America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

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VOCATIONS

CATHOLICS AT WORK

WILLIAM F. BAKER

KERRY A. ROBINSON

Sisters in Jordan

KEVIN CLARKE

OF MANY THINGS

Three years ago the time came for a venerable Jesuit professor at Loyola University, veteran of decades of scholarship and teaching, to move from Chicago to the Jesuit infirmary near Detroit. In distance, the trip is only 300 miles, a couple of hours' drive. In the imagination and in the heart, the trip is very, very long.

To lessen the trauma of the move, the office of the Jesuits' Chicago Province asked David, a young man on its staff, to help. David worked with planning and office management and was fantastic at it. He was likewise excellent at helping this older Jesuit uproot himself from things that had grounded him for a professional lifetime and move on.

"David, do you think I will need these books in my new home?" the Jesuit asked with confusion or regret, hope or fear. "No, father, I think they have enough good books up there." "Thanks, David."

I could have used David's help in October, when I moved from Chicago to New York. I was not retiring but coming to **America**. And I too had to dispose of many things accumulated during my 28 years in Chicago and pack up the rest. I would wear my old clothes again, of course, but how many sweaters does one really need? I had shelves full of books, and until I get a Kindle I will actually read and consult many of them.

A Jesuit does not move furniture, of course; but many smaller things, souvenirs or gifts, demanded decision, to take or not to take. And then there were photos. I worked for 21 years at another Jesuit magazine, traveled for stories and brought home hundreds of pictures to illustrate them. Starting slowly, leisurely, I could make good decisions; by move day, I was tossing things into boxes to sort later.

The boxes left Chicago on Oct. 6, and I followed two days later. When I arrived on 56th Street, a crew had just moved them into my new room. Over the next few days, as I cut through packing tape and unpacked, I found myself wondering, "Why did I ever bring this?" and "Where will I ever find that?" I had so much, but so much too was not there anymore. And I was very tired from the strain of moving, disposing of and leaving behind.

I got into a familiar routine in the morning, drinking coffee and picking up books I was working through in my old life. One of them was Rabbi Lawrence Kushner's *The Book of Words*, a work on Jewish spirituality, from which I read a short chapter each day. Kushner reflects on returning home and photographs, on gifts and losing things and spending time. His words hit home. On my fourth day in New York, after reading about family and images and memory, I grabbed my notepad and wrote simply, "Wow!"

I knew, of course, that the chipped vase a friend had given me many years ago in Cincinnati was not that friend and that my memories would endure without it. I knew that the book an author had signed and dated as a gift was not that friend either. I knew that the champagne glass from a young couple's wedding I celebrated 25 years before was not their love and their commitment, which has endured and grown stronger while the glass gathered dust on a shelf.

My family are not the gifts or the grade school art they have proudly presented me through the years. (My sisters helped me immensely in September when they gave me permission to dispose of anything they had given me—thanks!)

And I know that love and friendship endure when the photos have cracked and faded, when the clothes have worn thin. "Don't make idols of images of the Creator," Rabbi Kushner reminds us. God's love and human love are greater than their tokens, their reflections. This love outlasts our every move.

EDWARD W. SCHMIDT, S.J.

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ON THE WEB

Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas, right, reflects on ministering to shooting victims in **Tucson**. Plus, William F. Baker is interviewed on our podcast, and Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., reviews the film **"The Rite."** All at americamagazine.org.

What's the Rush?

On May 1, Pope Benedict XVI will beatify Pope John Paul II during a Mass in Rome that is expected to attract two million people. Perhaps some of these pilgrims were among those who filled St. Peter's Square on the day of John Paul's funeral shouting, "Santo Subito!" If all goes as planned, Karol Wojtyla's beatification will have happened in near-record time. Benedict waived the standard five-year waiting period required before a person's cause for canonization can begin. And recently the Congregation for the Causes of Saints accepted as miraculous the cure of a French religious sister from Parkinson's disease, clearing the way for the Polish pope's beatification.

But does it make sense to rush John Paul, or anyone, to sainthood? For millions, John Paul already is a saint, and perhaps Benedict is responding to the *sensus fidelium*, the wisdom of the faithful, by moving his former boss to the head of the line. But in addition to his towering accomplishments and personal piety, John Paul's worldwide popularity could also be a result of his extensive travels and frequent media appearances. Does that make him holier than other, less well-known candidates? And is it seemly to have Vatican officials who owe their positions to John Paul examining his cause? In centuries to come, will Catholics wonder if the rush meant that corners were cut? Cardinal Angelo Amato, head of the congregation, denies this, saying the case has undergone "particularly careful scrutiny." Many think John Paul should be canonized. (Apparently so does God: a miracle is taken as evidence that a person is in heaven.) But John Paul will be just as much a saint if the normal procedures are followed.

A Christian Calling

Sargent Shriver, who died on Jan. 18 after a long struggle with Alzheimer's disease, asked himself a question at the end of every day: What have I done today to improve the lot of humanity? Mr. Shriver—who ran for vice president in 1972, played a key role in the war on poverty, directed the Peace Corps and later helped run the Special Olympics with his wife, Eunice—treated the Christian command to love God and neighbor with the steadfast commitment it deserves. That he did so while working in the rough-and-tumble world of U.S. politics is worthy of no small praise. A leader of his kind, who fought as fiercely to eradicate poverty as he did to protect the rights of the unborn and the mentally challenged, is unlikely to appear again on the political stage anytime soon.

Perhaps Mr. Shriver's death will serve as a reminder to the growing number of Catholic legislators, Republicans and Democrats, that faith is not just a source of personal solace, but a rigorous way of life that sometimes demands public action. His career also stands as a challenge to those who would shut themselves off from the secular world for fear of being morally compromised. Speaking in 1979, Mr. Shriver hailed the election of Pope John Paul II because he believed the pope would not turn his back on the problems of the world but would engage them. This was the duty of every Christian, Shriver said: "Christians are needed in politics, in the law, in medicine, in the marketplace…." Maintaining a Christian identity begins by reflecting on another question favored by Sargent Shriver: Am I living my life as Christ would want me to?

The Arab Revolt

The popular uprising begun in Tunisia has raced across North Africa and the Arab world, especially Egypt. Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak has announced he will not run for re-election; so has Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh; Jordan's King Abdullah II has appointed a new cabinet; and the Palestinian Authority has announced local elections. The whole region is in upheaval. The movement arose not from militant Islam but from popular discontent over political repression and deteriorating economic conditions, and is led by largely secular forces.

The future is by no means decided. It is unclear whether the protestors will accept promises to decline re-election in the place of immediate resignations. What the impact of political Islam will be on the transition to democracy and the formation of new governments is unclear. Except perhaps in Yemen, Americans should not fret yet about any Islamist hegemony sweeping the region.

It will take some time for things to be sorted out, and there are sure to be some expressions of anti-U.S. and anti-Israel sentiment. But, as long as the basic direction of the revolution is for democratic government, respect for human rights and economic improvement, the international community, including the United States, should not overburden the new Arab politics with outside expectations. It should be supportive of the transitions in government, offering help on terms acceptable to the local people, assisting in relieving their immediate economic distress and contributing to long-term development. Israel will certainly have worries, but its long-term interests also counsel patience. Any precipitous action by Israel, particularly in Gaza or Lebanon, might push the Arab street beyond the tipping point, transforming a popular, secular uprising into a more radical Islamist one, with negative consequences all around.

The Reckoning

The final report of the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission is meant to be the definitive account of the economic crisis that erupted in 2008. Like the 9/11 Commission Report, it seeks to provide a complete account of the circumstances surrounding a cataclysmic event, in this case the worst recession since the Great Depression. Unfortunately, political disagreements among the commission members combined with the complexity of the narrative threaten to consign the report to obscurity.

If that happens, a crucial opportunity will be missed. Even with the adoption of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, the regulatory system in place may not be strong enough to prevent another crisis. As the commission members observe, "If we do not learn from history, we are unlikely to fully recover from it."

While the 9/11 Report was hailed by members of both parties, the Finance Commission faced significant political obstacles from the outset. The causes of the crisis are still much debated on Capitol Hill, and government's response to the crisis, the Troubled Asset Relief Program, or TARP, is politically poisonous. It is not surprising that none of the Republicans on the commission chose to endorse its findings, deciding instead to issue two lengthy dissents. For one thing, the report offers a stinging indictment of financial deregulation, an article of faith for Republicans—and some Democrats—for the last 30 years.

Already critics are dismissing the commission's report as a politicized document. In fact, it is grounded in months of research and hundreds of interviews, some facilitated by subpoenas. If not a definitive account of the crisis, it is the most thorough so far and merits serious study. A few of the report's themes deserve emphasis.

Risky Business. The mortgage industry has been widely pilloried for its unethical lending practices prior to the crisis, and the commission's report adds depth and detail to that judgment. Yet it is also striking how many American homeowners took advantage of these lax practices, signing on for adjustable-rate mortgages or trying to make a quick profit by "flipping" a second home. Overall, mortgage indebtedness in the United States doubled from 2001 to 2007, from $5.3 trillion to $10.5 trillion. In the wake of the housing market collapse, few parties emerged unscathed.

Irrational Exuberance. Again and again the report cites individuals and institutions who warned of the coming crisis. Beginning in 1999, a nonprofit housing group in California alerted Chairman Alan Greenspan of the Federal Reserve to predatory lending practices. Why were such warnings ignored? With markets surging and retirement and investment accounts following suit, few seemed willing to play spoiler. As one former government official said of the mortgage market: "Everybody was making a great deal of money...and there wasn't a great deal of oversight going on."

Markets Unbound. "The financial system we examined bears little resemblance to that of our parents' generation," the report's authors write. And yet the regulatory regime in place during the crisis was created to deal with financial problems that arose generations ago. In some instances, those reforms had been severely weakened. In the case of the Glass-Steagall Act, which sought to regulate the activities of the banking industry, the reform was repealed altogether. The triumph of the gospel of deregulation led to risky decisions that valued short-term profits over long-term investment.

