

America

The background of the cover features a light blue color with a faint, stylized line graph. Two red dice are prominently displayed in the center-right, one slightly behind and to the right of the other. The dice are translucent and show white pips. The overall aesthetic is clean and professional, with a focus on economic and financial themes.

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

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The Casino Economy

CHARLES K. WILBER

The Budget Battle
JOHN J. DI IULIO JR.
THE EDITORS

OF MANY THINGS

I've been reading about the brave hearts who stayed behind at Fukushima Daiichi—the nuclear power plant fatally crippled during the March 11 earthquake and tsunami in northern Japan—knowing they are likely killing themselves, staying anyway to protect their families and their community. Their example is humbling and ennobling at the same time. I wonder how well I would hold up under such pressure. Would I have the courage and self-control to stay, comforted only by the faith that my sacrifice was for the greater good? It's nice to think so, but....

The heroic act, the martyr's death: What 11-year-old did not contemplate the doing of noble deeds or long for a memorable end? Reading of the many torments of one of the North American Jesuit martyrs, St. Isaac Jogues, did I not, fleetingly at least, wonder in what blaze of pious glory my light would likewise be extinguished?

There is enough of the childlike idealist left in me sometimes to wonder what my grand gesture might be, what sacrifice I will make to better the world or leave a lasting testimony to faith. I haven't followed Isaac Jogues up the Hudson except on the Metro North, nor followed Albert Schweitzer into Africa. I have not pitched myself into the life of a Catholic Worker House. In short, I've come up pretty short in the suffering and sacrifice department. Too cowardly to follow Jogues into the red martyrdom, too co-opted for the white martyrdom of self-denial and service to others, too lazy for the green martyrdom of prayer and mortification behind monastery stones: What's left for a middle-class schmoe in the suburbs? Is there such a thing as a gray-flannel martyrdom?

Pulling out of a country club parking lot where my firstborn is taking swimming lessons, I note its impressive array of glinting, late-model luxury cars awaiting their tennis-bag-toting owners.

I climb into the unwashed family Odyssey, the poor thing itself dying the coward's thousand deaths of bumper and fender dinks and scratches, and wonder about the journey I am on. "Nice little sports car," I mutter as I follow a shiny Audi out of the lot.

"What's a sports car?" number one son asks.

"It's a small car that young men or old men like to buy," I tell him. "They go very fast. I used to think I might own one someday."

El Primero surveys the Audi. He's incredulous. "You couldn't get more than four people in that," he says. "Papa, you need a car for six."

"I'm aware of that," I say. "Don't worry; I won't be getting a sports car." Then, muttering in most unmanly fashion, I add, "I guess I missed my chance."

He's silent a moment, digesting that last juvenile morsel of regret. "If you had no family, you could get one," he finally says. "If you were still single." I'm jolted. Have I been talking in my sleep?

"You could get one if you had just one kid," he adds, "even two."

"But I've got four," I say, turning the Odyssey slowly (the only way it knows how) out of the lot.

"You've got four," he agrees.

"I'd rather have my four kids than a sports car any day," I tell him, hoping he will feel the same way himself some day. "Four kids is much more fun."

This is not to compare myself to Isaac Jogues or the heroic workers of Fukushima or real martyrs anywhere. I am not so deluded as to believe that passing up a sports car should earn me any hosannas. Let's just call this a small reminder that he and she also serve and sacrifice, if gladly, who only clean up after the sick, get the kids fed and to bed and chauffeur the swimming lesson.

It is a kind of martyrdom that is not especially heroic or colorful, but it's roomy and gets great gas mileage.

KEVIN CLARKE

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The Rev. **Daniel P. Coughlin**, right, talks about his years as chaplain of the House of Representatives. Plus, highlights from the Latin American Web site **Mirada Global**. All at americamagazine.org.



Let's Be Clear on the Budget

The upcoming battle over the 2012 budget may prove to be one of the most important legislative debates of the new century. A vast economic engine is set in motion each year with the Congressional approval of each annual budget. But the 2012 budget promises to reshape the United States and redefine the nation's place in the world for decades to come.

