

# America

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## Henri Matisse's Great Risk

LEO J. O'DONOVAN

## The Ethics of Nutrition

GERALD D. COLEMAN

## The Jesus of History

BERNARD BRANDON SCOTT

ADELA YARBRO COLLINS

# OF MANY THINGS

**T**he Jesus I know is the “living Jesus” described by Luke Timothy Johnson in his recent article in *America*, “The Jesus Controversy” (Aug. 2-9), the one he called in an earlier book the “real Jesus.” He is the Jesus of faith, the Jesus of the church and its tradition, the Jesus of prayer and liturgy, the Jesus of service and the hidden Jesus encountered, as the First Letter of John reminds us, in the neighbor. But unlike Johnson, I have not found the search for the historical Jesus an obstacle to faith.

I have been a critic of some of the more pretentious endeavors of the search for the historical Jesus, like the Jesus Seminar’s color-coded New Testament, marking authentic and putatively less authentic sayings of Jesus. But I have not been a fan of large tomes of scholarly minutiae from Jewish antiquity, no matter how outstanding, in which the author is unwilling to take a theological position.

I do not trust an author who won’t tell me what his findings add up to or what she believes. Even though it may take some sorting through, I like my Jesus scholarship to feed my faith and help me nourish the faith of the congregations to whom I preach. The deconstructive imagination has a subordinate role in any intellectual exercise. It helps us re-examine our assumptions, but if it does only that it is toxic. Without the positive movement of “a second naïveté,” such intellectual disassembling of historical detail is the chop-logic Plato dismissed as “butchery.”

Jesus scholarship can nourish faith by engaging our minds, our affections and our spirit. My earliest encounter with the so-called New Search for the Historical Jesus came with the work of the German New Testament scholar, Joachim Jeremias. He is notorious perhaps for having said that *abba*, “father,” was the one word we can say with certainty came from Jesus. But Jeremias wrote his own *New Testament Theology*,

and some of his themes, like the new family of God, Jesus’ intimacy with the Father and God’s kingdom, remain topics of my preaching until today.

John Howard Yoder’s *The Politics of Jesus*, while the work of a theologian, not an exegete, unpacked the social background of the Gospels for generations of students. In the United States, it opened the way for a new wave of the social gospel across denominations. Johnson, it seems to me, is especially allergic to that kind of social reading of the Gospel. The approach has sometimes been overdone, but the uncovering of “the faith that does justice” in the Hebrew Scriptures, rabbinic Judaism and early Christian writings is one of the great gifts of contemporary scholarship.

For those who can handle his complex prose, N. T. Wright’s two-volume set called *Christian Origins and the Question of God* offers rich background for observing both the Advent and the Lenten seasons. An exploration of the religious movements leading up to Jesus’ time, Vol. 1, *The New Testament and the People of God*, offers a rich preparation for celebrating the coming of the Messiah; and Vol. 2, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, lends support to the view that Jesus’ own identity was directed to accepting his death on the cross. Wright shows that Jesus scholarship and the Jesus of the liturgy complement each other.

What matters with historical Jesus research is what we do with it. It needn’t lead us to accept an ersatz Jesus nor leave our faith a shambles. There is a pragmatic test for the lived truthfulness of Jesus research. Do we know Jesus better? Are we inspired more to follow him? Are our desires more focused and committed? Are our hearts more generous? Are we readier to be led by God’s Spirit? Read critically, Jesus research can lead us to a deeper encounter with the living Christ.

**DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J.**

# America

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Ph: 212-581-4640; Fax: 212-399-3596

E-mail: [america@americamagazine.org](mailto:america@americamagazine.org);  
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HENRI MATISSE PAINTING BATHERS BY A RIVER IN 1913.  
PHOTO: ALVIN LANGDON COBURN.

## ON THE WEB

The editors share their favorite **summer reads** on our podcast, and Harry Forbes reviews “**Eat Pray Love**,” starring Julia Roberts, right. Plus, additional images from the **Henri Matisse exhibit** at MoMA. All at [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org).



### Resignations Refused

It should come as no surprise that Pope Benedict XVI's decision not to accept the resignations of Dublin's auxiliary bishops Eamonn Walsh and Raymond Field has unleashed outrage in Ireland. The bishops had resigned at the urging of Dublin's Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, who demanded that some accountability be demonstrated in the aftermath of the Murphy Report on sexual assault and abuse by clerics in the Archdiocese of Dublin. The Vatican decision is being interpreted in Ireland as a rebuke to Archbishop Martin and his persistent focus on greater accountability and penance among the hierarchy.

Archbishop Martin has been perceived not just as a rare pastoral presence in the midst of this international crisis, but a prophetic voice offering direction to a church looking for a way to right itself. He has been a model of a responsive, proactive prelate. Hence the discouragement at this inexplicable reversal. During an address in May to an Irish church group, Archbishop Martin worried that "strong forces" in the church wanted the truth about clerical sexual abuse to remain hidden and confided that he had never felt so disheartened and dejected.

Two bishops offered themselves up in a small gesture of accountability. Much more is required, but even this effort has been rejected in Rome. Can the Roman Curia really be so oblivious to the anger and frustration of average Catholics worldwide who are trying to make sense of years of clerical parish-shifting and coverups? It does not seem possible. But if they are, one is surely tempted to join Archbishop Martin in his dejection.

### Ethics by Default

The latest installment in the nation's evolving debt crisis has been an upsurge in home equity loans and lines of credit defaults. Consumer-borrowers are walking away from obligations on such loans in record numbers after watching home values plummet or losing to foreclosure the homes that originally generated the credit. Too many lines of credit were tossed out to consumers eager to put the money to good use on powerboats and motorcycles when both lenders and borrowers had trouble imagining a time when home values would not keep escalating.

Borrowers electing for "strategic defaults" follow a new ethic that somehow absolves them of their obligation to repay on the grounds that lenders, as professionals, should have been more skeptical about making such loans in the first place. It is hard to sympathize with that position, which has already proved, and will continue to

prove, costly to taxpayers and consumer-bystanders stuck bailing out failing institutions. That attitude reveals something, however, about the state of America's debt-drenched society in which the only people morally on the hook for commitments they make are "bag-holders." Now where could consumers have learned that lesson? During the Reagan era and again under President George W. Bush, government spending beyond its revenue stream has been elevated to a fiscal virtue. Likewise, corporate players rolled the dice on risky investment strategies with little intention of accepting personal or institutional responsibility for their decisions. We live in a world where trickle-down economics has never actually worked, but trickle-down morality seems to be functioning just fine.

### The Real Islam

Again and again since the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Islam has been unjustly portrayed as a religion that fosters violent and extremist behavior. The fierce resistance to the proposal to build a community center and mosque two blocks from ground zero in New York is rooted in the false belief that the Muslim faith is somehow to blame for the 2001 tragedy. Not only is this an erroneous reading of events (Al Qaeda is no way representative of Islam); it is emblematic of a larger misunderstanding of Islam as a triumphalistic force in history.

A welcome corrective to these historical misconceptions is now available from Harvard University Press. *Muhammad and the Early Believers*, by Fred M. Donner, is a bracing re-evaluation of the earliest days of Islam. Drawing on recent research, Donner explains how the "believers" movement (a term taken from the Koran) was ecumenical in nature, including Jews and Christians because they too were monotheists who believed in the God of Abraham. Citing architectural evidence, Donner also contends that the early "Islamic conquests" were not as violent as history books have portrayed. The believers' rise to political power, for instance, did not rely on forced conversions; theirs was a monotheistic movement that was often compatible with local traditions.

The interfaith spirit of Islam's founding is reflected in the plans for the community in New York. Park51, as the project is now known, is meant to be a cultural center where people of all faiths can gather to learn about the Muslim tradition. Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf hopes it can serve as a bridge between Islam and the Western world. The blinkered responses to that proposal are proof enough that such connections are desperately needed.

# Give Labor Its Day

Labor holds the key to the nation's future global competitiveness, its standard of living and the health of its democracy. This Labor Day we honor the recession-battered U.S. workforce, which deserves to have its day.

The U.S. worker, typically the world's most productive, has increased productivity for 18 months of this recession, even though he or she had fewer co-workers to share the workload. But such productivity cannot last forever, nor has it. At the end of the second quarter, the Labor Department reported a 0.9 percent dip in productivity for 2010. That dip could spark rehiring; the question is when.

Productivity is a two-edged sword. When fewer workers accomplish more, the greatest beneficiaries are not the workers but their employers, whose operations gain efficiency, and the shareholders, whose stock values rise. A recession gives employers the latitude to freeze or squeeze wages; high productivity allows them to postpone rehiring. More than layoffs, the delay in rehiring has kept 14.6 million former workers on government assistance and off the private payroll—nearly half of them for six months or longer—and has prevented new workers from landing a job.

Joblessness has worsened this year. The national unemployment rate held at 9.5 percent in July only because 181,000 workers stopped looking for work. The inclusion of part-time workers and those who have given up their job search but want full-time work would raise the rate to 17 percent or more.

Millions of U.S. workers had begun to lose ground decades before the recession—their wages flat, pensions phased out, benefits and promotions cut, and the jobs they performed regarded as expendable, the first cost to be slashed in any downturn. Unions have remained weak. Their top priority—the Employee Free Choice Act, which would make it easier for workers to organize—was introduced in both houses of Congress in 2009 but has been lobbied almost to death by business interests.

During the George W. Bush administration, workers at the top of the income ladder saw their pay and perks grow exponentially as their tax rates shrank, offering them plenty of cushion in hard times. Yet the enormous difference in pay at the top is not always merited by education, expertise or experience. Recent reports of excessive pay for unexceptional corporate leadership and wanton risk-taking with other people's money have enraged the public. Too often the rich get richer not because their work is outstanding, but

because the capitalist system favors them.

In the 1981 encyclical "On Human Work," Pope John Paul II affirmed the primacy of labor: "Workers' rights cannot be doomed to be the mere result of economic systems aimed at maximum profits. The thing that must shape the whole economy is respect for the workers' rights within each country and all through the world's economy" (No. 17).