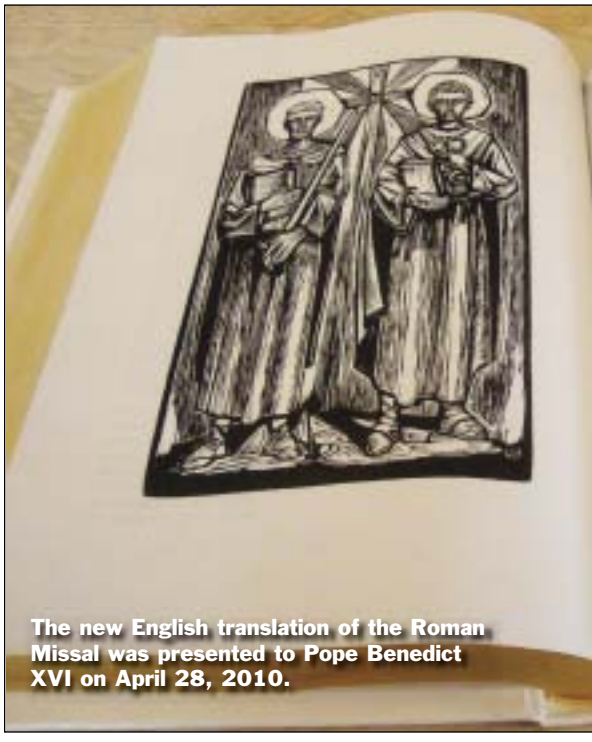
Watching the Watchdogs. Public institutions with the power to rein in questionable practices failed to act, most notably the Federal Reserve. Meanwhile, Moody's and other ratings agencies charged with assessing the strength of financial instruments repeatedly awarded misleading ratings. In case after case, individuals failed in their professional and ethical responsibilities.

With the Dow Jones Industrial Average hitting 12,000 in January for the first time since 2008, it is tempting to let the financial crisis fade into history. Yet as Wall Street surges, the economy still sputters, in very large part because of the events of two years ago. A final reckoning is necessary both to determine what went wrong and to ensure the system does not fail again. The rise and fall of the housing market is an example of corporate malfeasance not unlike the rush to war in Iraq in 2003, with both individuals and institutions playing a part. Some national soul-searching seems in order.

That examination could well begin with the 633-page report from the Financial Crisis Commission. Though short on analysis and weakened by Republican dissenters, it recognizes the crisis for the fundamental failure of responsibility it was. And for the average reader, the report offers a simple judgment amid an ocean of detail, one that could serve to temper the next wave of market madness: "We conclude, this financial crisis was avoidable."

NEW ROMAN MISSAL

Liturgists Worry About Upcoming Implementation



The new English translation of the Roman Missal was presented to Pope Benedict XVI on April 28, 2010.

Meetings of North American liturgists last month provided a first impression of how well the upcoming introduction of the new Roman Missal is likely to proceed. Attendees at conferences of the North American Academy of Liturgy and the Catholic Academy of Liturgy in San Francisco described liturgists as frustrated with the process that led to the new missal and displeased with the quality of the translation, but resigned to its inevitability.

"I wouldn't say people are jumping up and down about it," the Rev. Michael Driscoll of the University of Notre Dame said. "It's going to be a hard sell, but we're going to be doing our part to help. The attitude is: 'This is *a* translation, not *the* translation.'" Referring to the International Commission on English in the Liturgy and to the Vox Clara Committee, he added, "We have to be respectful of the bishops' committee and the I.C.E.L. and the [Vox Clara Committee], but this is probably not the definitive translation." In 15 or 20 years, said Father Driscoll, "Who knows? It's helpful to take the long view; that's a very Catholic thing to do."

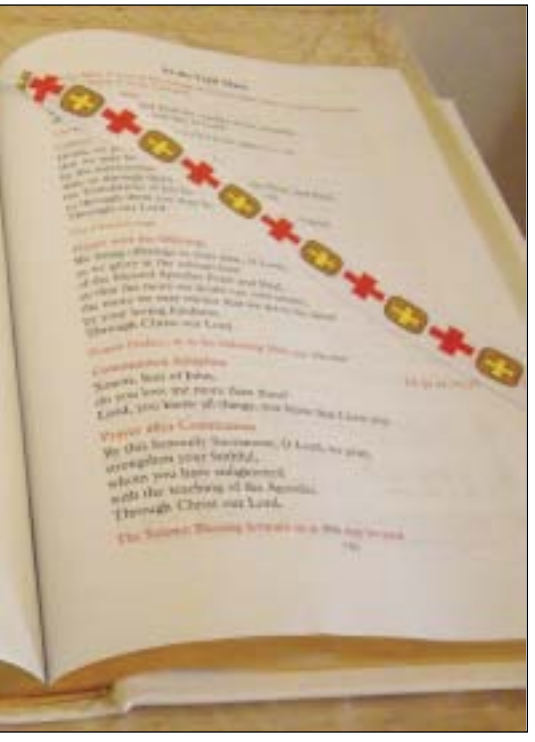
Bernadette Gasslein, editor of the Canadian liturgical periodical Celebrate!, said many liturgists are worried about the practical challenges to the missal's implementation and acceptance. "Ritual behavior is always hard to change," Gasslein said. "One would have thought that a congregation that deals with ritual behavior would have understood that." Gasslein believes that a staggered, slower introduction of the new missal, such as the Australian church is planning, would have been a more pastoral approach. Instead, the new translation is scheduled to be used starting on the first Sunday of Advent (Nov. 27, 2011), a season in the liturgical calendar that typically draws the participation of "people who haven't been to Mass since last Easter."

One measure of the level of the disquiet among liturgists is a recent open letter to U.S. bishops from Anthony Ruff, O.S.B. Father Ruff has decided to withdraw from speaking engagements at eight dioceses around the United States intended to help promote the new missal. In his letter, he said that it is something he no longer can agree to "with integrity." Father Ruff wrote, "I'm sure bishops want a speaker who can put the new missal in a positive light, and that would require me to say things I do not believe." He submitted the letter with the permission of his Benedictine superiors.

Father Ruff, who teaches theology at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn., served as chairman of I.C.E.L.'s music committee. "My involvement in that process," he wrote, "as well as my observation of the Holy See's handling of scandal, has gradually opened my eyes to the deep problems in the structures of authority of our church.

"The forthcoming missal is but a part of a larger pattern of top-down impositions by a central authority that does not consider itself accountable to the larger church," Father Ruff wrote. "When I think of how secretive the translation process was, how little consultation was done with priests or laity, how the Holy See allowed a small group to hijack the translation at the final stage, how unsatisfactory the final text is, how this text was imposed on national conferences of bishops in violation of their legitimate episcopal authority…and then when I think of Our Lord's teachings on service and love and unity…I weep." (The full text is available online at www.americamagazine.org.)

Father Ruff's misgivings about the process that led to the current translation (an earlier version, approved by English-speaking bishops' conferences, was rejected and responsibility for the new missal passed to Vox Clara) were shared by Richard R. Gaillardetz, a theologian at University of Toledo in Ohio. Noting that the documents of the Second Vatican Council require local episcopal authority over vernacular liturgy, Gaillardetz complained that in the development of the current



missal, "the whole process has been reversed," with a Vatican committee reworking a translation and then returning it to "the local church to rubber stamp."

"The liturgy has become the instrument of choice for rolling back the full implementation of [Vatican II's] global catholicity of the church," said Gaillardetz. "My impression is that most dioceses are going to make a good-faith effort to implement this.... What saddens me is that what should be a source of unity is about to become instead a source of significant disunity, and it did not have to happen that way."

On a positive note, Gasslein said, the challenge of introducing the new translation may force the church to confront "four generations of spotty liturgical catechesis" and help Catholic Mass-goers more intentionally "think about what's happening and think about what we're saying." For that process to conclude successfully, however, significant follow-through will be required in an era when the percentage of weekly Mass-goers continues to decline.

EGYPT

Church Follows Unrest With Concern

Church leaders watched the unfolding political drama in Egypt with a mixture of hope for reform and concern over potential violence, said the head of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, O.F.M., said on Jan. 30 that the unrest that has weakened the 30-year rule of Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak came as a surprise to Catholics in the region.

"We all sense that these are epochal changes. None of us would have imagined these kinds of developments a few months ago," Father Pizzaballa said. "This means that there are currents, especially in the Arab world, that now have found visible expression. This is certainly a positive sign, but it's also worrying because we don't know how all this will end," he said. Mubarak's opponents include both radical and moderate Muslim groups, and it is unclear who might assume power if the president resigns. Father Pizzaballa said he hoped that "respect for religious minorities will be preserved" in Egypt.

Francesco Zannini, who teaches at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies in Rome, said the situation in Egypt reflected the weakening political power of Arab leaders who have ruled as "monarchs" but who are threatened by changes brought by globalization. In Egypt, it was unclear whether the momentum of the unrest was great enough to bring lasting reforms, Zannini said. One big question, he said, was whether Mohamed ElBaradei, an opposition leader and Nobel Peace Prize-winner, had the capacity to govern Egypt. Zannini said that although Islamic extremists had begun to join the protests in Egypt, he doubted they will ever present a governing alternative there. According to Zannini, radical Islam was losing influence among the populations of the Middle East.

The Rev. Justo Lacunza Balda, former rector of Rome's Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, said police and military officials will not be able to stop demonstrators in Egypt or other Arab countries. "Ordinary people cannot tolerate any more the appalling conditions of human degradation in which they live. They say, 'Enough is enough' and believe that they have nothing to lose."

Anti-government protesters take to the streets during mass demonstrations in Alexandria, Egypt, on Feb. 2.

Shell Oil Angers Bishop

Archbishop John Olorinfemi Onaiyekan of Abuja, Nigeria, is urging Shell Oil to act in "an environmentally sustainable way." He said, "Shell should not do in the Niger Delta what it would not do in the North Sea." The archbishop's protests drew the attention of European human rights groups, which have filed official complaints against the oil giant with the Dutch and British governments. In the 1990s, Shell acknowledged that much of the oil pollution in the Niger Delta was due to the company's own failures. Human rights groups say that now, however, the company blames sabotage by communities and criminals for most of the problem, citing misleading figures that purport to show as much as 98 percent of oil spills are caused by sabotage. When spills are classified as due to sabotage, Shell has no liability, under Nigerian law, with respect to compensation for damage done to people or their livelihoods.