As the nation's political discourse becomes increasingly theatrical and incoherent, the bishops, along with other leaders and sectors of the church, need to speak with clarity about the budget as a moral document. After years of ignoring a national debt that has mounted dramatically since the last time a federal budget managed to produce a surplus, under President Bill Clinton, a bipartisan chorus in Washington has abruptly awakened to the reality of the nation's crushing \$14.3 trillion debt. Interest on the total federal debt is now one of the largest items on the budget each year, and deficit control has become the de facto priority in Washington.

Whether addressing the debt now is the best short-term way forward as the nation struggles to shake off the lingering effects of its deep recession apparently has become beside the point. Since deficit containment has become the primary goal this year, American Catholics must insist that the budget be balanced with attention to the many acute domestic and international needs that simply cannot be sacrificed to cost-cutting. That is especially true when many in Washington, in an unwelcome resurrection of supply-side economics, insist that tax reduction and the continuation of unconscionably high levels of defense spending are "non-negotiables." It should be the Catholic position that there are indeed non-negotiable items within the budget, but money for defense and tax cuts for the wealthy are not among them.

Indeed, in his recent address President Obama has insisted that he will not approve a budget that continues Bush-era tax reductions that have contributed so grievously to the current fiscal crisis. The church must not cross this crucial line in the sand. No just deficit-management program can proceed over the next decade or more without raising taxes on those upper-income citizens who have benefited so mightily from the last decade's tax cuts and economic realignments. The church needs to stake this position out now before the budget debate begins.

Many high-powered lobbyists will flood Washington

in May. But when the red pencils come out, who will speak for the poor? The U.S. bishops have been among the few consistent voices in defense of the needs of the most vulnerable. That voice needs to be loud and persistent as budget allocations are hammered out and budgetary trial balloons are floated by both parties. Representative Paul Ryan's proposal to convert Medicare and Medicaid into yet another free-market enterprise is wrongheaded. This would amount to federal welfare for the shareholders and chief executives of the nation's for-profit insurance companies. Ryan's proposal essentially assures millions more Americans that they will one day be cut off from affordable health care or impoverished trying to secure it. All sectors of the church need to speak up repeatedly and with clarity on the moral limits of further health care reductions before dialogue hardens into ideological concrete.

Bishops have shown no reluctance to speak authoritatively on issues of abortion and same-sex marriage. Bishops and the whole Catholic community must speak with the same clarity and vigor about the budget and the direction it sets for the nation. The budget is an urgent moral matter that demands a consistent, unified message. Its line items are more than just quotidian allotments of monies; they are moral choices: whether to honor the nation's commitment to the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals or concoct another tax break for the wealthy; whether to protect the human dignity of our elderly and poor by ensuring they can rely on adequate health care or continue an extravagant expansion of military spending.

The upcoming struggle will be a matter of life and death. Will faltering education systems and deteriorating infrastructure go unaddressed for another decade? Will more Americans fall out of the middle class as health care reform falters? Will the nation's public aid recipients, mostly women and children, discover their already tenuous support systems in nutritional aid, children's health insurance programs and Medicaid compressed further to make way for "tax relief" for corporations and the inhabitants of upper income brackets?

All sectors of the church can help frame this debate. Absent the church, the debate will be framed by ideologically tainted "research" emerging from the media and Washington think-tanks. The church says the budget is a moral document; it should speak about it with the urgency that claim demands.

Paths of Conscience

Since the day Martin Luther refused to recant his beliefs, declaring “Here I stand. I can do no other,” the unyielding integrity of the solitary hero of conscience has been an icon of the Western imagination. But conscience is a subtle power, and it sometimes also ties people of principle to the very communities against whom they protest. Socrates followed his daimon but also submitted to the verdict of Athens, the city that had given birth to his quest for virtue. The Second Vatican Council was made possible by the research of men like Yves Congar, O.P., Henri de Lubac, S.J., and John Courtney Murray, S.J., who had endured silencing by church authorities. The council was their vindication.