President Obama has had some success reining in the recession during his 18 months in office. His administration has saved the jobs of millions of public workers through state assistance, rescued much of the auto industry, extended unemployment benefits to millions, kept inflation low and through loans and grants enabled more low-income students to attend college, improving the long-term workforce. But the administration did not make the workforce a priority when the recession hit, as Germany, for example, did. The German government subsidized both businesses and workers to prevent layoffs and retain workers for shortened work weeks. As the economy picked up, businesses began rehiring, and Germany's unemployment rate has already dropped to pre-recession levels. By contrast, the U.S. government has neither created enough new jobs nor convinced the private sector to do so, which was the strategic plan.

To be competitive in the global workplace of the future, the United States will need to close the gap in income and education between the highest-paid workers and all other workers, a gap exacerbated by high unemployment. If left unchecked, this gap could also threaten the health of the large middle class that characterizes the world's best democracies.

The Catholic Church, which values the worker as central to society, could help to elevate the workforce in the public mind. Societal leaders must understand that corporate profits and shareholder returns cannot in justice be made at the expense of the nation's own labor force. Nations with a rich clique lording it over everyone else are too prevalent in the world, but none of them are thriving democracies. Nor are they just. If the United States is headed in this direction (as neglect of the growing income gap indicates), then workers, employers and civic leaders ought to begin this Labor Day figuring out how to reverse course.



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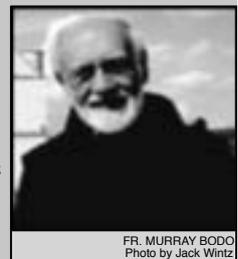
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## About Your Presenter

Your presenter is Fr. Murray Bodo, O.F.M., Ph.D., a Franciscan Priest and a member of the Franciscan Academy. He earned a Ph.D. in English from the University of Cincinnati and taught English and American Literature and the craft of writing for 36 years. The author of 25 books, including the best-selling, *Francis: The Journey and the Dream*, and his recent works, *Song of the Sparrow: New Poems and Meditations*, and *Mystics: Ten Who Show us the Ways of God*, upon which these talks are based. His poems, stories and articles have appeared in magazines and literary journals. Fr. Murray resides in Cincinnati, Ohio, and spends three months a year in Assisi, Italy, as a staff member of Franciscan Pilgrimage Programs.



FR. MURRAY BODO  
Photo by Jack Wintz

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# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

PAKISTAN

## Floods Hamper Aid Efforts As Disease Threatens Millions

**P**akistanis faced new dangers posed by disease as emergency response teams and international aid agencies struggled to rush supplies to millions of people forced to flee the country's worst flooding in 80 years. Jack Byrne, Catholic Relief Services' country representative to Pakistan, said the aid effort has been hampered because bridges and roads have been washed away by monsoon rains and the ensuing floods since late July.

The floods that started in the northern part of the country have generally followed the Indus River, moving southward to Sindh and Punjab provinces. In parts of northern provinces where floodwaters have receded, people are returning and "are having a hard time identifying where they lived," Byrne said. "People are still on the move in and around Sindh," Byrne reported from his office in Islamabad, the capital, on Aug. 17. "Thousands are just living on the road."

Hundreds of thousands of people displaced by the floods have made their way to the major cities of Karachi and Lahore, taxing efforts to provide adequate food and shelter. At a news conference in Islamabad on Aug. 17, Daniel Toole, Unicef's regional director for South Asia, said up to 3.5 million children are in danger of contracting diarrhea, cholera and upper respiratory infections through contaminated

water and insects.

The floods have affected up to 20 million people and a fifth of the area of this country of 170 million. An



**A family wades through floodwaters in Muzaffargarh District in Punjab Province, Pakistan, on Aug. 16.**

estimated 1,500 people have died. The United Nations reported that food rations and clean water have reached only 500,000 of the estimat-

IMMIGRATION

## Widow of Slain Rancher Reflects on Border Debate

**S**ue Krentz is a conflicted woman, coping with the complicated reality of life near the Mexican border. She hears calls for the humanitarian treatment of migrants at her church, and her family has long shown compassion to those who cross their ranch, providing water and other aid before calling the Border Patrol.

But it pains her deeply to know there was no similar compassion from whomever Rob Krentz, 58, encountered on March 27. That day her husband of 33 years was shot to death on their ranch northeast of Douglas as he made his rounds. No one has been

charged for the crime.

The Krentz family's loss soon became fuel for an already volatile debate about illegal immigration. The Arizona Legislature quickly passed a controversial bill to mandate local enforcement of immigration law. By the time a court-abridged version of S.B. 1070 was enacted on July 29, there was a constant drumbeat of news reports, talk radio and political posturing in Arizona, much of it referring to Rob Krentz's death. Every mention of the bill now stabs at her heart. "They couldn't just let Rob pass in peace."

Krentz supports S.B. 1070 and had

long backed such legislation, but she believes the main responsibility for fixing border problems lies with the U.S. and Mexican governments, the latter by doing more to help its own people support themselves in their own country. A lifelong Catholic, Krentz has turned to Mary and a daily 4 a.m. rosary "to get me through this." But she chafes when her pastor at St. Luke's preaches about the Christian responsibility to honor the human dignity of every person, no matter their legal status. "Where's my human dignity? Where was Rob's?" she asks.

Krentz listens to Glenn Beck's discourses on illegal immigration and his attacks on those within the church who are leading the campaign for comprehensive immigration reform. Whether she agrees with him or not,



ed two million people left homeless by the floods. The organization launched an appeal for \$459.7 million in emergency relief funds. Agency

officials expected that rebuilding and recovery will require billions more. The World Bank offered on Aug. 17 to redirect \$900 million in loans for development projects in Pakistan to assist with aid efforts. Catholic Relief Services, the U.S. bishops' international relief and development agency, has collected \$6.2 million in emergency funds since the flooding began. Even so, Byrne said relief agencies are concerned that donor fatigue is setting in.

"The donor response has been slow," he said. "It's what the U.N. calls perception deficit, people thinking the money is not going where it's needed because they think the government is corrupt. Pakistan is saddened that the world has been slow to respond."

Byrne said the funds collected by C.R.S. have been used to provide emergency kits to about 3,000 households and a total of about 30,000 people. The kits contain cooking sets,

water purification tablets, bottled water, blankets and soap.

The agency also has started providing transitional shelter to people in the north. The simple wooden structures will provide adequate housing for the short term as people begin to re-establish their routines, he explained.

Once people are settled into new housing, cash-for-work programs will hire people to rebuild roads, clear drainage channels and build small bridges.

The floods have devastated Pakistan's already fragile economy, wiping out farmland and sweeping away people, livestock and property. Byrne said there is growing concern that the planting season may be delayed. "If most of the farmers miss the planting season, which is in September, it will affect the crops next year," he said. "They plant corn, wheat, cotton for clothing, and there's a lot of subsistence farming."

Krentz sympathizes with those who feel they must come to the United States and worries for them.

"I understand that people are desperate," Krentz said. "I understand that people are terrified. I understand that people have nothing; that they're looking for a better life. But I also understand that there's a criminal element that's testing us."

Long before her husband was killed, the peace and sense of security that had been a part of Cochise County ranch life for generations had been gradually eroding. Beginning in 1996 when the Border Patrol began cutting off the most heavily traveled areas for illegal crossings near San Diego and near El Paso, Tex., undocumented migrants began crossing the border farther out in the desert.

Cochise County quickly became a favored route.

At one edge of the Krentz Ranch along Highway 80, Krentz pulled over to investigate a clutch of Border Patrol vehicles inside her cattle fence. Agents had just picked up 10 people walking across the ranch in 100-degree heat at midday. "People have to be awfully desperate to even attempt this," Krentz said. "I've seen women here with their babies, and their babies are thirsty.... I get so mad. I get mad at the [Mexican] government for not taking care of their own people."

It doesn't bother

Krentz that church and migrant-aid groups leave water along desert trails known to be used by migrants. "Just because I'm white and conservative does not mean I'm a Ku Klux Klanner," she said. "It does not mean I'm not compassionate with people in need."



**Sue Krentz near her cattle ranch outside Douglas, Ariz.**

## Girl Servers Alter Inequality

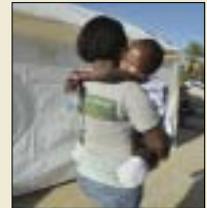
Permitting girls to serve at the altar marked the end of a form of inequality in the church and allowed girls to experience the formative power of directly assisting with the mystery of the Eucharist—said the Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano* in an article on Aug. 7. “The exclusion of girls...has always weighed heavily and represented a deep inequality within Catholic education,” it said. Even though there may have been many parishioners who accepted the presence of girls as servers only when there were no boys to fill the role, “overcoming this barrier was very important for young women.” Pope Benedict XVI met with more than 53,000 altar servers from Europe during his weekly general audience in St. Peter’s Square on Aug. 4. Organizers said most of the young pilgrims were female.

## Pakistani Security Failed Christians

A senior police official in Pakistan acknowledged that security forces failed in their duty to protect the victims of anti-Christian violence in Gojra one year ago. The senior official spoke to 2,500 people gathered on Aug. 1 to mark the first anniversary of some of Pakistan’s worst anti-Christian violence. Addressing the crowds in the Punjabi city of Gojra, prominent local Muslims deplored the mob violence that left eight people dead and described the culprits as unworthy to be called Muslims. Amid tight security and a high police presence, Bishop Joseph Coutts of Faisalabad presided at a memorial Mass held at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Gojra. The bishop lit candles for each of those who died in the

## NEWS BRIEFS

The U.S. Knights of Columbus are partnering with Project Medishare for Haiti to make **prosthetic limbs available to Haitian children** injured during the earthquake on Jan. 12. • The Turkish government’s decision to allow Ecumenical Patriarch **Bartholomew of Constantinople** to celebrate the feast of the Dormition of Mary on Aug. 15 at the Panagia Soumela Monastery was a sign of hope for Turkey’s Christian minority, said Thomas Michel, S.J., of Ankara • A coalition of former employees, patients and Greenwich Village residents is suing the New York State Department of Health demanding documents related to the closure of **St. Vincent’s Hospital** in April. • The hedge fund titan and atheist **Robert Wilson** backed up his faith in New York City Catholic schools with \$5.6 million to fund a program that connects Catholic elementary schools to potential alumni-donors. • The Parkman Professor of Divinity and Comparative Theology at Harvard Divinity School, **Francis X. Clooney, S.J.**, was elected a corresponding fellow of the British Academy, Great Britain’s national body for the humanities and social sciences. He is a frequent contributor to **America’s Web** edition.