NEWS BRIEFS

Buddha in Bhutan

More than 210,000 people worldwide contract **Hansen's disease** each year, even though it is preventable, Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski, president of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Ministry, reported on World Leprosy Day (Jan. 30). ✦ South African Catholics prayed for the recovery of the 92-year-old anti-apartheid hero **Nelson Mandela** after he returned home following treatment for a respiratory infection. ✦ Catholic missionaries are ready to set up faith communities in **Bhutan** after the predominantly Buddhist and Hindu country announced on Jan. 27 that it would accept the registration of Christians for the first time. ✦ It is "unacceptable" to evangelize without addressing the urgent problems of poverty, injustice and oppression, Pope Benedict XVI said in a message released on Jan. 25 in preparation for **World Mission Sunday** next October ✦ The Italian inventor Onorio Frati has devised an "**electronic rosary**," a pocket-size egg-shaped gadget. ✦ Catholic Relief Services' international staff and their families in **Cairo, Egypt,** were evacuated to Jordan on Jan. 31 as pro-democracy demonstrations continued.

C.H.A. President Affirms Bishop's Role

In an exchange of letters with the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the head of the Catholic Health Association has affirmed that the local bishop is the "authoritative interpreter" of the ethical and religious directives that guide Catholic health care. Carol Keehan, a member of the Daughters of Charity who is president and chief executive officer of the C.H.A., said her organization "has a sincere desire to work with the church and individual bishops to understand as clearly as possible clinical issues and bring the majesty of the church's teaching to that." In response, Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan of New York, U.S.C.C.B. president, said the church must "speak with one voice" against the "increasing political and social pressures that are trying to force the church to compromise her principles," including "the problem of illegitimate government intrusion in our health care ministries." Sister Keehan later said she was not aware that the U.S.C.C.B. intended to make the exchange of letters public. The C.H.A. and the U.S.C.C.B. took opposing stands on whether the health reform bill passed last March would adequately protect against the possibility of federal funding of abortion.

State of the Sisters

Women entering religious orders today are highly educated and active in parish ministries, according to a recent survey conducted by the Georgetown University-based Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate. The 2010 profession class of women religious was more diverse by race and ethnicity than the U.S. population of women religious in general. Six in 10 identified themselves as white; one in five as Asian and one in 10 as Hispanic. Six percent were African-American or African. The average age of these new women religious was 43. Nearly six in 10 entered religious life with at least a bachelor's degree, 25 percent with a graduate degree. Four in 10 participated in a youth group before entering religious life. Eighty-five percent had ministry experience before entering their religious institute, most commonly in liturgical ministry, faith formation or social service.

From CNS and other sources.

MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE

Faith and Freedom

Why does Pope Benedict XVI's message for the 2011 World Day of Peace focus on "religious freedom as the path to peace"? The connection might not seem immediately obvious. Religious liberty is often thought of as a human rights concern, not a security issue.

It is both. There are currently major armed conflicts in 16 locations in the world, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Major armed conflicts are the world's worst wars, those in which over 1,000 people were directly killed by combatants in the preceding year.

Nine of those 16 places where the world's worst wars rage are countries that are among the world's worst violators of religious freedom: Sudan, Pakistan, Iraq, Myanmar (Burma), Afghanistan, Somalia, India, Turkey and Sri Lanka. Each year the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom reports on the countries where religious freedom is either violated or not adequately protected by the state.

Two more of those major armed conflicts have major religious dimensions, in the Philippines and Israel. Even though the state does not officially persecute in these cases (and these countries are not on any of the commission's watch lists), religious minorities often describe themselves as feeling persecuted. They are allowed to worship, but they feel their religious affiliation is part of the cause of their second-class citizenship.

The Global Peace Index ranks the peacefulness of a country by a variety of measures beyond major armed conflicts, including violent demonstrations, political instability, number of people in jail, homicides and size of internal security forces. All of the five least peaceful countries and a majority of the 10 worst-scoring countries on the Global Peace Index are also among the countries with the world's poorest records of religious freedom. Conversely, all of the world's 30 most peaceful countries have good records for religious freedom, and none are on any of the religious freedom watch lists. The 2010 Human Security Report notes that "Four of the world's five deadliest conflicts—in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia—involve Islamist insurgents," who reject religious freedom.

> Religious freedom is a security issue, and peace depends on it.

Is it merely a coincidence that warring countries repress religious freedom while peaceful countries do not? No. In academia we note that correlation is not causation, and violence is usually overdetermined. Wars and violence have many causes—routinely economic and political, at times intensified by religious factors. The problem is not religion per se, which is neither always peaceful nor always violent. The question is: Under what conditions will what sorts of religions aid peace or war? Religious freedom is key.

Where states repress religious groups, violence often ensues—violence by the state against religious minorities, violence by majority groups who take their cues from state policy and violence by religious minorities trying to protect their communities and beliefs. Daniel Philpott, a political scientist at the University of Notre Dame, identifies two important variables related to whether religions will aid war or peace: differentiation and political theology—in other words, institutions and ideas. Where religious freedom is secure, state and religious institutions are autonomous, separate and draw on their own sources of authority, and peace is likely. Neither party uses violence to subdue the other, and minority religious groups are likewise secure from repression, so they also do not seek violent redress. When state and religious authority overlap or are merged, trouble begins. Even if the merger is consensual, if the political ideas of the state religion are intolerant or exclusionary of other traditions, conflict ensues, as other religious groups seek protection from repression.

The pope is right in noting that religious freedom is a security issue, and that peace depends upon it. The U.S. government has done more than most, issuing annual reports on the state of religious freedom in every country. This is an important contribution. But the United States has special responsibilities in Iraq and Afghanistan. Christians in Iraq are now worse off than they were before the U.S. invasion and occupation, under the regime of Saddam Hussein. The United States must do more than issue reports to build peace.

MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE *professor of international relations at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., was a Crapa Fellow at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom during her sabbatical leave in 2010.*

Traders receive Communion at the stock market in Manila, the Phillippines.

PHOTO: REUTERS/ CHERYL RAVELO

Catholics At Work

Over a lifetime, work is the single most energy- and time-consuming pursuit of most adults today, for both men and women. Work, whether paid or unpaid, is also a source of identity, community, creativity and meaning for many. The phrase *meaningful work* has been used to describe socially redemptive jobs like social work, church work and health care, as well as government, science and engineering jobs that attempt to solve social problems. But the term can be misleading. For honest work itself has meanings that go beyond the economic necessity to support oneself, one's family and the local economy. Work develops and hones skills, builds character, frames time and sets up a public rhythm. Work challenges assumptions and faith.

How, exactly, does work intersect with faith? The particularities may depend on the work itself.

We have asked practicing Catholics across a variety of fields to describe briefly how they regard their faith and their work when they consider them together. What is the interplay between the two? In what ways has their faith influenced their work—perhaps strengthened certain decisions they have made, governed relationships with clients or co-workers, been instrumental in their very choice of what work to do, given them tenacity and hope, shaped their positive view of the work they do? Just as important is this twin consideration: In what ways has their work influenced their faith—perhaps caused them to understand some particular tennet, sparked certain questions or reflections, enabled them to see in their very own lives some contemporary application of biblical truths or ancient Christian wisdom?

In this, **America**'s annual vocation issue, we present the first in an occasional series of short pieces that will feature workers' thoughtful reflections. We invite readers to tell us about their own experiences of faith and work.

The Editors

Broadcasting Faith

No teleprompting necessary

BY WILLIAM F. BAKER

Breaking into a career in television would have been impossible for me without the intellectual and emotional support of my religion. Summoning the courage to speak freely and truthfully to political officials, corporate leaders and television stars is much easier when you remember that everybody is equal in the eyes of God. That mixture of humility and courage has been present whenever my faith and my working life have intersected.

There were times when being a Catholic in the television business gave me an extra, though necessarily private, sense of pride in my work. In a television studio about a mile from ground zero on Sept. 12, 2001, my friend Msgr. Jim Lisante was a guest of Bill Moyers on a live national broadcast. Bill had invited religious leaders into the studio to discuss the moral and spiritual ramifications of the terrorist attacks. Monsignor Lisante was sitting next to a rabbi, who had just cited an Old Testament text calling for "an eye for an eye." When he was asked what the Catholic tradition taught in the face of such aggression, Monsignor Lisante looked right into the camera and said, "Forgiveness." For anybody who remembers the climate of fear and rage that pervaded the country during those weeks, Monsignor Lisante's courage is something to be deeply proud of.

If my faith has sometimes enriched my work, it has also occasionally made it more difficult. About 20 years ago, I had to decide whether to broadcast a film called "Stop the Church," about members of the gay rights group Act Up, which disrupted Mass and desecrated the host at St. Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue. Though I supported and still support the struggle of gay people for dignity and equality, I found the actions of the protesters in the film deeply offensive. But like the other Catholics I have known who work in media, I kept the private covenant of my faith separate from the public duties of my job. As a Catholic I found abhorrent what as a journalist I was morally obligated to bring before the independent judgment of the public. So the film ran on New York's PBS station. This made a lunch I had with my friend Cardinal John O'Connor, at his residence near St. Patrick's some months later, rather tense. I asked him about forgiveness, and he asked me about righteous indignation. We never mentioned it again and remained friends.

I've been surprised at times how little even the most educated people in American society understand about the importance of religion in this world. So when Bob Abernathy approached me about producing the television show "Religion & Ethics Newsweekly," I was a strong supporter, even when the head of the programming department said it was "illegal on PBS because of the separation of church and state." Clearly education was needed.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF AUTHOR

Throughout my career, the spiritual vocabulary of the church has given me a big advantage. It has shown me how to see my work sacramentally, as the outward sign of an inward, if not grace, then purpose. Abundant purpose sustains a person or a company when money may not be as abundant. My successes as a manager in the media business, and specifically in the not-for-profit media business, came because I persistently kept the inner justifications for my work in view, whether times were good or bad. And I always encouraged my employees to do the same.