Conscience can adhere to just one goal, or it can sustain a vivifying tension between two or more commitments. It can stand defiantly alone, or it can show care for the humanity even of those in authority. For Mohandas Gandhi, for example, moral truth does not stand on one side of a contest but emerges from the encounter between protesters and those who oppose them. St. Thomas More teaches us that people of conscience can even strategize and scheme to meet the tensile demands of conscience.

In recent weeks the U.S. church has witnessed two controversies in which the conscience or professional integrity of an individual came into conflict with church authorities. In August 2008 the Maryknoll priest Roy Bourgeois concelebrated an ordination ceremony sponsored by Womenpriests, lending legitimacy to an event forbidden by the Vatican; and last February, without permission, he took part in a panel discussion on women’s ordination. This past month the superior general of Maryknoll instructed him to “publicly recant” his support for women’s ordination or be dismissed from Maryknoll and the priesthood.

In a letter to his superior, Father Bourgeois quoted from a commentary in 1968 by then Father Joseph Ratzinger on Vatican II’s statement on conscience: Even against ecclesiastical authority, conscience must be obeyed before all else. To force Father Bourgeois to recant would be to ask him to lie about his beliefs. He has chosen a path of authenticity.

Conscience, however, is not a machine that gives a robot orders. Conscience does not need to be unyielding. It can also be exercised with humility and flexibility. One wonders what Gandhi or St. Francis of Assisi or Dorothy Day might have advised Father Bourgeois. Might they have

urged him to continue his work against war and torture and leave women’s ordination to the Holy Spirit? Silencing a spokesman does not kill an idea. Church authorities, if they call for religious assent of the mind to the prohibition against ordaining women, must do a far better job of convincing the faithful that the exclusion of women from orders rests firmly on the church’s faith.

The second case concerns the accusation by the Committee on Doctrine of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops that in elaborating a contemporary doctrine of God in the book *The Quest for the Living God*, Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J., of Fordham University put forward “misrepresentations, ambiguities and errors.” According to the bishops, Sister Johnson employs “standards from outside the faith to criticize in a radical fashion the conception of God revealed in Scripture and taught by the Magisterium.” But in Sister Johnson’s words, the book presents “new insights about God arising from people living out their faith in different cultures around the world.”

The Catholic Theological Society of America has defended Sister Johnson. It contends that the bishops ignored procedures they had adopted in 1989 that require a conversation with the author as the first step in a doctrinal inquiry. In a world where bishops are needed more as teachers than as prosecutors, it would have been far wiser for those who first objected to the book to invite Sister Johnson to an afternoon dialogue before referring the book to the Committee on Doctrine and for the committee to have engaged the author before moving to a public critique of her book. For her part, Sister Johnson has sought to meet with the committee, issued just one brief press release and has otherwise kept a discreet silence. Uncompromising witness is not the only option for this woman of conscience.

Church and society would benefit from other witnesses of conscience appreciating the many ways by which they can testify to moral and intellectual truth. For its part, the church would profit from interiorizing the lesson of the council’s “Declaration on Religious Liberty” that “it is by personal assent that people must adhere to the truth they have discovered,” recalling that “Christ, who is our master and Lord, and at the same time is meek and humble of heart, acted patiently in attracting and inviting his disciples.”



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

MEXICO

Migrant Victims Discovered In Mass Graves Near U.S. Border

Mexico confronted the horror of another mass slaying in the northeastern state of Tamaulipas, where the drug trafficking networks Los Zetas and the Gulf Cartel have fought over lucrative smuggling routes and carried out such crimes as extortion and the kidnapping of undocumented migrants with impunity. Tamaulipas officials report uncovering at least 126 bodies in early April from mass graves in the municipality of San Fernando in the Diocese of Matamoros, approximately 85 miles south of the Mexico-Texas border at Brownsville.

The investigation in San Fernando continues a series of grisly discoveries that have horrified the country. In August, 72 migrants from Central and South America were massacred on a ranch in San Fernando after being kidnapped during an attempt to cross into the United States.

Investigators blame Los Zetas for both of the mass slayings. Seventeen suspects have been detained for the most recent murders. Mexico's attorney general, Marisela Morales, said on April 14 that 16 members of the municipal police had been fired for allegedly providing protection to Los Zetas in San Fernando.