Haiti’s children

violence, including a family of seven killed in their home. On Aug. 1, 2009, a rumor that Christians had been seen desecrating the Koran sparked an Islamist armed attack on the Christian quarter of Gojra and the burning of more than 50 homes.

## Move Ministries To the Margins

The scandal of sexual abuse by members of the Catholic clergy, the diminishing number of priests and an overemphasis on professionalism may be coloring how the leaders of religious orders think about the priesthood, said Archbishop-designate Joseph W. Tobin, a Redemptorist from the United States recently appointed secretary of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and

Societies of Apostolic Life. He was speaking in Long Beach, Calif., at the annual assembly of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men on Aug. 7. Clerical sexual abuse has provoked repugnance throughout the church and has led some people to see religious leaders as hypocritical and arrogant, Archbishop-designate Tobin said. As a counterforce, he suggested that the priests recall the healing of the deaf man in the seventh chapter of the Gospel of Mark. The story placed Jesus in a “religious and social no-man’s land, a place where pious Jews would not be comfortable.” He said, “The place for consecrated people today is the space where people are excluded from their full dignity as sons and daughters of God.”

From CNS and other sources.



# Seeking Peace in Sudan

**Y**ou have to look up to the Sudanese bishops because they maintain their faith despite what they've been through. Witnesses to their country's horrific civil war, they nevertheless have ready smiles and gentle humor, laughing over lunch at the Supreme Court cafeteria (after Congressional hearings on Sudan sponsored by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom). Bishop Rudolf Deng Majak, president of the Sudanese bishops' conference, and Bishop Daniel Adwok Kur, auxiliary bishop in Khartoum, retain hope for peace in Sudan despite the likelihood of war. The bishops recently traveled to the United States to urge international attention to the peace process in Sudan at this critical crossroads. And you literally have to look up to them. After spending two days with the Sudanese bishops, who are well over six feet tall, I had a bit of a kink in my neck.

Sudan is preparing for a referendum next January as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended Africa's longest-running civil war in which two million people died and four million fled their homes to avoid the violence. The people of southern Sudan are widely expected to vote to break from the north and become an independent country. The government in northern Sudan (headed by President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who was indicted for genocide and war crimes by the International Criminal Court) is not eager to imple-

ment the peace agreement and the referendum, thereby losing the south, where rich oil fields lie.

In the five years since the peace agreement, refugees returned and oil income grew. But war will return if the referendum and the agreement do not go forward, and it will be worse this time around, with oil-funded weapons being sold to all sides.

Maj. Gen. J. Scott Gration, the U.S. special envoy to Sudan, says, "I will work with officials in Khartoum and Darfur, N.G.O.'s and members of the community to make sure we put into place a system of security and stabilization."

But the Sudanese bishops note that the Sudanese churches are often excluded from U.S. and U.N. activities in Sudan despite their proven track record in building peace.

Dan Griffin of Catholic Relief Services notes the need to include the churches at this critical juncture. "The Catholic Church and communities of faith in Sudan have been the only bodies to successfully implement peace building on a large scale in Sudan, through the people-to-people peace process that reconciled the Dinka and the Nuer people that enabled the Comprehensive Peace Agreement process to move forward. The church has been instrumental in addressing conflict. They have the moral authority, the experience and the capacity to reach across ethnic lines and geographical areas to provide real leadership and an alternate view of peace."

As Steve Hilbert, Africa specialist on the staff of the U.S. Catholic

Conference of Bishops said, "There are a million ways this can go wrong, and only one [way] it can go right. Will we witness a new peace or a return to an old war?"

The issue is not just a botched African referendum. The issue is avoiding genocide. Much of the international attention is focused on the prospect of north-versus-south violence. But Bishop Deng cautions, "Many people do not

realize that more southern Sudanese were killed by other southern Sudanese than were killed by those from the north."

Unlike the Rwandan genocide, this time we know in advance when the trigger event will occur. The Sudanese church and Catholic Relief Services are

ramping up peace-building activities, including conflict mediation, interfaith programs, leadership training and voter education programs.

The campaign Catholics Confront Global Poverty, sponsored by C.R.S. and the U.S.C.C.B., urges support for the bipartisan House Resolution 1588, to strengthen U.S. and international engagement and coordination in helping the Sudanese implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. They need our solidarity, prayers and support to avoid genocide and build peace. The church and the U.S. government have helped work for peace in Sudan before; both must help again. As Bishop Deng notes: "We are a broken community. We need the solidarity of people around the world to heal us. People look up to us, they trust us."

Will we  
witness  
a new  
peace  
or a return  
to an  
old war?

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MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE, during her sabbatical from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., is a fellow at the Commission on International Religious Freedom.



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ EDWIN VERIN

# What's Extraordinary?

BY GERALD D. COLEMAN

**A** number of high-profile legal cases since the 1980s have involved persons receiving medically assisted nutrition and hydration (food and water): Claire Conroy, Paul Brophy, Nancy Cruzan, Hugh Finn and Terri Schiavo. The provision of nutrition and hydration through various medical interventions, generally described as “tube feeding,” is one of the most complex and controversial issues in contemporary bioethics.

Such relatively common legal and moral debates are concerned with persons who are in a persistent vegetative state. While some brain functions, like wake/sleep cycles and spontaneous/automatic reflex actions of the nervous system may continue, all detectible activity of their neocortex has stopped. A diagnosis of PVS means that the doctor sees virtually no prospect for the patient's recovery.

Nutrition and hydration can be provided by medical means, which are sometimes wrongly called “artificial.” A tube, for example, can be inserted through the nose and into the stomach, a method usually employed for short-term use. Other tube-feeding methods require surgery. A tube can be passed through an incision in the abdominal wall and into the stomach, for example, or through the abdomen into a portion of the small intestine. In such cases, feeding tubes and incisions need consistent monitoring.

To make an informed decision about the use of tube feeding, one must consider several factors, like a patient's diagnosis, prognosis and current condition, as well as any complicating factors like the presence of renal failure and pneumonia. A number of relevant questions also should be asked: What medical method is best suited for this person and for how long? What are the benefits and burdens of various methods? What are their side effects? In short, there is no single or simple answer to the questions surrounding tube feeding.

In the past several decades, more than 40 courts in the United States have addressed medically assisted nutrition and hydration. As a result, there is a virtually universal legal consensus that tube feeding is a medical treatment that may, depending on the result of a careful decision-making process, be withheld

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GERALD D. COLEMAN, S.S., is vice president for corporate ethics for the Daughters of Charity Health System and a lecturer in moral theology at Santa Clara University in California.



or withdrawn. Less unanimity, however, exists in the medical and moral fields. Clinicians agree that withholding or withdrawing a feeding tube is appropriate when 1) it is medically futile—that is, does not provide effective nutritional support or prevent dehydration; 2) the patient would experience no real benefit; 3) the burdens for the patient outweigh the benefits; and 4) the patient is dying.

Given this complex history, it is not surprising that within the Catholic tradition a number of theologians, ethicists and groups of bishops have come to different conclusions regarding the use of tube feeding. The pivotal question for them has been: Is tube feeding a medical intervention—not just basic care—that can be morally evaluated using the traditional distinction between ordinary and extraordinary means of care? Other questions further complicate the issue: Can a persistent vegetative state be diagnosed with certitude? How does one determine the quality of life of a patient in this state?

## What the Church Teaches

In March 2004 an International Congress took place in Rome with the title *Life-Sustaining Treatments and the Vegetative State: Scientific Progress and Ethical Dilemmas*. There Pope John Paul II delivered an allocution that encouraged scientists and researchers to find ways to diagnose PVS more accurately. He referred to studies showing that up to 43 percent of patients were misdiagnosed and to cases of patient recovery after a period of time with sustained rehabilitative efforts. He also acknowledged that recovery is more difficult the longer the condition of the vegetative state remains.

The papal allocution strongly reaffirms the intrinsic worth and the personal dignity of every person, including those in the PVS, and insists on their right to basic health care, particularly nutrition and hydration, hygiene, a comfortable environment and the prevention of complications resulting from bed confinement. In other words, such patients retain their moral claim to basic health care.

John Paul II's allocution also underscores that the administration of food and water—even when given by medical means, including feeding tubes—is a natural way of conserving life. The use of medically assisted nutrition and hydration, it said, should be presumed “in principle.” Clear medical reasons are to be given in each particular case to demonstrate why such assistance is *not* morally obligatory.

The moral obligation to provide medically assisted nutrition and hydration, then, is conditioned by medical efficacy. Do the means used achieve the proper goal, which is to nourish the patient and alleviate suffering? When it is med-

ically demonstrable that these goals are not being achieved, however, the moral obligation to use tube feeding ceases.

While the giving of nutrition and hydration is considered ordinary care even when medically administered, its use is bound by the church's traditional discernment of ordinary/proportionate and extraordinary/disproportionate means (see *Declaration on Euthanasia*, 1980).

The pope's allocution underscores the following key points: 1) All human persons, regardless of their state of development or decline, possess an inviolable dignity; 2) Every person has a right to receive ordinary health care to preserve life and alleviate suffering; 3) The decision regarding the use of medically assisted nutrition and hydration must be based on the actual medical condition of the patient; and 4) An exception can be made if tube feeding is determined to be disproportionate or medically futile, in which case the intervention may be withheld or withdrawn. In all cases the patient is to remain the subject of care, comfort and love. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith reaffirmed these teachings of John Paul II in 2007.