Since retiring from WNET-TV, I have enjoyed the blessing of bringing my work and my faith closer together. I am producing a feature film called "Sacred," about the deep connections between Islam, Judaism and Christianity. I have also accepted a position on the faculty of Fordham, New York's Jesuit university. Surrounded there by a community

ON THE WEB

A conversation with William F. Baker.
americamagazine.org/podcast

sustained by the faith that has sustained me for so long, I feel very much at home.

WILLIAM F. BAKER, *president emeritus of the Educational Broadcasting Corporation, parent company of WNET-TV and WLIW-TV, where he served for 20 years as chief executive officer, is journalist-in-residence at Fordham University and holds the Claudio Aquaviva Chair at its Graduate School of Education.*

Business Plan

Bringing best practices to the church

BY KERRY A. ROBINSON

I have the best job in the world. And I never saw it coming. Seven years ago, heartbroken over the sexual abuse crisis in the Catholic Church, I visited my spiritual director yearning to lend myself to a meaningful, life-giving pursuit. She suggested that as a prayerful discipline every day for a month, I open myself to the world of possibility while going about the hectic demands of full-time work and motherhood.

Fortified by her wisdom, I flew to Memphis for a board meeting of Catholic philanthropic foundations and received the answer to my prayers in the person of Geoff Boisi, to whom I offered my services. He later became the founding chair of the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management and invited me to be its first director.

Our network is made up of senior executive leaders from all sectors and industries. These thoughtful, generous men and women—ordained, religious and lay—are chief executive officers, presidents, executive directors, generals and major religious superiors. They are people of profound faith and accomplishment. All Catholic, they come together to help the church respond positively to complex, contemporary and temporal challenges. Our work is neither easy nor expedient. Daily we contemplate the managerial, fiscal, administrative, personnel, communications and public relations challenges facing church leaders.

Kerry A. Robinson with Prime Minister Tony Blair at the 2009 Leadership Roundtable annual meeting, at which Blair offered a keynote address.

How? When church leaders ask for help, we respond rapidly with advice, programs and personnel. A bishop from the Midwest, for example, contacted the Leadership Roundtable and explained that the diocese's pastors and lay leaders could benefit from greater managerial, financial and human resource expertise. The leaders' proactive approach allowed us to help the diocese implement the Roundtable's Standards for Excellence, 55 concrete measures to ensure that Catholic parishes, dioceses and nonprofits are operating within accepted best practices. (A recent Carnegie-Notre Dame study confirmed that this local church is now run more efficiently and effectively, and pastors report the advantage of having a credible roadmap to guide their managerial responsibilities.)

We also assist with leadership formation through the Pastor's Toolbox, a weeklong Harvard Business School-style seminar that equips new pastors with tools for effective management. And when the Great Recession threatened church assets, we convened economic leaders and bishops, a collaboration that led to two national initiatives: coordinated procurement to save money and pooled investment to increase assets.

There is no question that my faith—in possibility, in the church, in God's providence—brought me to this role. Every day I try to honor this gift by remembering its genesis in vocational discernment and the blessing of meeting Geoff Boisi and our many inspiring colleagues.

When you love something, like the church, you come to know it intimately and see it at its best and at its most ignoble. A close priest friend reminds me that it is harder to hold on to one's faith the closer one gets to the center of power. There is an irony involved: more care of one's own inner life of faith must be taken when one works daily in service to the church. What we witness at times (arrogance, fear, control, clericalism, mediocrity, vitriol between the left and right, lack of mercy, distrust) can challenge faith. But it is a challenge my colleagues and I have come to embrace. We commit ourselves to being the church we want to see, to remembering what it is we love most about the church, to serving in a manner that is positive, solution-oriented and faithful.

To accomplish our mission, we hold ourselves to high standards. We seek the best and brightest Catholic leaders, from the church and secular arenas, and assemble them to collaborate on ways to strengthen the church. Recently, when we sought

PHOTO: ROBERT A. LISAK

to provide communications expertise to lay and ordained church leaders, we turned to Tony Blair, former prime minister of the United Kingdom, and Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas, then vice president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

As Christian stewards, we believe that to complain and refuse to be part of the solution is to be complicit. As baptized Catholics, we are active, grateful participants, engaged in the life of the church while attending to its temporal needs. We meet for liturgy and begin in prayer. We remember how much can be accomplished when nobody cares who gets the credit. We follow guiding principles and maxims that are deeply Catholic: Trust in providence; banish cynicism; extend the benefit of the doubt; be on the lookout for grace; be joyful.

Catholics in the United States have attained education, affluence, influence and executive leadership, which allows for unprecedented lay expertise, support and leadership in service to the church.

I no longer know if it is my work that nurtures a rich, earthy, vibrant inner life of faith or my faith that inspires and sustains my passionate commitment to serve the church. Either way, it makes for a great day job.

KERRY A. ROBINSON *is executive director of the National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management.*

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Jordan's Sisterhood

Three communities of sisters offer solace and support in troubled times.

BY KEVIN CLARKE

The Italian Hospital is nestled at the crest of a steep rise overlooking the city of Al-Karak, Jordan, surrounded by the remnants of a crusader castle, its crumbling walls a reminder in sandstone of the region's many conflicts. From this vantage point raids were once launched on passing Muslim caravans. On the roof of the hospital's adjoining convent at dusk, Alessandra Fumagalli, C.M.S., leans along the parapet. Before her a purple and rust sunset breaks the line of a mountain in the near distance; the fading light falls across the small houses and scrub desert below. Far to the west, the sunset sparkles across the surface of the Dead Sea. Sister Alessandra surveys the sleepy valley a moment. "At night all the homes on the hillside light up," she says. "It's so beautiful, it looks like Christmas. You can see why Jesus wanted to be born here."

Sister Alessandra at Al-Karak

Sister Alessandra's perspective is indeed beautiful, but the view is hardly the only compensation she derives from her work among the poor in Karak and its surrounding villages, so far from her native Italy. She describes her mission as a satisfying, silent evangelization of doing, for and among her Muslim neighbors. Like the crusaders before them, this handful of Comboni sisters keeps watch over the people of Karak, but they offer an altogether different Christian presence among their Muslim neighbors.

Christians are only a tiny percentage of Jordan's population, but Sister Alessandra says it is important to her to live in Jordan. "People from Europe and the United States are surprised to see Muslims and Christians living and working together, [but] this is even the aim of our operation, why we love to be here. Not only to provide health care, but to show that we can live together." Her work speaks about God without speaking about God, she says. Six other sisters join Sister Alessandra in keeping the hospital going, as other Comboni sisters before them have done since 1934.

Though it is open for pretty much any medical emergency, the Italian Hospital's scarce space is devoted primarily to two of Karak's most pressing needs: Women from the neighboring villages come to the hospital to have their children, and many come for treatment for kidney issues related to the region's poor drinking water and haphazard use of drugs that elsewhere require a prescription or are otherwise controlled.

The Italian Hospital has just 38 beds, but more than 1,000 babies a year are born there. How is this possible? Rapid turnover. Sister Alessandra says women can expect

PHOTOS PAGES 18 AND 19: KEVIN CLARKE

KEVIN CLARKE *is an associate editor of* ***America.***

about two hours for recovery after a normal delivery and 24 hours after a caesarian, then it is off to home to make room for the next birthing mother or broken arm. Sister Alessandra says if the hospital had more beds, the new mothers could have more time to recover. We need more money, she flatly tells visitors; we need more room; we need a new maternity ward, better dialysis facilities, new medical equipment of all sorts. Amman, where the sick or injured can find an M.R.I. machine or a specialist, is 130 kilometers away. She wants to bring those services closer to the people of Karak. "People wait weeks to see a doctor," she explains.

"In some way I have to find all the money to do this," Sister Alessandra says. She seems more than up to the challenge. "I applied to the Vatican [for financial help]," Sister says. "I said, 'If you want our presence here, you need to support us.'" The Pontifical Mission for Palestine has helped, but much more is required. The hospital gets by on support from the mission and from donors in Europe and the United States through the Catholic Near East Welfare Association. But its patients are also expected to help keep the doors open. "Who can pay, will pay," says Sister Alessandra in a charming, slightly fractured English. "But it is a very low price," she rushes to clarify.

Out of Zarqa

Babies and young mothers crowd the hallways and small examination rooms of the Mother of Mercy Clinic in the sprawling Palestinian refugee camp of Zarqa. It is Monday, vaccination day, and a line of mostly young mothers with small children in tow threads along the corridors and out the door. Like babies everywhere, the infants and toddlers in this small health center smile shyly at strangers and find ways to amuse themselves until the needles appear and the screaming begins. Mercifully, it is over quickly and the kids and their mothers are out the door or off to their next appointment.

Established in 1949, Zarqa is one of the oldest of the 13 refugee camps for Palestinians in Jordan, though the dusty tenement city of more than 17,000 hardly resembles anyone's idea of a camp at this point. As a way of insisting that the camp is a temproary measure, there is resistance to the creation of basic infrastructure. Even after decades and generations have passed through Zarqa, no sewer lines have been installed. Open sanitation canals run through the middle of the streets, just one of the many health hazards confronted by residents and another reason the Dominican Sisters of St. Catherine of Siena who work here can expect to stay busy.

Three Domincan sisters help run the clinic, which treats about 140 patients each day. The small staff currently includes just two harried doctors, one male, one female. In this patriarchal society few women will agree to be treated by a male doctor. Sister Habiba Touma, the clinic's director, hopes soon to hire another female physician to keep up with demand. Every day the staff is forced to turn people away.

Among Palestinian refugees at Mother of Mercy Clinic

The sisters live near the clinic and each day pass through the Muslim streets of the camp in their habits. Zarqa has a reputation as a cauldron of Palestinian resentment—a one-time "most wanted terrorist" in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (literally "one from Zarqa"), grew up here. But the sisters say residents treat them with respect, even affection.