The federal attorney general's office and the military said the victims were killed after cartel gunmen boarded

buses stopped at illegal checkpoints and removed male passengers. In a state-



ment on April 11, the Defense Secretariat said the victims were

GLOBAL POVERTY

Development Goals Within Reach?

In a glimmer of good news related to global poverty, two-thirds of developing countries are on track or close to meeting targets for tackling extreme poverty and hunger, according to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The U.N.'s Millennium Development Goals, commitments to halve an array of measurements of extreme poverty and social depredation by 2015, have appeared fatally threatened by the severe global economic downturn and a lack of follow-through by Western powers, which committed themselves to the goals in 2000. But the new report offers a hopeful portrait of progress in several key areas of concern. Among developing countries that

are falling short on development goals, half could easily catch up, the report's authors said, with improved policies and faster growth.

According to the report, *Global Monitoring Report 2011: Improving the Odds of Achieving the MDGs*, the world remains on track to reduce by half the number of people living in extreme poverty. The number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day is projected to be 883 million in 2015, compared with 1.4 billion in 2005 and 1.8 billion in 1990. Much of this progress reflects rapid economic growth in China and India. Unfortunately, many African countries are lagging far behind.

"Good news about decreases in the

aggregate numbers of poor people worldwide provides hope for millions still prevented from reaching their full human potential," said William O'Keefe, head of advocacy for Catholic Relief Services, responding to the report. He cautioned all the same that such global and even country-level economic indicators "mask both profound inequity and persistent poverty."

O'Keefe said, "War, natural disasters, political upheaval and corruption compound these conditions, as well. More can and should be done to help the hundreds of millions still caught in this cycle."

According to the I.M.F., developing countries will likely achieve millennium goals for gender parity in primary and secondary education and for access to safe drinking water. The report notes many nations "will be close on hunger" and on primary education goals. But



A woman shouts during a protest in Mexico City on April 6 by violence-weary citizens, calling for a halt to Mexico's war on drug cartels.

abducted between March 24 and March 29. The U.S. consulate in

Matamoros said it received three reports of buses being boarded by gunmen and one report of a U.S. citizen being abducted. The citizen's fate is unknown. Mexican authorities said at least 60 residents traveling north—possibly headed toward the United States—from the central state of Guanajuato could be among the victims. Families of missing bus passengers converged on Matamoros in search of information about their loved ones.

Bishop Faustino Armendáriz Jiménez of Matamoros told reporters on April 13 that at least one priest from a municipality near where the mass graves were discovered had fled after being threatened and subjected to harassment by presumed members of organized crime. He added that other priests have encountered difficulties traveling in the state, which is plagued by highway checkpoints manned by

groups like Los Zetas and the Gulf Cartel.

"We've had [incidents] at the armed checkpoints," Bishop Armendáriz said. "Thanks to God, we're still here. Fortunately, nothing has happened, but we travel with fear."

Bishop Armendáriz blamed "social deterioration" and the drug trade for the violence in Tamaulipas, which he says is now beyond police and military control. "The situation has exceeded the judicial authorities, but we continue trusting the government strategies for recovering peace and security in our municipalities and on the highways," he said. President Felipe Calderón of Mexico warned that more victims were likely to be found. He told a business gathering on April 12 that a 19-year-old suspect had admitted to killing more than 200 people.

PHOTO: REUTERS

progress is slow and targets may be missed on other goals. Forty-five percent of developing states are far from meeting targets on access to sanitation, and nearly 40 percent are far from the maternal and child mortality goals.

Hugh Bredenkamp, deputy director of the I.M.F.'s Strategy, Policy, and Review Department, said: "Good macroeconomic policies remain crucial to progress toward the M.D.G.'s.... The challenge in low income countries is to sustain and accelerate growth through better policies that will create jobs and greater opportunities for the private sector. Advanced economies need to do their part to secure the global recovery by repairing and reforming their financial systems and tackling their fiscal imbalances."

