 and goes through 12:10. In it Paul is refuting the charges of his opponents who accuse him of being weak (10:1-2), having no credentials (3:1-3) and being unimpressive in words, deeds and physical presence (10:1-12). Paul counters with a surprising twist: instead of defending himself by taking a position of strength, he turns the tables and argues that his weaknesses are the very mark of his authenticity as an apostle. His own powerlessness makes evident that God's grace and power work through him.

That the "superapostles" (11:5; 12:11) who oppose Paul are the "thorn" in his flesh sent by Satan is likely when we see that in 11:12-15 he compares them to Satan, "who dis-

guises himself as an angel of light." See also Num 33:55 and Ez 28:24, where enemies are called "thorns." Unlike these false apostles, Paul boasts of weakness that allows God's power to work through him. Further, he is content to endure hardship when it is for the sake of the mission.

Paul, with the grace of God, was enabled to do far more than he ever thought possible, given his own abilities. Jesus, by contrast, was prevented from doing any mighty deeds in his hometown because of the limited expectations of his own people. Thinking they knew Jesus inside and out, they hindered his ability to let God's power work through him for their benefit. Sometimes this is referred to as the "tall poppy syndrome." Group dynamics often prevent anyone from rising above the rest. "Who do they think they are?" others will say about an emergent local leader. If an "expert" had come from outside the community and taught the same things as their native son, they would have been far more disposed to accept such teaching.

In both readings there is a recognition that the perceptions of others can strongly influence the exercise of prophetic and apostolic gifts within a faith community. Opposition and close-mindedness can squelch the flow of the Spirit, while expressed belief in the untapped abilities of another can cause him or her to flourish in extraordinary ways with the power of God.

**BARBARA E. REID**



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