There is certainly no indication of anti-Western or anti-Christian hostility among the families visiting the clinic this afternoon. Patients come from all around Zarqa and from the city outside the camp. Sister Habiba says health services to the camp residents are paltry at best and thousands crowd the U.N.-run clinic. "This clinic is too good and too cheap!" she says cheerfully. The clinic charges minuscule fees for its services, but "whoever can't afford it, that's fine, too," says Sister Habiba.

The health problems of the people are manifold, many associated with the poor conditions in the camp itself. In addition to the general overcrowding and poor sanitation, unregulated industrial sites have sprung up around the community, exposing the children to industrial dust and pollutants. Asthma is an acute problem. Poverty among the Palestinians here is extreme. "Malnutrition is a problem here," Sister Habiba says. The people also suffer from kidney troubles and many congenital disabilities related to the high rate of communal intermarriage, which persists despite the Palestinians' dislocation. People generally marry only from within the village they left behind in Israel, the sisters say, even when that village has become an increasingly distant memory.

A young man who grew up, like Abu Musab, in Zarqa and now sells pharmacuetical supplies to the clinic inter-

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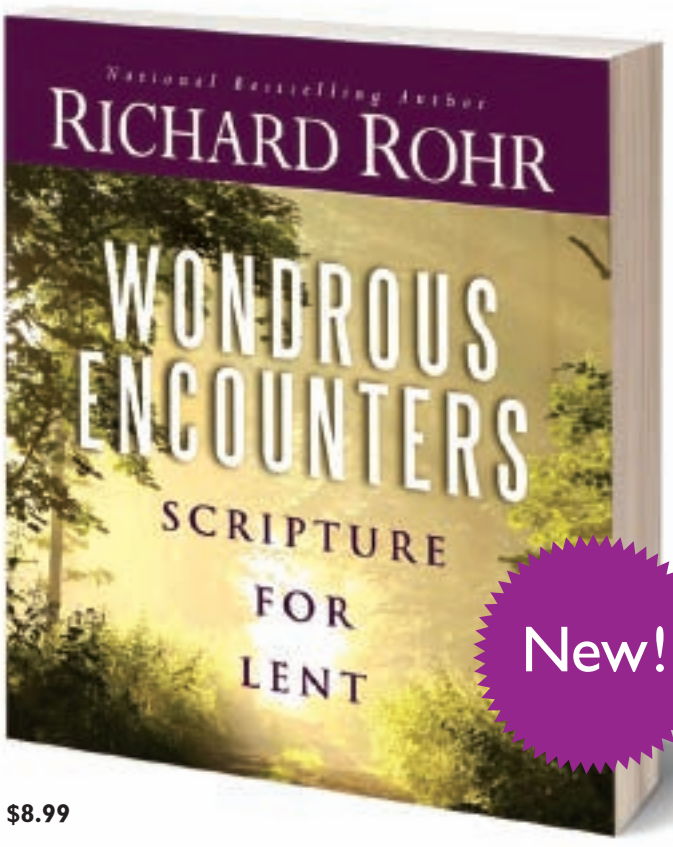

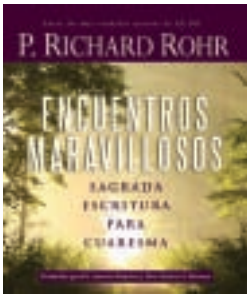

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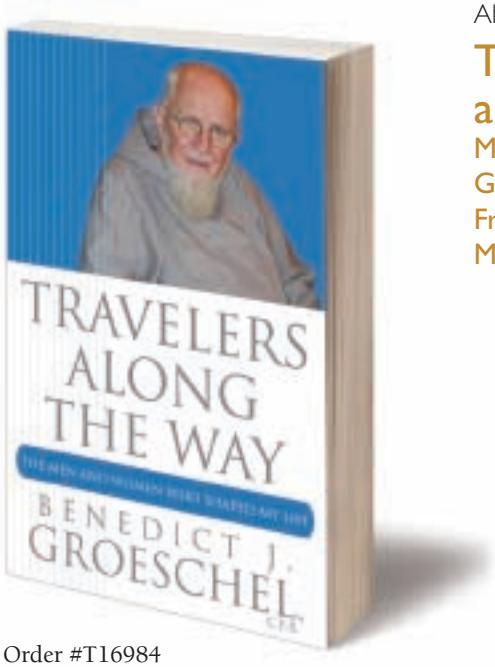

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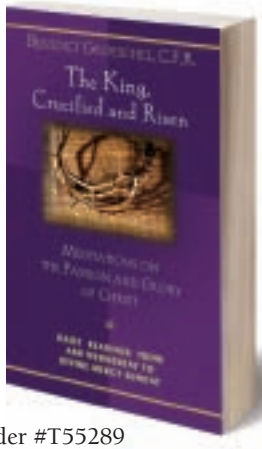

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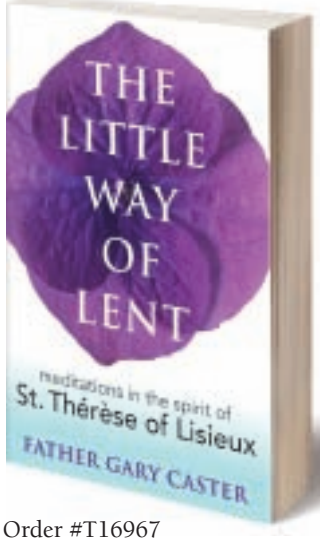

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rupts Sister Habiba's tour, excited to see a group of U.S. journalists and eager to get a message through to America. "Bush is a liar," he says. "And bin Laden is the same liar."

"A human being is a human being," he says earnestly. "I am a Muslim, but before Islam my ancestors were Christians. We were sons of Jesus and then later sons of Mohammed. When they meet, they will never stop crying about what is going on," he says.

Sister Habiba is happy to finish the tour. She has a lot to do this afternoon. The next day she will be returning to her native Baghdad to assume a leadership position with her order, which will bring more difficult—and increasingly dangerous—work to do in this her 50th year of religious life. The reporters are incredulous. "What were you, 9 years old when you joined?" one asks.

She ponders a moment. "Ten," she says with a laugh. "I think I was 10."

Iraqi refugees in Amman, Jordan

PHOTO CNS/PAUL HARING

Guests of a Nation

A young man drew a primitive outline of a handgun and a bullet. A small illustration like this had accompanied a demand for $50,000 that his family received the night before they fled Baghdad, he says. The family knew such a message was no empty threat to Christians in Iraq. When you receive a note like that "you must go," he says, throwing up his hands. "We told them, 'Don't kill anyone; we are leaving.'" Did he know the people who were threatening him? "Of course," says Raed, 17 now, 11 then. They were his neighbors. Like thousands of others, Raed escaped with his mother and sister to Amman, where they maintain a tentative, frustrating existence, not as official refugees in Jordan but as guests of the nation.

Chaldean Catholic families are gathered, as they are every week, at a parish house maintained by a group of Franciscan Missionaries of Mary in Amman. The Christians, dislocated by years of violence or running from kidnapping or death threats, live in densely populated neighborhoods in Amman. They come for services and catechism offered by this small community.

The border with Iraq is more or less open, and even the Jordanian authorities are not certain how many Iraqis there are in the desert kingdom. It may be as many as 500,000; a significant percentage of the total, whatever it is, are Christians. Though many receive a stipend from the United Nations, the Iraqis face severe financial constraints in Amman. Most, even those who were once people of means, now struggle to put daily bread on the table.

"It's very difficult" for the Iraqi Christians in Jordan, Sister Warde-Rose Keirouz allows, but certainly preferable to conditions back in Baghdad, which for some could mean certain death. "Jordan is a poor country, and it is doing what it can."

As "guests," not official refugees, the Iraqis cannot legally work in Jordan—those who are caught in "illegal" jobs are deported—and children cannot enroll in state schools. "Some of our Iraqi families have children who have never been to school," Sister Warde-Rose says.

The education of this lost refugee generation is a major preoccupation of a community that once prided itself on the educational attainment of its young people. Another concern is getting out of Amman to America. This is a dim prospect: only 6,600 Iraqi Christians of all denominations were accepted as refugees in 2010. A bright young woman who hopes to go to America some day and to attend college—somehow—reports that she has come of age in Amman, six years after fleeing Baghdad, without once attending school.

The sisters have come to have a hand in resolving the many settlement, employment and housing issues of the Iraqi newcomers, finding groceries and, before the numbers became too great, attempting to run a kind of primary school themselves for the children. Now they try to find donations that allow Chaldean Catholic children to attend private schools, one less worry for their exasperated parents. This year they found placements for 100 Iraqi children.

"The Christians in Iraq are now just waiting for the opportunity to leave," Sister Warde-Rose says. "They lost their faith; they lost their security." They may have had wealth; they may have had shops and property; but it has all been left behind in Iraq.

"Only a small number plan to go back," Sister Warde-Rose says. "Most are hoping to go to the United States or Europe or Canada." Real peace and security in Iraq remains a hoped-for outcome among the sisters and their "guests."

"God can do miracles," Sister Warde-Rose says. "I'm not very optimistic, but I think our Lord can do anything."

"We need St. Francis to help us," she adds with a smile. A

Putting on the Apron

BY THOMAS P. SWEETSER

It was the first weekend of Masses for the new pastor, the Rev. Tony Zimmer. The priest had just arrived at St. Anthony on the Lake in Pewaukee, Wis., a suburb 20 miles from the heart of Milwaukee. I knew Father Zimmer from his previous parish, had always enjoyed his humor and style of presiding and attended one of the Masses that day. I suspected his first homily at St. Anthony parish would not disappoint.

At the start of the homily, Father Zimmer thanked everyone for granting him the privilege of being the new pastor. He mentioned that the parishioners of his previous parish, St. Charles Borromeo, had given him a wonderful sendoff. "They gave me a present," he added. "Do you want to see it?" The congregation responded with a resounding yes. He stepped away from the ambo and picked up a bright red apron.