In the United States, the guiding principles for Catholic health care facilities and services are contained in the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, issued by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. From time to time, these directives are revised in light of official church teaching or to include new or updated directives that address medical and moral concerns. The directives currently in use (the fifth edition) were approved and published in 1995 and have been revised twice since then.

## Directive 58

The latest revision concerns Directive 58, which the bishops approved on Nov. 17, 2009, to incorporate both the teaching of John Paul II in 2004 and its affirmation by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith three years later. A news release issued by the Catholic Health Association on Nov. 18 explained: “The revised Directive does not offer new teaching but rather reflects existing Church teaching which Catholic health care facilities have already incorporated into their practice.”

In conformity with the papal allocution, the revised Directive 58 makes the following points: 1) In principle there is a general moral obligation to provide patients with food and water, including medically administered nutrition and hydration for those who are unable to take food orally, even if assisted; 2) This moral obligation extends to patients in a persistent vegetative state because of their innate human dignity; 3) This moral obligation ceases or becomes “morally optional” when tube feeding becomes excessively burdensome or no longer accomplishes its objective—that is, when medically admin-

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istered food and water are no longer being assimilated by the patient; 4) It is necessary to distinguish between patients in a chronic state, like PVS, and patients who are dying.

Accordingly, the revised introduction to Part Five of the E.R.D.'s, which includes Directive 58, states, "While medically assisted nutrition and hydration are not morally obligatory in certain cases, these forms of basic care should in principle be provided to all patients who need them, including patients diagnosed as being in a 'persistent vegetative state,' because even the most severely debilitated and helpless patient retains the full dignity of a human person and must receive ordinary and proportionate care."

### Spread of Misinformation

Despite repeated, official attempts to clarify Catholic teaching on the use of medically assisted nutrition and hydration, false and misleading information about the revision of Directive 58 persists.

One journalist who specializes in health care asserted (modernhealthcare.com, 11/17/09) that Catholic hospitals must now insert and maintain nutrition and hydration tubes, and that all PVS patients must be given medically assisted nutrition and hydration except those close to inevitable death from underlying conditions. This assertion is incorrect. The church's teaching is not that every PVS patient or patient with a chronic condition must be main-

tained on feeding tubes until diagnosed as dying.

Rather, by use of the phrase "in principle" in the papal allocution, in the C.D.F. response and in the *Ethical and Religious Directives*, the church acknowledges that tube feeding may become medically futile for a patient. The C.D.F. laid out several clear examples: settings in which tube feeding is not available, as in a remote place or in a situation of poverty; when complications emerge so that a patient is no longer assimilating the nourishment; or when such assistance causes a patient significant physical discomfort.

A misinterpretation of the church's teaching can be and already has been adopted by other groups that espouse purposes contrary to Catholic teaching. The organization Compassion and Choices, for example, a leading force behind efforts to legalize assisted suicide, has misrepresented the revision of Directive 58. A regular writer on their Web site, Barbara Coombs Lee, claims (wrongly) that Catholic health care institutions will no longer honor patients' advance directives and that patients in a persistent vegetative state will be force-fed against their will (see [compassionandchoices.org/blog/?cat=27](http://compassionandchoices.org/blog/?cat=27)). She states falsely that by removing all flexibility to respect the wishes of a patient or family, the revised directive creates an obligation to provide patients medically assisted nutrition and hydration in all circumstances, and that the new guidelines allow no consideration of the burden to the patient. These assertions are absurd.

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In fact Directives 24 and 25 support such advance directives as a durable power of attorney for health care. One can even indicate in one's advance directive that medically assisted nutrition and hydration is not to be administered because of one's "psychological dread" of tube feeding. Psychological dread is one of the accepted and traditional moral categories that can constitute extraordinary or disproportionate means (see "A History of Extraordinary Means," *Ethics and Medics*, September and November 2006). Reasonable persons might regard tube feeding as excessively burdensome because it causes them great dread (*vehemens horror*).

Directive 24 cautions that a Catholic health institution "will not honor an advance directive that is contrary to Catholic teaching." In light of the revised Directive 58, an example of such an advance directive would be that of a person who does not want tube feeding if diagnosed as in a permanent vegetative state for the reason that such a patient has lost all human dignity and is dying. This reasoning runs counter to Catholic teaching, since PVS patients have an intrinsic dignity that demands equality of health care. One could think of other such examples. The bottom line is that a diagnosis of unconsciousness or of PVS can never in itself be the basis for withholding or withdrawing health care that would be given to others who are not in such a state. **A**

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# The Jesus of History

Two scholars respond to Luke Timothy Johnson.

BY BERNARD BRANDON SCOTT AND ADELA YARBRO COLLINS

*The relation of the Christ of faith to the Jesus of history is a topic fraught with controversy in theological circles. It also has implications for the way Christian believers understand and practice their faith. We invited Luke Timothy Johnson to reflect on the topic and state his own position, which he did in “The Jesus Controversy,” published in **America** on Aug. 2. We have asked two biblical scholars with different views, one a Catholic, the other a Protestant, to respond to Professor Johnson’s article. The three articles together give an indication of the scope of current thinking by mainstream scholars. All three articles appear online, where readers can add their own insights, experience and viewpoints.*

—The Editors

## Following the Troubadours

*How the historical Jesus tests—and strengthens—our faith*

**T**he biblical scholar Luke Timothy Johnson has sung the same tune for a long time, one that reassures those who are satisfied with the status quo. The quest for the historical Jesus, however, was founded on a rejection of the status quo.

Professor Johnson’s argument plays out in a series of either/ors, the implication being that one side is the false position and the other the true one. A primary opposition for him is the historical Jesus and the real Jesus. Who can argue for the impoverished Jesus of historical efforts when one can have the real Jesus? But if one challenges both the obviousness of the categories and the necessity of the opposition, then suddenly the tune becomes discordant.

Scholars have created “apocryphal gospels,” Johnson charges. These modern apocryphal gospels stand in contrast, of course, to the true, canonical Gospels. He offers no proof that these are either apocryphal or gospels, but rhetorically, the cat-

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**BERNARD BRANDON SCOTT** is the Darbeth Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Phillips Theological Seminary, in Tulsa, Okla.



PHOTO: REUTERS/PAULO WHITAKER

egory once established is irresistible. Who could possibly prefer an apocryphal gospel to a real Gospel?

That the Jesus of these apocryphal gospels “is often a mirror image of the scholars’ own ideals,” is an old, well-worn charge. For the sake of argument, let’s grant that Johnson is right, that these are all mirror images of the scholars’ own ideals. Is that not also the case of the Jesus of Mark’s Gospel and every other Gospel? So the real Jesus turns out also to be a reflection of the various Evangelists’ ideals about Jesus. The real Jesus is just as constructed as the historical Jesus of the modern apocryphal gospels. Even more, the real Jesus turns out to be multiple, a different Jesus conjured up by each Evangelist, just as scholars conjure up multiple images or reconstructions of Jesus. If one is honest, the tradition has conjured up even more images of Jesus, perhaps an almost infinite number.

Johnson has a solution to this problem: “Each Gospel witnesses to the truth that Jesus as a human being was defined first by his radical obedience to God and second by his utter self-giving to others.” Johnson argues that this Platonic essence is reconstructed from the Gospels’ convergent pictures of Jesus by historical method, historically verified. His argument reminds me of Adolf von Harnack’s argument in *What Is Christianity?*: “In the first place, they [the Gospels] offer us a plain picture of Jesus’ teaching, in regard both to its main features and to its individual application; in the second place, they tell us how his life issued in the service of his vocation; and in the third place, they describe to us the impression which he made upon his disciples, and which they transmitted.”

This Platonic essence is convenient but not self-evident. It is not a historical statement, as Johnson declares, but a theological judgment, and not the only possible theological judgment about the Gospels. He maintains that the Gospels “converge impressively precisely on the historical issue that is of the most vital importance concerning the human Jesus, namely his character.” This raises inevitable historical questions. Where does this convergence come from? Would any Gospel writer acknowledge Johnson’s Platonic essence? So general is his Platonic essence that I wonder if it is helpful or even distinctive. Is it not true of other historical characters? Again, if we grant this as a valid summary of the character of Jesus in all four Gospels, where did those authors get their information? How does one know they are right in their judgment? Maybe they are just following the lead of Paul or Mark.

These questions lead back either to history or to Johnson’s preferred modality, faith. You have to take it on faith. Faith is not innocent. Push below the surface and faith is a stand-in for authority. To take it on faith means to take it on authority. But then, whose authority? How does one test that authority? Once again one faces historical questions.

Not only do I find Johnson’s categories not established by rigorous method; I also find his either/or method of argumentation unconvincing. There is another option. Historical criticism can be a both/and. Historical analysis is deconstructive and often corrosive to authoritarian claims. History does not grant certainty, only probabilities, but then neither does faith grant certainty. If it were certain, we would not need faith. A historical understanding of early Christianity presents a range of options and demonstrates development and difference within the early movements that sprang up from those seeking to follow Jesus. That can be liberating but also challenging and threatening.

Johnson concludes with a passionate plea about the proper focus of Christian awareness: “learning the living Jesus...in the common life and common practices of the church.” But how do we know this is the real Jesus? For Johnson, the either/or is history versus faith. That for me is a false dichotomy. Faith must always be tested, and that raises historical questions (as well as other kinds of questions), which provide only probability. There is no way around it, unless faith is an authoritarian claim. Given the bankruptcy of authority in the church today, we should take any such claim of authority with a historical and deconstructive grain of salt. That is why people are listening to the troubadours.