O'Keefe warned that Western powers had to keep development programs in mind as they addressed their budget

challenges. "The United States and other wealthy nations," he said, "must not abandon these and other worthy efforts. In spite of political squabbling over the budget, Congress must preserve and expand poverty-focused humanitarian and development assistance."

In some countries, the report suggests, future efforts should focus on socially excluded groups, like indigenous people and ethnic and linguistic minorities. The report notes that most development indicators among these groups are far worse than in the general population, especially in terms of income poverty.

O'Keefe acknowledged that C.R.S. has seen "macro-improvements" in its global outreach. But in working with the local church, he said, C.R.S. would continue "urgently addressing the health, hunger, education and other human challenges of the human family."



Children pose at a "settlement" near Nairobi, Kenya, where more than 250,000 live in corrugated metal and wood shacks without running water, electricity or sanitation.

Priorities Questioned In Budget Debate

As the political debate surrounding the country's spending priorities, tax policy and the reduction deepens, the Catholic community continues efforts to prevent the needs of the poor and vulnerable from being heaped onto the pile of expendables. The effort is rooted in the biblical call for justice for people on the margins—children, the elderly, the sick, the poor. Employing tactics from a rolling fast involving 36,000 people—including 27 members of Congress—to town hall meetings, the broad-based effort has stressed that spending priorities must reflect basic moral principles. Advocates say cuts approved by Congress on April 14 disproportionately target programs benefiting the poor.

U.S. Bishops Defend Johnson Process

In the wake of criticism from the Catholic Theological Society of America, Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington, chair of the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Doctrine, sent a "resource" to bishops on April 18 "outlining the relationship between bishops and theologians." Controversy has been brewing since a critique was released on March 24 of the book *Quest for the Living God*, by Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J. The committee charged that the work was misleading and "does not accord with authentic Catholic teaching on essential points." The C.T.S.A. countered that the bishops had misinterpreted Sister Johnson's book and had ignored its own policies—for instance, by not first informally discussing its concerns with her. In the resource Cardinal Wuerl said that "it is the specific com-

NEWS BRIEFS

Commenting on the controversy regarding Pope Pius XII's actions during World War II, Archbishop **Timothy M. Dolan** said at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York on April 12: "Whatever the archives hold, the Catholic Church does not fear the truth about the often heroic and sometimes disgraceful conduct of her leaders and members during the Second World War." • President **Benigno Aquino** of the Philippines said on April 17 that he would risk excommunication to support a law that would allow artificial contraception in the Philippines. • Sante Fe's Archbishop **Michael J. Sheehan**, in a pastoral letter dated April 3, admonished unmarried Catholic couples who were living together or joined in a civil union and divorced Catholics who remarry without an annulment not to receive Communion. • France's bishops pledged on April 13 to **support church leaders in Egypt and Libya**, noting their "aspiration for dignity, respect, justice and democracy." • On April 12 Bishop Richard Moth of Britain's military diocese expressed appreciation for the release of a **document on human sexuality** for Britain's Boy Scouts, even though it provides guidance on condom use.



Benigno Aquino

petence and responsibility of bishops to teach the faith in its entirety," citing a 1992 statement of the doctrinal committee that bishops "are to determine authoritatively the correct interpretation of the Scripture and tradition committed to the Church...and they are to judge for the Church the accuracy of the presentation of this revelation by others."

Matteo Ricci Award Honors Callahans

The scholars and authors Daniel Callahan and his wife, Sidney de Shazo Callahan, were honored for their distinguished contribution to culture on April 7 by the editors of **America** with the Matteo Ricci, S.J., Award. The Callahans were recognized for their many contributions to

the world of ideas, to letters, bioethics, moral philosophy and theology, psychology, spirituality and journalism. The award is named after the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), who helped bridge European and Chinese culture. Drew Christiansen, S.J., editor in chief of **America**, in presenting the award, said: "In honoring Sidney and Daniel Callahan, we believe we are honoring two scholars, writers and public intellectuals who exemplify the Riccian spirit. Throughout their careers, they have bridged disciplines and different communities' ideas, and in so doing they have exercised enormous influence on American society, Catholic intellectual life and the advance of ethical understanding across continents."