"Kind of like Christmas all over again," Father Zimmer remarked as he put the red apron over his green vestments and walked around in front of the large gathering. His name was written at the top of the apron, and in the middle were the initials of St. Charles Borromeo parish. What was difficult for many in the congregation to see from afar was that the rest of the space was filled with parishioners' names and parting messages.

"How many here have put on an apron recently?" asked Father Zimmer. Many, both women and men, raised their hands. "Putting on an apron is serious business," he continued. "It means that you are about to do something important. An apron is like a uniform—a uniform denoting service, doing something special for others. That is why I value this gift so much. The people from my last parish were telling me that I had been their servant leader for the last 10 years. And that is what I want to be for you as well."

He continued: "But I can't do this alone. We all have to put on our aprons and roll up our sleeves to prepare the meals and liturgies and lessons and visits and what-all for others. I need you. We are all servant leaders here together—servants of our God and servants to others. This is the same God who, on the night before he died, put on a kind of apron—that's how I read the towel around his waist—and got down on his knees to serve his friends and followers. Imagine that! That's the kind of God we have. And we must do the same.

"There is a song that sums this up well. I'll sing the first verse and you pick up on the second," he instructed, referring the congregation to their missalettes. Then he began to sing Richard Gillard's "The Servant Song": "Will you let me be your servant,/ Let me be as Christ to you;/ Pray that I may have the grace to/ Let you be my servant, too."

The congregation took his lead and sang all the verses. It was difficult for me to do much singing, however, because of the emotion of the moment. As I looked around, I could see others smiling, also moved by the experience.

Such a simple gesture all this "putting on the apron" was, but a profound expression of what it means to be a pastor. And the priest extended Christ's genuine invitation to all present in that church.

At the conclusion of the homily Father Zimmer took off the bright red apron, put it back on the stand and told the congregation, "We have a baptism today." He gestured toward the child who had been brought forward. "Hopefully young Lucas will grow up with this same attitude of service." As the baptismal rite continued, I thought of the white garment to be placed on the child: It could well be an apron. It might take a lifetime to grow into, but this is a beginning. And this child has a strong, willing faith community to show him how. A

ON THE WEB
Bishop Gerald F. Kicanas on ministering to victims in Tucson.
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THOMAS P. SWEETSER, S.J., *is director of the Parish Evaluation Project, Milwaukee, Wis.*

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IDEAS | ELIZABETH KIRKLAND CAHILL

OUR WORDS AND OUR SELVES

Marie Ponsot and the rediscovery of language

'After Stroke, a Poet Hunts for the Language Lost," ran a headline in The New York Times last summer. The 89-year-old poet Marie Ponsot, who raised seven children on her own, published six volumes of poetry, translated a myriad of books and won the National Book Critics Circle Award, was suffering acute aphasia as the result of a stroke. Jim Dwyer, the New York Times columnist, movingly recounted how Ms. Ponsot was groping not only for vocabulary but for order and placement and usage—in a word, for syntax. Her attempts to reclaim speech by going back "to the earliest thing I ever knew by heart," the Lord's Prayer, ended only in frustration.

PHOTO:SCOTT HIGHTOWER

Marie Ponsot in New York City, 2003

I am haunted by the image of Ms. Ponsot struggling to order her words. I have admired her work since first encountering it over a decade ago. For years two of her poems have been pinned to my bulletin board—a rare honor, as space is limited there and literature must compete with the detritus of managing a household. There is "Rain All Night" from 1999, included in the collection *Springing* (Knopf), with its thrilling admixture of danger and hope:

On the road home the tide is rising.

Riding the road-tide is dangerous
but it's not safe to stand still.
Hang on the verge & you drown.
I'm going along for the ride.
I may see more riders further on.
Drowning must wait till I get there
and who knows who might be waiting
with a flash-light, a thermos,
even a raft or a canoe.

Next to it is a more recent poem, "The Tree Says," which originally appeared in Commonweal. Its enjambments imbue the poem with a lovely, spreading generosity: The tree says: "How to love: put down strong roots./ Be slow to rise. Study the turn of light/ before you ramify so that new shoots/ do not obscure old. Tolerate the flight/ of birds you welcomed...."

What must it be like for a woman who has deployed words with such sparkling sensitivity to have to scrabble for syntax? Syntax is defined in my *Latin Prose Composition* handbook as "the various classes or headings, under which all words used in speaking or writing may be arranged." Syntax undergirds written works as divergent as Mark Antony's stirring eulogy in Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" and the instructions on an income tax form. Syntax is what Mr. Dwyer correctly characterizes as "a tool more fundamental to human existence than the wheel."

It is fundamental to the spiritual life, too. For me, words and their arrangement have always been an essential component of religious experience. The prayers that touch me most deeply, that create in me a sense of the holiness and apartness of God, are marked not only by a judicious and sensitive choice of words but by their artful construction as well. Cadence, repetition, pairing and word order—these are the grace notes of prayer, the forces that transform spoken petitions and thanksgivings into music.

As a little girl growing up in the Episcopal Church, I absorbed the richness of expression that is the great Anglican heritage, confessing my sins in Morning Prayer: "Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep, we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts...."

As an adult Catholic convert, I have migrated toward St. Patrick and the plethora of prepositions that adorn his breastplate: "Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me...."

And I echo St. Ignatius Loyola in his entreaties to the Lord: "Teach me to serve you as you deserve:/ To give and not to count the cost,/ To fight and not to heed the wounds,/ To toil and not to look for rest,/ To labor and not to ask for reward/ Save that of knowing I am doing your will."

But my personal favorite (author unknown), which I pray daily, is this prayer:

O Lord, forgive what I have been,
sanctify what I am,
and order what I shall be.

To me, this little tricolon limns a perfect arc of prayer. It begins in the past, with an examination of conscience, spurring me to reflect on where I have fallen short ("forgive what I have been"). It proceeds to the present, with a plea for God to bless my current circumstances, helping me make peace with my imperfect self ("sanctify what I am"). Finally, it flows into the future with its call for trust in God, gently exhorting me to place myself in the hands of God ("order what I shall be"). The syntax of such a prayer, winging through past and present toward the future, has the capacity to direct a pilgrim's progress, to illumine the salutary path. The ordering of the words both creates and reflects the way we might order our spiritual selves and may perhaps, just perhaps, propel us toward the kingdom of heaven.

Several years ago, during a visit to the Liberty Science Center in Jersey City, N.J., I foolishly entered what was then called the "Touch Tunnel." This is a maze of black tunnels utterly devoid of light (and, it seemed, of air). The idea is that, deprived of the sense of sight, bereft of familiar visual markers, the tunnel traveler will rely on the other senses—smell, hearing and touch—to find the way back to light and life. It looked manageable from the outside, and I did not want to appear timid in front of my children, so in I went. For what seemed like hours I groped in the darkness, thoroughly disoriented and increasingly certain

A LOOK IN THE CAVE

abstract from a medical encyclopedia

"The brain dwells in a cranial cave,
prefers few neighbors, most often will pretend
that no one is home; has a chronic
illness, *meta-cathexis*, a psychic
continuum of disembodied energy
which floats above the particle world,
in layman terminology, *desire*; exhibits
a joie de loquacity infrequently, partially,
preferring instead the silence common
to creatures of habitual solitude, those
that have fear of the light; is the soul's
pharmacist, dispensing alternate doses
of adrenalin and gossip, chemical impulses
which cause the pale locomotive of the body
to toss and turn; often sleeps under a quilt
of delusion, a random patchwork of truth
and fiction, a blanket of dreams and wishes;
has been rumored on occasion to speak
in calm low tones of a high far place…"

DONALD BELL

DONALD BELL *lives in Spokane, Wash., and works in the food distribution industry.*

that I would suffocate on my own terror before I found the way out. As it was for Dante's pilgrim in the opening of *Inferno*, so it was for me: *la diritta via era smarrita*, the straight way was lost. To misplace one's sense of syntax, to be unable to locate the correct pathways for words, must be similarly terrifying.

ON THE WEB
Selections from Marie Ponsot's poetry for **America**.
americamagazine.org/pages

As the months have passed, I have often thought about how Marie Ponsot was doing in her efforts to reclaim syntax. And now I hope that God is sanctifying what she is and ordering what she will be. I wonder whether she has perhaps discovered an experience of God that lies on the other side of language, where words cannot go.

Language has its boundaries. Certain emotions and experiences are inexpressible by the human tongue, understood only by the heart in a wordless reality. As the poet John Berryman wrote, upon the loss of a beloved friend, "Nouns, verbs do not exist for what I feel." Deep grief, extreme joy—we cannot adequately salve or celebrate these by throwing words at them. "The kingdom of wisdom," writes the Rev. Raimon Panikkar in *A Dwelling Place for Wisdom*, "paradoxically, can be entered by all because it transcends both sensuousness and intelligibility and takes its seat in the mystical." Does mysticism, perhaps, begin at the point where the sensuousness and intelligibility of language leave off?

If this is what God has ordained for us—a journey through a dark and wordless tunnel that leads ultimately to an everlasting effulgence of light—then I will go faithfully. But I cannot say I will not miss the nouns and the verbs.

ELIZABETH KIRKLAND CAHILL, *co-author (with Joseph Papp) of* Shakespeare Alive! *(Bantam, 1988) and a graduate of the Yale Divinity School, is currently a visiting fellow there. The poem "Rain All Night" is reprinted from* Springing *with the permission of Random House.*

BOOKS | GERALD T. COBB

WHERE LIFE IS WEIRD

THE WITCH OF HEBRON
A World Made by Hand Novel

By James Kunstler
Atlantic Monthly Press. 336p $24

The setting of James Kunstler's novel is just before Halloween in an appropriately frightening post-apocalyptic era after "the banking collapse, two terrorist nuclear strikes, the Holy Land War and the sharp decline in oil supplies that shattered everyday life in America." Kunstler offers a sharply cautionary tale, conjuring up bizarre characters who would be right at home in the scariest of haunted houses. As one character puts it, "The world we know is slipping away and something weird is taking its place."