## In Defense of the Historical Jesus

*Empirical studies of the Gospel are limited. They are also necessary.*

Luke Timothy Johnson makes a good case for the importance of, in his words, “the living Jesus—the resurrected and exalted Lord present to believers through the power of the Holy Spirit—in the common life and the common practices of the church.” But in his essay Professor Johnson also claims, “History is a limited way of knowing reality.” I must point out that all ways of knowing reality are limited. Even experience of “the living Jesus” is limited by the questions and needs of individual believers, by the leadership of professional ministers and by the ethos of particular congregations and churches.

Johnson praises (faintly) the excellent work of Msgr. John P. Meier in *A Marginal Jew* and cites with approval Monsignor Meier’s recognition that “the empirically verifiable Jesus is by no means the ‘real’ Jesus.” Both scholars are right in saying that historical methods can give us only a partial picture of Jesus. In my view, however, the “real” Jesus is absolutely unknowable. Anyone who makes a claim about

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ADELA YARBRO COLLINS is the Buckingham Professor of New Testament Criticism and Interpretation at the Yale Divinity School in New Haven, Conn.

“the real Jesus” is speaking rhetorically and not making a verifiable claim about reality. Historians are concerned with the human Jesus who was born, lived and died, leaving traces that can be studied using historical methods. The resurrected and exalted Lord is just as much a construction of those who worship and experience him as is the historical Jesus constructed by scholars.

In his book *The Real Jesus*, Professor Johnson was very critical of the Jesus Seminar. The basic idea and procedures of the seminar are, in principle, admirable. I attended a number of their meetings in the 1980s, which were early years in its history. Each meeting focused on a particular topic—for example, the parables. One or more scholars volunteered to research the parables of Jesus in preparation for the meeting to see what previous studies had concluded about them and to evaluate the evidence for their origin. Then these scholars gave presentations at the meeting itself, arguing that Jesus had spoken some of the parables and that followers of Jesus created others after his death.



After the presenters had laid out the evidence and the arguments, the assembled scholars debated these findings. After extensive debate, a vote was taken on each parable. Every member of the seminar would place a bead in a basket: red for the view that Jesus most probably spoke the parable, pink for the view that he probably told it, gray for the view that he probably did not tell it and black for the view that he most probably did not.

In an ideal world, well-educated and well-informed scholars would assess the evidence and arguments with an open mind and vote in accordance with the stronger evidence and arguments. I am sorry to say that such was increasingly not the case in later meetings of the Jesus Seminar, notably in the 1990s. Scholars had preconceived ideas, such as the conviction that Jesus was a teacher or philosopher, not a prophet, and these ideas determined how they voted, regardless of the evidence.

This situation, however, is not a fault unique to the Jesus Seminar. It is characteristic of the human condition. There will always be more and less competent scholars and better and worse arguments and thus more and less reliable historical conclusions. Similarly, there are more and less competent professional ministers, better and worse types of common life

and more and less helpful common practices in the church.

Johnson aims “to show how encountering Jesus as a literary character in each of the canonical Gospels enables a more profound, satisfying and ultimately more ‘historical’ knowledge of the human Jesus than that offered by scholarly reconstructions.” Such an attempt does indeed have value. But many Americans, inside and outside the church, care about history in a stronger sense and about historical methods and results. In other words, they want to know in what ways the Gospels represent the actual Jesus accurately and in what ways they are fictions or later theological interpretations of Jesus that contradict or go beyond what historians can determine about the past. Historians recognize that the Gospels

are interpretations of Jesus from the perspective of faith in him as the Messiah, Son of God or Son of Man and that this faith is founded upon the experience and proclamation of his resurrection, an event that by definition is beyond history.

In Johnson’s view, “Each Gospel witnesses to the truth that Jesus as a human being was defined

first by his *radical obedience* to God and second by his *utter self-giving to others*” (emphasis added). Imitation of the character of Jesus has long been a high value in the church. It would truly be the manifestation of the kingdom of God on earth if all members of the church would imitate these two aspects of Johnson’s reconstruction of the character of Jesus. The trouble is that in the history and present life of the church, radical obedience and utter self-giving are moral values that only some members of the church are seriously expected to practice. Already in the second century, Ignatius

of Antioch taught that the members of Christian communities should obey the bishop as they would obey God. Such advice creates too great a gulf between the clergy and the laity. The value of obedience can serve to increase the power of

the hierarchy in the church and to limit the participation of lay people in general and women in particular.

The study of the historical Jesus, however limited the reliable results may be, is an important means of testing theological interpretations of Jesus that claim to be based on the intentions and life of Jesus. Those with a good grasp of the current state of research on Jesus can discern whether such interpretations are indeed congruent with the probable mission and aims of Jesus. **A**

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# BOOKS & CULTURE

ART | LEO J. O'DONOVAN

## RISKING EVERYTHING

*Henri Matisse's truest expressions*

After the Museum of Modern Art's successful "Matisse Picasso" show in New York (2003), Glenn Lowry, the museum's director, asked the curator John Elderfield what his next project would be. "Well, it certainly won't be a Matisse," he said.

Fortunately, the Art Institute of Chicago later invited Mr. Elderfield to take part in the conservation and technical study it had begun on Matisse's monumental "Bathers by a River." Thus began a five-year collaboration

that has resulted in a revelatory exhibition co-curated by Stephanie D'Alessandro, "Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913-17." It appeared first in Chicago and is currently at the Modern until Oct. 11.

While studying under the Symbolist painter Gustave Moreau, Henri Matisse (1869-1954) learned to copy paintings in the Louvre; and for the rest of his life he studied his predecessors. "I owe my art to all painters," he said. A slow learner who first painted somber, traditional pieces, he later

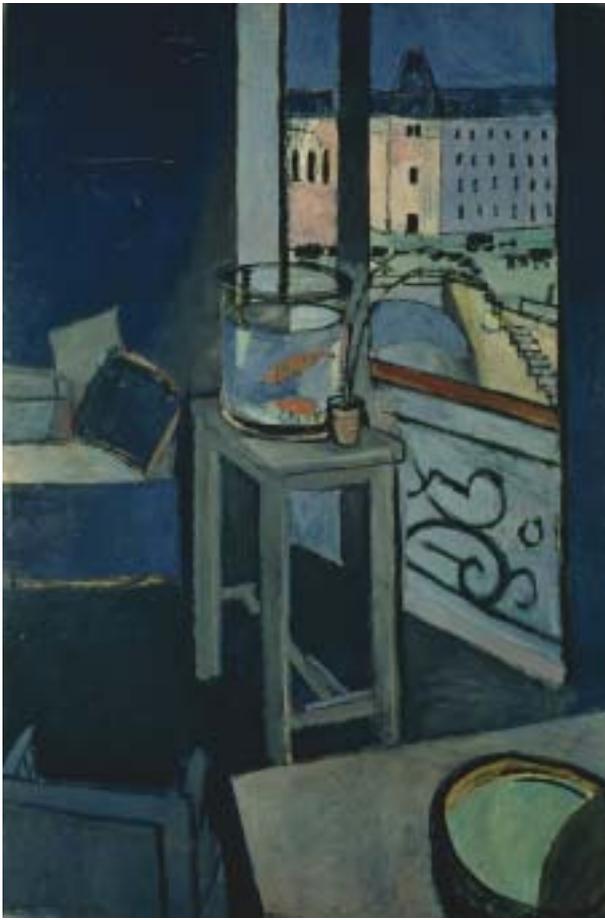
lightened his palette in Arcadian scenes in the early 1900s. During the summer of 1905, Matisse visited Provence with his artist friend André Derain and began an inventive use of brilliant color that did not always correspond to the object being painted. Shown at the Salon d'Automne the following October, their canvases earned the artists the label "les Fauves" ("the wild beasts").

In 1909, the Russian collector Sergei Shchukin asked Matisse to decorate the staircase of his Moscow home. The artist proposed scenes of dance, music and bathers. Shchukin preferred the first two. But Matisse, using a sketch he had sent his patron, pursued the bathing theme indepen-



"Bathers by a River," by Henri Matisse (1909-10, 1913, 1916-17)

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**“Interior With Goldfish” (1914)**

dently for the next eight years, which culminated in the enigmatic painting that occasioned and now closes the current exhibition.

“Radical Invention” opens with figurative work from 1907-9, including the powerful “Blue Nude” (1907). The first of his four larger-than-life-size “Back” reliefs is also here, documenting the artist’s increasingly abstract vision and his practice of reworking pieces for the sake of “a true, more essential character.” But Cézanne’s “Three Bathers” (1879-82) sets the tone of the gallery. Matisse bought the painting from Ambroise Vollard in 1899 and later said: “It has sustained me morally in the critical moments of my venture as an artist. I have drawn from it my faith and perseverance.”

Matisse was savagely treated at two important exhibitions in 1910 and drew back from involvement in the

Parisian art world. Two trips to Morocco proved to be invigorating. The Modern’s exhibition focuses on the years between his return to Paris in 1913 and his departure for Nice in 1917.

Living with his wife in the suburb of Issy-les-Moulineaux and then moving in 1914 to an apartment on the Quai Saint Michel, Matisse revisited familiar themes—interior scenes, still-lives, portraits—but with a new attention to formal structure. He used “the methods of modern construction,” he said, referring to the contemporary ascendancy of Cubism and to the more fractured style of other modernists. In pursuing revisions and

simplifications, he began to scrape and incise, leave erasures visible and allow earlier drawing to appear through what is painted over it.

Indeed, on entering a gallery that displays half of the 12 major canvases from the first six months of 1914, you feel as if you are inhabiting the artist’s imagination, seeing familiar paintings as if for the first time. Brilliant color yields to blacks, dark blues and grays. Strong vertical bands organize the picture space, strangely drawing it both apart and together. The flat geometric organization of “Interior With Goldfish,” the first in a series that looks out from the studio to the Seine and the Île de la Cité, develops into “Goldfish and Palette,” a piece of sheer magic, with the goldfish of happiness and the painter’s palette anchored by a broad black band left of center and a jutting angular passage to the right. Nearby, the startling “Portrait of Yvonne Landsberg” presents the lovely young woman with a mask-like face, curves radiating from her body like a radioactive field.