The novel itself is somewhat weird. In his previous non-fiction works, like *The Long Emergency* (2005), Kunstler garnered praise for raising questions about our energy future. By shifting to fiction in his 2008 novel, *A World Made by Hand*, Kunstler presumably sought to flesh out these questions more vibrantly, as only fiction writers can. *The Witch of Hebron* certainly does have a number of quite intense moments, but it also suffers from implausible plot elements and flaws in the portraits of some characters.

Kunstler sets his tale in and around the small upstate New York community of Union Grove, whose inhabitants suffer symptoms of what might be called "post-apocalypse stress disorder," such as impotence, religious hysteria and a propensity for robbery and homicidal violence. The novel centers upon 11-year-old Jasper Copeland, whose puppy is killed near the outset of the novel, provoking him to an act of vengeance, after which he decides he must flee town and family. There is certainly a disproportion between global disaster and the death of a puppy, but Kunstler's plot needs a precipitating cause for the 11-year-old to abandon home and family for a life on the road that will unfold as a coming-of-age story.

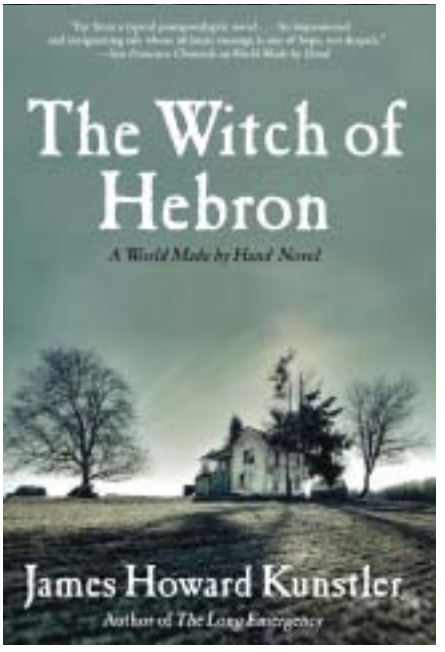
Anyone who has shivered his or her way through Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road*, which also featured a young boy traveling through a post-apocalyptic landscape, will recognize several of the conventions Kunstler uses. Jasper enters abandoned houses that harbor terrible secrets. He encounters highway bandits, including a particularly nasty 20-year-old sociopath named Billy Bones. And he stumbles upon the occasional life-saving food sources and helpful strangers.

Somewhat paradoxically Kunstler imagines the traumas and tribulations of the future as leading us back to a kind of Golden Age, when people lived off local gardens, bartered for goods and really knew their neighbors. Kunstler's foreboding sense of the future thus contrasts with this nostalgia for a pre-automobile age. Also, linguists should be warned: many of the 21st-century residents of Union Grove speak in a throwback, cowboy-like dialect peppered with words like *ding-dang, goldurn* and *lookit*. This does not seem to be a step forward for the English language.

For at least one character, the town's minister, Loren Holder, the

apocalypse has also brought with it sexual impotence without any possible recourse to Viagra since there are no more pharmacies. Here enters Barbara Maglie, the "witch of Hebron," who uses gentleness and a reserve of herbal aphrodisiacs to restore Loren's potency. Since Loren's ministry is somewhat ineffectual, the doors of Union Grove are open for a fanatical religious sect called the New Faith Covenant Church of Jesus, whose odd leader, Brother Jobe, seems to have telepathic powers to induce pain or even death in anyone who crosses him. The matriarch of the sect is "Precious Mother" Mary Beth Ivanhoe, who has had visionary seizures since age 19, when she was hit by a sport utility vehicle, which for Kunstler is the perfect gas-guzzling symbol of the evils of our age.

In Kunstler's imagined world of the near future, sexism makes a big comeback. Women characters are marginalized, generally cast in a servile mode or a sexual mode. The novel's sex scenes are awkwardly written and may upset the squeamish or anyone who takes



gender studies seriously, as they are strongly skewed toward a masculine perspective.

The novel improbably asserts that by observing his physician father at work Jasper has acquired "as much knowledge as a first-year medical student might have in the old times." The pre-teen Jasper treats a man with boils, which seems marginally plausible; but when he later performs an emergency life-saving surgery, all plausibility disappears. Jasper is inconsistently portrayed throughout the novel, vacillating between the immaturity of a child who throws tantrums over his dead puppy to the self-awareness worthy of a 25-year-old Hemingway character, as when he comments, "I'm a lost soul."

The novel ends with several unresolved issues: the body of a murder victim is exhumed for further analysis; two sons are missing from Union Grove; and Jasper returns home not much older but significantly wiser, ready for the next chapter of his personal growth.

Kunstler has said he hopes to write four novels in this series, to corre-

spond to the seasons. There is something seasonal and nostalgic about Kunstler's approach to fiction about the aftermath of civilization's collapse. He excels at writing lyric passages about nature, particularly trout streams, which function as symbols of nature's beauty and freedom. His acute pessimism about the future coexists with his faith in the human instinct to survive and adapt. He also demonstrates that the human penchant for storytelling is unlikely ever to become extinct so long as a single human being has breath enough to speak and strength enough to write.

GERALD T. COBB, S.J., *is associate professor in the English department at Seattle University in Washington State.*

PETER HEINEGG

TRAGEDY WITHOUT A HERO

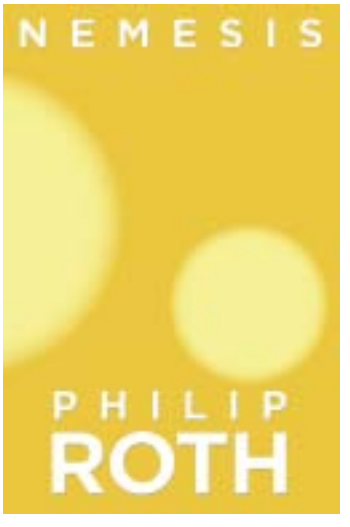
NEMESIS

By Philip Roth
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 304p $26

Spoiler alert: as J. M. Coetzee points out in his fine piece, "On the Moral Brink" (New York Review of Books, 10/28/10), there is no way to discuss Philip Roth's new novel sensibly without revealing both the climax and the conclusion. (Imagine an opening night review of "King Lear" that ended with, "But daughter Goneril's rebuke of 'your all-licensed fool' is only the beginning of the old man's troubles.")

This, the latest of four related novellas (preceded by *Everyman*, *Indignation* and *The Humbling*) is a stripped-down fable that omits many of Roth's best-known features—complex, convoluted characters, obsessive sexuality and even intense Jewish ethnicity—to deliver a meditation that might be labeled "The Atheist meets the Anti-theist."

The protagonist, Eugene "Bucky" Cantor, is an ultra-decent, if bland and somewhat boring 23-year-old Frank Merriwell type, a phys. ed. teacher spending the summer of 1944 supervising a public playground-cum-ballfield in Newark. Given a 4-F deferment because of his wretched eyesight, Cantor frets because he cannot be with his buddies fighting the Nazis in Europe or the Japanese in the Pacific. But life-and-death terror comes to peaceful Newark in the form of a polio epidemic, which soon claims some of his charges—and a shocking number of Jewish children in the nearby Weequahic district of the city. Like everyone else who is supposedly "in charge," Cantor is helpless. He plays by the rules, avoids overstraining the kids, practices meticulous hygiene and tries to keep up morale. But his lovely about-to-be fiancée and fellow teacher Marcia begs him to join her at her Indian-themed Jewish summer camp in the Poconos, where a job has opened up for a swimming and diving instructor (two of Bucky's countless athletic skills). What to do?



Resistant at first, Bucky cites his need to stand by his boys and care for his widowed grandmother; but in a momentary impulse, half-panic and half-rebellion, he runs off to join Marcia in a sunny, breezy mountain Eden (while Newark broils in a nonstop infectious heat wave). Everything is beyond wonderful: true love, terrific campers, sensational natural beauty—and then all hell breaks loose. Bucky's adoring fellow instructor Donald Kaplow contracts polio and dies. Groups of the campers fall ill (including one of Marcia's sisters), and Indian Hill shuts down. Finally, Bucky himself turns out to be that rare specimen, a healthy infected carrier, and gets hauled off to the hospital, convinced that he was the plague-bearer who struck down the youngsters with whom he had contact. He survives and recuperates with only partial paralysis. But in an overwhelming fit of despair, he breaks with Marcia (who loves him anyway and furiously rejects his rejection) and goes on to live a lonely life working as a gas station attendant, clerk, postal employee, whatever. His splendid body now crippled, Cantor marinates in misery.

So what is the point of it all? The key moment comes in the final encounter between Cantor and the previously almost invisible narrator of the book, a younger man named Arnie Mesnikoff, who used to be one of Bucky's playground kids. Mesnikoff caught polio too, but recovered sufficiently to marry and have both a family and a satisfying career as an architectural designer for handicapped people. He is an atheist, but an altogether happier character than Bucky, who has been passionately hating God because of all the children who suffered or perished in the epidemic (there is an obvious parallel between polio and the Holocaust) and hating himself for being God's unwitting but cowardly tool.

In his culminating judgment, Arnie writes:

As for Bucky's rebellion against Him, it struck me as absurd simply because there was no need for it. That polio epidemic among the children of the Weequahic section and the children of Camp Indian Hill was a tragedy he could not accept. He has to convert tragedy into guilt. He has to find a necessity for what happens. There is an epidemic and he needs a reason for it. He has to ask why. Why? Why? That it is pointless, contingent, preposterous, and tragic will not satisfy him. …Instead he looks desperately for a deeper cause…and finds the why either in God or in himself, or, mystically, mysteriously, in their dreadful joining together as the sole destroyer.

Like Marcia, Arnie thinks God has nothing to do with it; and while both their reactions are undoubtedly "healthier" than Bucky's, the agony of rigid, humorless, unironic, not-all-that-bright "Mr. Cantor" (as Arnie always calls him) has a sort of dumb-heroic nobility about it. Devoid as it is of Jewish flavor (but then the Book of Job likewise has a wholly gentile cast of characters), *Nemesis* seems to boil down to a stark, cosmic encounter with forces that used to be called satanic; and as in Job, the fact that there are no rational answers does not mean you can do the sensible thing and give up looking for them. Bucky Cantor was once an extraordinary athlete—the story closes with a triumphant recollection of how fabulously he could throw a javelin—but in every other way he was a perfectly ordinary person, just your basic really nice kid turned tragic, self-destroying failure. Blessed are the unreconciled. Perhaps.

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

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR sought by Africa Faith & Justice Network in Washington, D.C., office. Details at afjn.org.

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LETTERS

He's Not Here

In "Welcome to the Cafeteria" (Current Comment, 12/20), you describe Luke Gormally as a professor at the Ave Maria Law School in Ann Arbor, Mich., and as one of those who criticized Pope Benedict's statement on condoms. Mr. Gormally is no longer a member of the Ave Maria Law faculty, and the school is in Naples, Fla., not Ann Arbor.

(REV.) MICHAEL P. ORSI
Naples, Fla.

Beware of Intervening

Your editorial "Deadline in Sudan" (1/10) sounds like a description of the Sudan of 35 years ago, which was the same as Sudan back in the 1950s. Over the decades all of Sudan's dictators have systematically eliminated any insurgents in the south or anywhere else. Some of these campaigns of extermination would take years of effort. What did they all have in common? They were all Muslim leaders in a Muslim country. Allowing the Christians and adherents of traditional religious in the south to go off peacefully and practice their religion in a separate state is not acceptable to them. The moment no one is looking they will go back to their mode of suppressing whatever challenges Muslim control.

The United States, with its involvement in Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran, runs an extreme risk if it gets involved. Effective support of the Christians will be seen by Muslims worldwide as an attack on a Muslim nation.

TOM MAHER
Stow, Mass.

The Gaza Siege Must Cease

I applaud Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., for his humane and practical vision, "Two Peoples, One State" (11/15). The people living in the Holy Land had the natural right to self-determination after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Certainly the refugees have the right to return, according to international law, and to exercise their right to self-determination now. In the meantime, home demolitions, the military occupation, the checkpoints, the siege of Gaza and so on must cease immediately. We cannot give aid of any kind to nations that are violating human rights or international law. If needed, a U.N. peacekeeping force can keep order until details are worked out.

BENJAMIN URMSTON, S.J.
Cincinnati, Ohio

Head Off Netanyahu

"New Pressure From Israeli Hardliners" (Signs of the Times, 1/24) should prepare us for the likelihood that during the U.S. presidential campaign in 2012 Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will take advantage of the fear American politicians have of the Jewish vote and decide to "take out" the Iranian nuclear factories or attack Hezbollah in Lebanon. This possibility can be countered only if Americans can overcome their fear of being labeled anti-Semitic and contact their representatives about their concern for actions Netanyahu might take. We have to support the Jewish peace movement in the United States.

The impact of an Israeli attack would cause worldwide inflation as the flow of Saudi oil is cut off, and the interruption of oil from Iran would send the world into a spiral of inflation and depression. We must make it clear to Israel that this would end the flow of U.S. refined petroleum, military weapons and funding to Israel.

C. THEISEN
Bonita Springs, Fla.

Not With My Money

I agree with "Bad Deal," by Thomas Massaro, S.J. (1/3), when he calls for the increased teaching and honoring of Catholic social teaching, special concern for the poor and other value principles. But the author's application of these principles is questionable.

I do not know where government, Father Massaro or anyone else gets the right to decide when certain people have too much money (honestly acquired) and therefore have a moral obligation to turn over a larger share of

"You can't fire me! I'm too big to fail!"

CARTOON BY HARLEY SCHWADRON

To send a letter to the editor we recommend using the link that appears below articles on **America**'s Web site, www.americamagazine.org. This allows us to consider your letter for publication in both print and online versions of the magazine. Letters may also be sent to **America**'s editorial office (address on page 2) or by e-mail to: letters@americamagazine.org. They should be brief and include the writer's name, postal address and daytime phone number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

that money to someone else—especially to a government that they did not choose and that does not have a reputation for the efficient use of other people's money.

Perhaps Father Massaro should promote greater charity and support for "proxy-government" or faith-based organizations—especially in the Catholic community, which is ranked last in its support for its church among the main denominations.

ROBERT W. McCHESNEY JR.
New Braunfers, Tex.

Back Words With Action

Reflecting on "Pope Denounces Violence as Threat to Freedom" (Signs of the Times, 1/24), I commend Pope Benedict for his strong position on the lack of religious freedom and the persecution of Christians by Muslims and, in the Holy Land, by Israeli officials. The pope should back up his words with action, as Pope John Paul II did with the Soviet Union and his response to the suppression of labor unions in Poland. By focusing on the suppression of human rights in Poland, he was able to mobilize the world in support of his actions. The rest is history: the fall of the Soviet Union and freedom granted to Poland.

CHUCK RADIOFF
San Diego, Calif.

California in the Fore

Since I do not live in Spain, I cannot address the problem raised by Pope Benedict XVI (Signs of the Times, 1/24), referring to "educational programs that mandate obligatory participation in courses of sexual or civic education with content opposing Catholic teaching."

But because I live in California, I am familiar with the school policy here. No student in a public school must stay in a classroom when material related to the subjects mentioned [abortion and homosexual marriage] are discussed. So let's be clear about the issue and regional context. California is a

great example of how to deal with this issue, and the political culture was shaped by Catholic social thought before it became a state in the union.

CHRIS NUNEZ
Santa Cruz, Calif.

A Moment of Peace in Paris

Your "Accidental Pilgrims" (1/24) reminded me of another article by Dennis Linehan, S.J., that appeared in **America** (Of Many Things, 2/25/08). He wrote of his time in Paris working on his dissertation, when each day after the noon meal he would walk the short distance from the Jesuit residence to the Motherhouse of the Daughters of Charity, where he would pray in the chapel of the Miraculous Medal. For him it was a haven from the pressure of study and the din of Paris traffic. Now I can affirm all your pilgrim experiences while searching for those that may come my way unexpectedly.

MARY ANNE BRAWLEY, D.C.
Binghamton, N.Y.

When the Red, Red Robin...

After re-reading the Of Many Things column by Drew Christiansen, S.J., in the Jan. 24 issue, I am convinced we need a phenomenological analysis of the holy. Transcendence—whether in art, music, drama, sports or patriotism—refers to an experience beyond the ordinary. But a sense of the holy is different. The various religions integrate prayer, sacrifice and love into their traditions. But those outside religious traditions also experience the sacred. Meanwhile, we Christians should spot the holy in our daily lives. When the first robin sings over the melting snow, God is with us.

ERNEST RANLY, C.PP.S
Carthagena, Ohio

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Having No Enemies

SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), FEB. 20, 2011

Readings: Lv 19:1-18; Ps 103:1-13; 1 Cor 3:16-23; Mt 5:38-48

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:44)

It is with great sadness that we received news on Jan. 24, 2011, of the death of Don Samuel Ruiz, who had been bishop of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas in southern México from 1960 to 2000. Don Samuel is well known for having empowered the indigenous people of his diocese and for his role as mediator in the conflict between the Zapatista rebels and the Mexican government in the 1990s. For this, he had received many death threats. Some years ago I had the opportunity to meet him.

In the course of our interview, I asked him how he had come to live so completely the command to love one's enemies, when he had so many. He gave me a puzzled look and responded: "I have no enemies." It was my turn to be puzzled, as he had arrived for the interview in a bulletproof van, accompanied by three large, armed bodyguards supplied by the Mexican government, at their insistence. He explained further, "There are some who want to make themselves enemy to me, but I have no enemies."

In today's Gospel, Jesus instructs his disciples on how to live in just such a way. Jesus begins by quoting the law of retaliation in Lv 24:20, which puts limits on acts of retribution so as to curtail cycles of vengeance. The principle he puts forth is "do not retaliate against the evildoer" (v. 39a). In some translations, the verb here, *antistenai*, is rendered "offer no resistance." But this verb most often carries the connotation of violent resistance or armed resistance in military encounters (e.g., Eph 6:13). Jesus is not advising his disciples to let evildoers freely abuse them; rather, they are not to retaliate by the same means. They are to respond with an action that confronts the evildoer nonviolently, thus breaking the cycle of violence and opening up a new possibility by which gestures of reconciliation can be reciprocated.

Jesus gives four concrete examples (vv. 39b-42). The first involves a backhanded slap intended to humiliate (only the right hand would be used to strike another). Turning the other cheek is a provocative response that robs the aggressor of the power to shame, and instead the shame falls on the perpetrator. The second concerns a debtor, who stands naked in court, handing over not only the outer cloak demanded as collateral but also the undergarments, a shocking act that places shame on the creditor (see Gn 9:20-27, where shame falls on Ham, the son of Noah, who viewed his father's nakedness). The third instance involves a Roman soldier who has compelled a local person to carry his pack. The latter destabilizes the situation by creating a dilemma for the soldier, who would face punishment for exacting service for excessive distances. The fourth example is aimed at a person in a superior economic position. The context implies that the indebtedness is due to some injustice. The lender rectifies the situation by forgoing the demand for repayment. In each of these cases, nonviolent responses undermine enmity and open possibilities for new ways of relating. In this way the Mosiac law is fulfilled.

The last section deals with the command to love the neighbor (Lv 19:18). Nowhere in the Scriptures is there a command to hate the enemy. The question was whether one was obliged to act lovingly toward those outside the covenant community. Jesus' answer is affirmative. Disciples are to set no bounds on their love (*teleios* in v. 48 connotes not moral perfection but "completeness, fullness"), just as God sets no bounds on the divine love.

BARBARA E. REID

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Pray for the grace to be able to say, "I have no enemies."
- Ask Jesus to show you how to imitate God in setting no bounds on your love.
- How do members of your faith community strengthen one another for transforming enmity into love?

ART: TAD DUNNE

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