The onset of war in August 1914 troubled Matisse deeply. Rejected for military duty because of his age and health, he lamented that “Derain, Braque, Camoin, Puy, are at the front risking their lives.... How can we serve our country?” He bought a hand etching press and made numerous prints, lithographs, monotypes, dry points



**“The Moroccans,” (late 1915 and fall 1916)**

and etchings, many of which he sold to pay for weekly shipments of food to family and friends deported to Germany. With portraits, printed or in oils, he pressed his experimentation—placing a grid pattern over a drawing of his wife and flattening his curling, sensuous line in severely abstracted renderings of patrons and performers. But he also continued to revel in color, which he poured into the Cubist-influenced “Still Life After Jan D. de Heem’s ‘La Desserte’” (1915), a reprise of a student exercise from 1893.

The year 1916 was a terrible one for France, but Matisse considered it his duty to press on as an artist. His effort yielded extraordinary works like “The Window,” his family’s drawing room in Issy-les-Moulineaux rendered as a turquoise harmony centered but dematerialized by a thick band of white paint in the center of the canvas. “The Moroccans” was of even greater importance for Matisse. It presents two figures before a violet building to the right, a burst of yellow melons and green leaves in the lower left, and an architectural complex in the upper

right. But the startling innovation is that the different parts are set against pitch black. Matisse used pure black, he said, “as a color of light and not as a color of darkness.”

#### ON THE WEB

Harry Forbes reviews  
“Eat Pray Love.”  
americamagazine.org/culture

The last gallery leaves one gaping. It contains the third “Back” relief, “The Piano Lesson,” and

the “Bathers”—all from Matisse’s studio in 1917. “Bathers” (about 8½ feet by 13 feet) is not an easy picture, no more than is Picasso’s “Demoiselles d’Avignon,” to which it is an obvious response. Here it has a grandeur, almost an inevitability, that astounds. *This* is our condition, the four massive figures in their infected Eden tell us (a snake rises from the bottom of the canvas). Two of the women are on a verdant bank beside the black band of river; two turn toward us, faceless but questioning; all inhabit a barren geometry of black, white and blue bands. In this version of the Golden Age theme, the figures are at once together and alone, idyllic but exiled, torn from their time into a century of terrible conflict yet with hope for the human.

In his years of radical questioning, Henri Matisse struggled to maintain

continuity through change. He came to favor the process of his art over the result. His painting still asks how our feelings can be visualized in a new era and how the insecurity of our questions, their risk and root, can be honestly dealt with. A humanism courses through the Modern’s exhibition, a daring care for human life and its expression that has something exalting about it.

The risk inherent in Matisse’s art during these years becomes increasingly evident as he searches for true expression of his feelings before the world. It bears an analogy to the risk a believer accepts when setting out to be a disciple who cannot know, and is not told, exactly where his journey will lead. For a modern artist like Matisse, all claim to finality lies beyond him—it is in fact rebuffed as ideology. But the modern believer also recognizes that the finality of hope is a gift from a Holy Mystery worthy of confidence, but impossible of calculation.

“All art worthy of the name,” said Matisse late in his life, “is religious.” But he did not venture to say that he himself was so. Rather, he showed us how he existed: unfinished, incomplete, struggling to be true to his talent, often jubilant about the look of life but still uncertain as to its outcome. For anyone who believes in a Love before and beyond all our own, in a Word that bears our deepest questions and is as well their answer, in a Spirit poured out daily on this good but broken world, the authenticity of Matisse’s art calls such faith to be equally true to itself.

The words of Marie-Alain Couturier, the great Dominican priest and supporter of Matisse, bear pondering: “I believe that artists have a God and that he catches up with them at the end of that road taken by all prodigal children.”

LEO J. O’DONOVAN, S.J., is emeritus president of Georgetown University.



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# HOW'S HE DOING?

## THE PROMISE President Obama, Year One

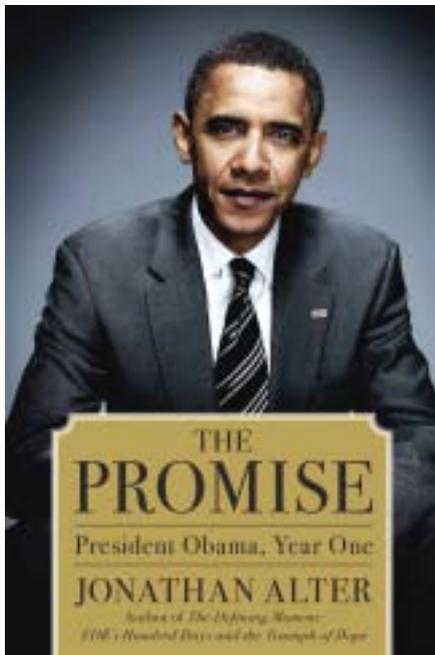
By Jonathan Alter  
Simon & Schuster. 480p \$28

Political journalism often buries itself in unimportant minutiae. Historians often lose sight of the lived circumstances and daily challenges of the politicians they survey, placing them in sweeping historical narratives that would have made little sense to the actors themselves. Both genres suffer from the same projection of the needs of the author into the subject matter, the journalist sacrificing perspective to break her story, the historian sacrificing the historical record to justify his theories.

Jonathan Alter's new book seeks to be both political journalism and a first history of President Obama's first year in office. Alter's earlier book about the first 100 days of Franklin Roosevelt's presidency achieved a nice balance, a sound book of history, enlivened by his journalist's sensibility for details that brought the characters to life. Unfortunately, his new book never breaks out from its journalistic confines. It reads like a series of observations strung together by chronology alone.

The portraits of the personalities in the Obama White House are uneven. Alter does best with Larry Summers, the demonstrative former Treasury Secretary who had difficulty adjusting to the rhythms of the "No Drama Obama" White House. Alter artfully tells the tale of a policy discussion in which Summers began to say, "That's the stupidest argument I've ever heard," but only got as far as "That's the stu-" before catching himself, smiling to the group, and promising to try and be more constructive. Conversely, Alter's portrait of the White House

chief of staff is remarkably flat. How many times do we need to be reminded that Rahm Emanuel has a potty mouth? More damning, the relentless



focus on the actors results in a lack of focus on such complex issues as health care and the economy.

Amid the rehearsal of gossip, one piece of significant news does emerge. Alter describes in detail the way the Pentagon brass tried to "box in" President Obama regarding the options facing the United States in Afghanistan, selectively leaking to the press to build their case for more

troops. Obama did not like the pressure, but he also did not like the fact that the generals often could not agree about the facts on the ground, let alone about strategy. He dressed them down in a confrontation that Alter claims was the strongest assertion of presidential authority since Truman fired MacArthur.

More important, Obama ordered a top-down review of the situation in Afghanistan and the strategic options available to the United States. He convoked multiple national security meetings to thrash out a way forward. Obama was determined not to repeat the mistakes of his predecessor, who gave the Pentagon free reign. The meetings he convened yielded results at once. For example, the Pentagon had not learned that the Taliban paid considerably higher wages to freelance militias in Afghanistan than did the Afghan government: Obama ordered a raise effective immediately. His policy may work or it may not, but it will not fail for lack of forethought.

Alter's account fills out the picture we already had of Obama as professorial, but at the end of the book, he still remains opaque. In his calm demeanor and well-documented disdain for letting political considerations intrude into policy debates, the president is quite different from his immediate predecessors, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, both of whom were mercurial and insistent that politics shape policy. Alter admires Obama for his insis-

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tence that “good policy is good politics” and notes the irony that the pre-election concerns about Obama’s fitness for the presidency were reversed in execution: “Before taking office, Obama was expected to ace communications and personal narrative and struggle in executive leadership; instead, the reverse happened.” Obama was unafraid of making tough decisions. But in his first year in office, time and again he was unable to communicate his administration’s policy goals in a way that convinced the American people that this was the change they had wanted.

Obama’s inability to connect with working-class white voters plagued him in the primaries, was overcome when the economic crisis made “change” seem existentially necessary for the nation in the fall, but came back to haunt the Obama presidency. Alter mostly focuses on Obama’s failure to find the right message on health care and his reluctance to get the Cabinet engaged in spreading the administration’s message. He passes over in two sentences the more proximate political challenge for Obama. Alter writes, “Obama was so obviously intelligent and well spoken that he reminded [white working-class voters] that a class of well-educated elites had left them behind.” Almost 200 pages later, Alter writes, “Obama often paid a price for underplaying the politics and overestimating his ability to reason with people.”

Alter should have expended more time on those two observations and the linkages between them. Since Obama turned 18, more or less, he has moved in a world dominated by high achievers. He has become master of that world. His aides and his friends are all successful and smart. They all flourish in their respective fields. They all have Ivy League degrees. But they

do not know what it is to be afraid that you are going to lose your house or your job or your health care.

The challenge for Obama, then, is to recognize that his cosmopolitan world is, in fact, quite parochial. The problem with

rational arguments is not their cogency, but their limits: sometimes reason does not explain people’s attitudes and opinions. That the technological

### ON THE WEB

Summer reading picks  
from the editors.  
[americamagazine.org/podcast](http://americamagazine.org/podcast)

advances of the past 20 or 30 years have not reached many for whom a good job on the shop floor was a source of pride and accomplishment is a brute fact that the president must master. The problem with Alter’s book is, finally, that it too often shares in the parochialism it chronicles.

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**MICHAEL SEAN WINTERS** is the author of *Left at the Altar: How the Democrats Lost the Catholics and How the Catholics Can Save the Democrats* (Perseus, 2008).

ANN BEGLEY

## INTO THE DARKNESS

### KOESTLER

#### The Literary and Political Odyssey of a Twentieth-Century Skeptic

By Michael Scammell  
Random House. 720p \$35

The Budapest-born British author and political activist Arthur Koestler was a man of controversy in death as in life. Hands trembling with Parkinson’s disease and diagnosed with chronic lymphocytic leukemia, he nonetheless continued to write, albeit with great difficulty, until a swelling in the groin indicated a metastasis of the cancer. And so in 1983, at his home in London, he, at age 77, together with his third wife, Cynthia Jefferies, age 55, killed themselves with an overdose of barbiturates and alcohol.

His suicide note reveals “timid hopes for a de-personalized after-life beyond the confines of space, time, and matter.... This ‘oceanic feeling’ has often sustained me,” he confides, “and does so now....” Koestler had long been in favor of euthanasia, and so it was not surprising that—his body deteriorating and death imminent—he chose to take his life. But why, it has been asked, did he consent—as he clearly did—to the simultaneous suicide of

his healthy and much younger wife? Eyebrows were further raised when his will disclosed that he had left the bulk of his estate to found a chair of parapsychology at Edinburgh University. His best-known scientific publications are *Roots of Coincidence* (1972), an attempt to establish a relationship between extrasensory perceptions and quantum physics, and *The Challenge of Change* (1973), a study of coincidences and their relationship to the hypotheses of Carl Jung.

In his meticulously researched authorized biography, Michael Scammell, a scholar and translator of Russian literature, paints the portrait of a combative man, quick to take offense and slow to forgive, “Hungarian in his temper, German in his industry, Jewish in his intellectual ambition,” forever oscillating between arrogance and humility. Suffering from a form of manic depression, he treated the ailment with large quantities of alcohol, bolstered by an assortment of drugs: in the 1960s he took LSD with Timothy Leary. He partied hard, drinking and arguing politics and philosophy all night and well into the morning with the likes of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus.

Labeled a sexual predator by friend and foe alike, he flirted outrageously with other men's wives. A compulsive adulterer, he was repeatedly unfaithful to all three of his wives as well as other women he lived with. As one critic put it, referring to Koestler's dizzying list of seductions, philandering on this scale is neurotic. David Cesarani, in a previous biography, *Arthur Koestler: The Homeless Mind* (1998), goes so far as to call his subject a "serial rapist." Scammell disputes this charge at some length, pointing out discrepancies in the various allegations. Still, he quotes from one of Koestler's letters that "without an element of initial rape in seduction, there is no delight." Said to have had misogynist tendencies, Koestler bullied the numerous women with whom he had relations, insisting on an abortion if they became pregnant. Nonetheless there was, it seems, an unacknowledged daughter with whom he refused to have any contact.

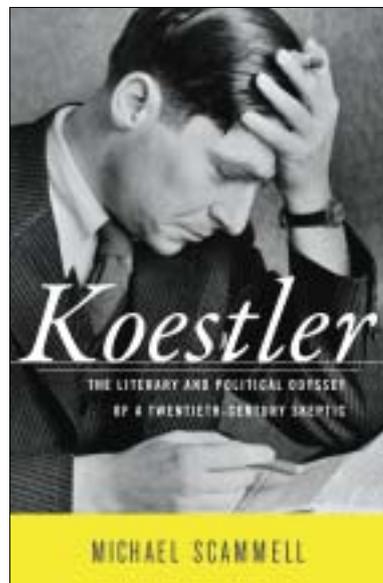
Koestler abandoned his university

studies in Vienna to travel to Palestine in order to participate fully in the Zionist movement. Although his enthusiasm was short-lived, the four years he spent in the Middle East jumpstarted his career in journalism. Returning to Europe, he traveled extensively, "perpetually in search of a country"—to use Malraux's words—before settling in England. Working primarily in Paris and Berlin, he interviewed heads of state, prominent literary and political figures—greatly enhancing his reputation. As a writer, he changed languages twice: first from Hungarian to German, then from German to English. Like many intellectuals of the 1930s, he looked upon the Soviet

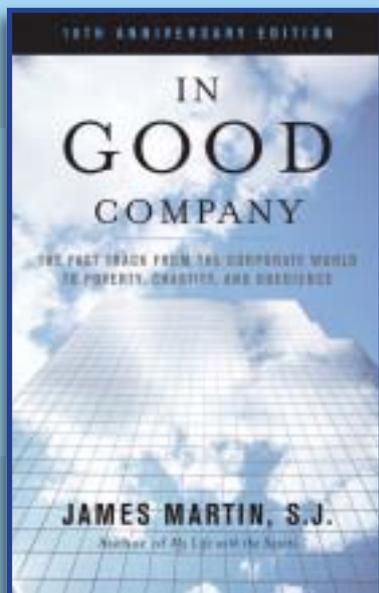
Union as the hope of the future and joined the Communist Party. Glossing over the patent evidence of mass starvation he encountered in "the promised land," he wrote a laudatory account of the forced collectivization.

In Spain during the Civil War, he was imprisoned under sentence of death but was eventually exchanged for the wife of one of Franco's ace fighter

pilots. In France, he was interned in a Vichy concentration camp for six months as an "undesirable alien," an experience that engendered *Scum of the Earth* (1941), his first novel written in English. To escape the Gestapo, he



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joined the French Foreign Legion. Then, upon arriving in North Africa, he deserted and made his way to England, where, lacking an entry permit, he was once again imprisoned

pending an investigation of his case. As soon as he was released, he volunteered for army service.

His romance with Communism over, he published his best and most

influential book, the devastating anti-totalitarian novel *Darkness at Noon* (1940, translated from German into English in 1941), an event that catapulted him to international fame. Over the years, espousing many causes, Koestler wrote over 25 novels and essays, biographies, five autobiographical works, a volume on the history of science, as well as a considerable body of articles on subjects as varied as Eastern mysticism, evolution, psychology, genetics, neurology, chess and the paranormal—to mention only some. He was awarded the prestigious Sonning Prize for outstanding contribution to European literature and was made a Commander of the British Empire.

And yet Koestler's reputation has waned, as is evidenced by the absence of any major commemoration on the centenary of his birth. This is partly due to his obsessive interest, during the last years of his life, in the paranormal, to his stance that Jews should either migrate to Israel or assimilate completely into their local cultures and to the view expressed in *The Thirteenth Tribe* (1976) that the bulk of modern Jewry is not of Palestinian but Caucasian origin. Then, to be sure, his countless sexual transgressions have deeply tarnished his reputation. But the primary reason is, perhaps, that the central moral and political issue of his time and the subject of his greatest work, the struggle against Communism, no longer evokes much interest.

Michael Scammell's hefty volume (with 16 pages of black and white photos) is more than a detailed account of a man's life, an insight into his oeuvre and a recreation of a historical period; it is an effort, in elegant prose, to revive a literary reputation that has declined.

**ANN BEGLEY**, an essayist and reviewer, has taught at universities on both east and west coasts. Her studies of Simone Weil and Marguerite Yourcenar appear in *European Writers: The Twentieth Century*.



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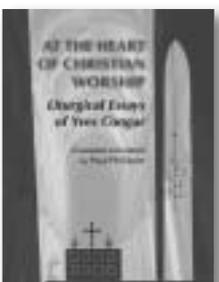
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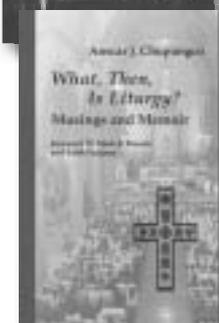
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## LETTERS

### There Is No Defense

Is the kind of question posed by Kevin O'Rourke, O.P., in "Complications" (8/2) useful in the public forum? Could it hurt the church? Bishops can be wrong, and when evidence of their wrongful decisions comes to light, appropriate actions should be taken to rectify any injustice. But here no evidence is presented that the bishop and his advisers did not clearly establish that a direct abortion had been performed or that they did not know the medical facts or the pertinent canons for penal sanctions. Is the author hinting that if a person's primary intention is to save life he may be justified in approving a decision to take an innocent life? I have never heard of an

approved Catholic defense for directly taking an innocent life.

JAMES CARUSO  
*Fairfax, Va.*

### Sometimes We May Kill

Re "Complications" (8/2): Catholic teaching is clear that with one exception, aborting life directly at any stage, even for mercy and even before personification in the womb, is evil. The one exception is defense of life—one's own, or of another, or of a country or society. If my life is threatened, my right to life prevails, and I may directly abort the other's life.

But at this point, does the threatener of my life have to be unjust to be aborted? Examples illustrate that this is not necessary. He or she may be innocent. If a pilot is unknowingly strafing his own army's troops, they are

justified in shooting him down. The same applies when the fetus is definitely going to end the mother's life. The mother's right to live prevails, even though the fetus is innocent.

Paradoxically there is a widely accepted, unjustified direct aborting of life in capital punishment. Yet there is minimal outrage against it—even in pro-life circles. And the accused has been denied the time and conditions to heal his soul.

CONNELL J. MAGUIRE  
*Riviera Beach, Fla.*

### Uncle Sam Wants You

Your response to the Dream Act in your editorial "Dream On" (8/19) is an interesting idea, but it is really a closet draft for the military industrial complex to fill its ranks. To gain a path to citizenship you must go to college or

join the military. Most young people in that group cannot afford the high prices charged to get residency and citizenship, so they will be forced into the military out of economic necessity.

JOHN SIEGMUND  
*Portsmouth, Mass.*

### Violating the Patriot Act

America speaks to a crucial point in the current comment “Making Peace With Terrorists” (7/19). America made its peace a long time ago when it decided to accept advertising from the Department of Defense and the terrorist group the U.S. Air Force. Webster’s New World Dictionary defines terrorism as “the use of force or threats to demoralize, intimidate, and subjugate, esp. such use as a political weapon or policy.”

Certainly, as America notes, “even writing an op-ed on methods for engaging terrorists in conflict resolution may be held to be in violation of the Patriot Act.” Wouldn’t accepting paid advertising from the terrorists at the U.S. Air Force violate the act too?

BEN JIMENEZ, S.J.  
*Detroit, Mich.*

### To Molder in the Dust

A comment on “Musicians Prepare for Coming Changes in the Mass,” (8/2) asks us to not be “cranky.” The church is sliding into irrelevancy and abandonment by the next generation, and we are throwing spitballs and hymnals at each other arguing for a completely unneeded revision so we will sound more like Latin speakers. What a huge waste of energy and of catechesis while far more important issues and themes are left to molder in the dust. We will leave the church simply nodding our heads in confusion and dismay.

MIKE EVANS  
*Anderson, Calif.*

### Raise Wages and Prices

Re “The Future of Farm Workers” (8/2): It is easy to make a compelling argument by oversimplifying a situa-

tion. You fail to mention that continued use of illegal workers has depressed wages below a living wage for a U.S. citizen. The remedy requires more than finding U.S. citizens willing to replace the illegals. It requires removing the illegals and allowing wages to rise. Yes, this will increase the price of goods and services, but I believe we citizens are willing to pay higher prices to make a living wage available for our fellow citizens.

M. MELO  
*Nutting Lake, Mass.*

### Jesuits’ Jesus

What a breath of fresh air is Luke Timothy Johnson’s piece, “The Jesus Controversy” (8/2). This Sunday morning, the media have provided me with so much that is disheartening and of grave concern, but the article subtitled “Why Historical Scholarship Cannot Find the Living Jesus” is spot on.

The Jesuits, with their Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, have much power with which to substantiate what Johnson writes. Yes, the living Christ is known and knowable through “a continuing process of transformation with a community of disciples,” through the sacraments and the encounter with the canonical Gospels that the “quest for the historical Jesus” can deflect. Mere history and scholarly reconstructions are a pale substitute for the living reality.

CAROLYN GWADZ  
*Bethesda, Md.*

### Bishop Accountability

To your list of organizations in “Duty Bound” (7/19)—Voice of the Faithful and the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management—that are “valuable assets in the church,” let me add BishopAccountability.org, which has amassed a treasure-trove of documents in its online archive on sexual abuse by members of the clergy. This assures that the historical record is preserved for

scholars as well as law enforcement agencies.

MARY SEGERS  
*Summit, N.J.*

### Gun-toting Justice

In response to “Guns and the Court” (8/2): I read today that a driver for a warehouse in Connecticut, frustrated at having to resign because he was caught stealing on the job, pulled out a handgun and killed eight coworkers before killing himself. In July, a 9-year-old boy in Los Angeles killed his 2-year-old brother with a handgun. And most of us are aware of the gun-toting students in schools and colleges around the country.

I wonder if Justice Samuel Alito, who voted to overturn Chicago’s ban on gun ownership, would be willing to meet face-to-face with the families of these victims and explain to them the principle of the right to bear arms for self-defense. A gun in anybody’s hand is not a good idea.

MIKE LONIE  
*Holmdel, N.J.*

### Formalist, Not Fundamentalist

I enjoyed Ann Begley’s piece on Muriel Spark, “Edinburgh’s Grande Dame” (7/12); but the author mistakenly uses the expression “Russian fundamentalists” to refer to David Lodge’s observation on Spark. The term Begley should have used was “Russian Formalists,” which Lodge correctly deploys (see *New York Times*, 10/20/85) to suggest a process of “defamiliarization” in art and a kind of surrealistic quality in Spark’s novels. I guess there must be Russian fundamentalists out there, but “making strange” is probably not what they are after.

GUERRIC DEBONA, O.S.B.  
*St. Meinrad, Ind.*

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# Calculating the Cost

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), SEPT. 5, 2010

Readings: Wis 9:13-18b; Ps 90:3-17; Phlm 9-17; Lk 14:25-33

*“First sit down and calculate the cost” (Lk 13:24)*

We hosted Jean Vanier and a companion from L’Arche at our school a few years ago. It was a privilege. There were huge crowds and standing room only, as people flocked to listen to this giant of a man share his saintly wisdom. All were enthralled with the way he spoke about the Gospel and how he and his community tried to live it out. Anticipating an enthusiastic response, at the end of his remarks, Vanier looked very seriously at the crowd and advised any who were thinking they would like to take up the kind of ministry he had founded to be very sure that they could sustain a commitment for the long haul. He described in sober terms the difficulties and the sacrifices necessary to create inclusive, peaceful communities, where persons with and without physical and mental disabilities could live together in loving union.

A similar scene confronts us in today’s Gospel. Great crowds who were being healed and fed by Jesus were following him as he traveled. He addresses them in very sober terms about what it takes to stay with him for the whole way. He speaks about calculating the cost, not to dissuade any potential disciples, but rather to be sure that they are aware of what com-

mitment to him demands, lest they be caught unaware. He names three of the greatest stumbling blocks: attachment to family, to possessions and to life itself. None of these in themselves is wrong, but for disciples these attachments cannot take priority over attachment to Jesus.

The saying about hating one’s own family members is jolting to our ears, as it was to Jesus’ first followers. In Jesus’ time, people did not conceive of themselves as individuals but derived their identity and their social standing from their family, clan, village and religious group. It would be unimaginable to cut oneself off from family; this would be tantamount to losing life itself.

Looking at other passages in the Gospel of Luke, we see that Jesus himself does not renounce his family. Unlike Mark (3:30-34), Luke (8:21) leaves open the possibility that Jesus’ blood kin can also be disciples. In fact, Luke portrays Jesus’ mother as one who faithfully hears the word of God and obeys; and in the story of Pentecost (Acts 1:14), Luke notes that Jesus’ mother and siblings are among the disciples in the upper room. What Jesus asks, however, is that a disciple be willing to embrace as kin others

who are not related by blood. Disciples must act as brother and sister toward those who are different, whether by physical ability or any other status marker. For some disciples, this new family will cause tension and even rupture in one’s biological family. A disciple needs to be forewarned of this difficulty and be prepared to confront it.

We see a concrete example in the second reading, in which Paul implores Philemon, the slave owner, to accept the slave Onesimus, as a brother and an equal.

There is a curious twist in the Gospel, as the parables Jesus tells would seem to advise building up one’s resources in order to accomplish one’s ends. The



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Pray for the grace to let no other attachment take precedence over your commitment to follow Christ.
- How has the Spirit empowered you to choose a path of costly discipleship?
- When have you facilitated a costly choice, as Paul did with Philemon and Onesimus?

final verse takes us in exactly the opposite direction—calculating the cost of discipleship leads one to total divestment. In addition, we might note that although Luke envisions only male disciples in 14:26, elsewhere he clearly depicts women disciples (e.g., Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and the Galilean women in Lk 8:1-3; 23:44-56; 24:1-12; Tabitha in Acts 9:36; Lydia in Acts 16; Prisca in Acts 18) whose attachment to Jesus superseded love of family, possessions and life itself.

**BARBARA E. REID, O.P.**, a member of the Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids, Mich., is a professor of New Testament studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Ill., where she is vice president and academic dean.

ART: TAD DUNNE

# The God Who Seeks

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), SEPT. 12, 2010

Readings: Ex 32:7-14; Ps 51:3-19; 1 Tm 1:12-17; Lk 15:1-32

*“Or what woman having ten coins...” (Lk15:8)*

Some years ago in São Paulo, Brazil, a minister who worked with street children related how she was introducing them to Bible stories and helping them to reflect on them. One day she told the story of the prodigal son. She stopped at the point where the younger son decided to return home, and she asked if he would be able to go back home. One youngster spoke up. “It depends,” he said. “On what?” she asked. “On whether there is a mother in the house. If so, then she will work on the father and get him to finally accept the son back.”

This boy had rightly intuited the cultural dynamics of Jesus’ day, which perhaps matched those of his own family. A father in a patriarchal culture whose son had so disgraced him, would have rent his garments and declared that son no longer one of his own. We find a very different sort of father in the Gospel, more like a mother who watches and waits and runs to meet the wayward son when he finally appears on the horizon. Such an image ruptures any patriarchal images of God and keeps us from literalizing the metaphor “Father.”

Today’s Gospel presses further in offering a fuller set of images of the divine. God can also be likened to a shepherd (who could be either male or female), who diligently searches for a lost sheep. Jesus’ first hearers would have understood the great lengths to which that shepherd went, searching hither and yon for the lost one, and the

great amount of energy it would take to hoist the heavy animal onto his shoulders and lug it back to the sheepfold. It is startling that instead of complaining, he is filled with joy. A footnote to the story: Some people worry about the 99 left in the desert while the shepherd is off searching for the lost one. Jesus’ original audience would have known that a flock that size would have had more than one shepherd, and the 99 are not left untended. All are precious and are in the divine care.

Most often overlooked by homilists and biblical interpreters is the little parable in the middle of the trilogy. This third parable mirrors the very same dynamics as the other two, this time proposing the image of a woman who searches intently for a lost coin. Just as a sheep and a son are so valuable that they must be sought out when lost and celebrated when found, so is a drachma—enough to feed the family for a day. It is not a trivial bit of pocket change, nor is there any carelessness on the part of the woman. The point is that just as the shepherd goes to extraordinary lengths to find the lost sheep, so the woman uses precious

lamp oil and searches unceasingly under stubborn cobblestones in the floor until she finds where the errant coin has lodged. Shepherd, woman and father are all equally good images for God, who expends great effort to procure the return of the lost and who hosts an exuberant celebration in their honor.

The trilogy of parables in today’s Gospel invites us to seek and retrieve the lost and overlooked female images of God. This enables a fuller experience of the divine, aids us in seeing women as images of God and keep us from idolatry, against which the first reading warns. Jesus himself invites us to stretch our imaginations, as he takes on the persona of Woman Wisdom in the opening verses of the Gospel, where he is criticized for the company he keeps at table. Like Woman

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Keep the image of the searching woman in mind while you pray, and ask God to reveal its meaning to you.
- Let yourself be found and rejoiced over by God, and give thanks for this gift.
- What diligent efforts are needed to search out and celebrate with lost images of God?

Wisdom (Prv 9:1-6), he has welcomed a scraggly array of all types to dine with him. We can stay outside and grumble, or we can enter into the party and allow ourselves to be surprised by the host.



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