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Accounting for Reality

Welcome to the warm-up for the coming 2012 political campaign-season clash over how to get America's fiscal house (\$14.2 trillion in national debt and counting) in order.

On April 5 Paul Ryan, the young Wisconsin Republican who heads the House Budget Committee, released "The Path to Prosperity," a plan for cutting \$4 trillion in federal spending over the next 10 years. On April 8 leaders of both parties exhaled when an 11th-hour budget compromise averted a federal government shutdown. On April 13, with a battle over raising the national debt ceiling before August at hand, President Obama issued "A Balanced Approach," his plan for cutting \$4 trillion in federal spending over the next dozen years.

Both Ryan's plan and the president's plan display political courage and deserve to be taken seriously—seriously enough, that is, to critique constructively.

On the positive side, certain ideas in Ryan's plan boast a bipartisan pedigree and have decent scholarship behind them (like his spin on the old market-based idea for means-tested "premium support subsidies" for Medicare).

Still, while not quite as Scrooge-like as some have asserted, Ryan's plan makes disproportionate cuts in programs for the poor. Moreover, it is light on public finance details, long on Pollyanna-like predictions about policy impacts and short on facts regard-

ing how major federal programs work.

Ryan's plan lowers top individual and corporate income-tax rates, for example, from 35 percent to 25 percent but is foggy on other tax reform particulars. If adopted wholesale soon, it predicts, unemployment will plummet by 2015 to below 5 percent. In political economy terms that prediction is fanciful.

Ryan's plan would also revolutionize federal health care programs, first by rescinding the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 before its major provisions are implemented in 2014 and then by turning Medicare into a virtual voucher program and Medicaid into a block grant program.

Medicare's total administrative overhead costs remain about 5 percent, well under the comparable rates for private insurers. All told, about 4,500 federal employees manage both Medicare and Medicaid (nearly 40 percent of the federal budget).

I have been bird-dogging Medicaid's federal-state financing and administration since I co-edited a volume published by the Brookings Institution on the subject over a decade ago. Ryan's plan promises that further devolving already highly devolved Medicaid to the states would make it work better and cost less while improving both children's health and senior citizens' long-term care. That would be wonderful, but how? The plan does not really say.

The president's plan is kinder and gentler than Ryan's plan, but unfortu-

nately, it is also even lighter on finance details, equally fanciful in its assumptions about policy impacts and no less silent on relevant administrative facts. Its fail-safe feature, a requirement to make deeper cuts in 2014 if fiscal targets have been missed, is about as credible as the requirement to pass a budget resolution each year by a certain date (a "requirement" met six times in the last 35 years).

Both budget plans deserve a serious, constructive critique.

True, the president's plan goes further than his February 2010 budget plan did in recommending long-term cuts. And it does draw somewhat on the report his own bipartisan Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform issued on Dec. 1, 2010.

But the president, who politely deep-sixed the commission's report, should take a serious second look at it. Aptly titled "The Moment of Truth," it recommended several politically centrist, economically feasible paths to \$4 trillion in deficit reduction by 2020.

True to all the unpleasant financial realities and tangled administrative facts and true to the moral imperative to reject fixes that unduly disadvantage the truly disadvantaged, can the president still lead on this issue?

Yes. He can and must, for without steadfast presidential leadership on this issue leading to bipartisan agreement in Congress and majority public support, the moment of truth will pass, and America's fiscal house will crumble.

JOHN J. DIJULIO JR. is the author of *Godly Republic: A Centrist Blueprint for America's Faith-Based Future* (Univ. of California Press, 2007).

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Rev. Joseph Tetlow, S.J.
Director, Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House

the failures and sins you have committed. You let His passionate love teach you that you are forgiven and honored in God's eyes. You will bring home to yourself how much God loves you by contemplating Jesus' Passion and death. You may find that something in your life really needs reform or renewal. You may find that you have an important decision to make, and make it well during *Exercises*.

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flesh. A contemplation will reveal how all things begin in Christ and through Him return to the Father. The presentations here open these issues for your reflection and prayer.

About Your Presenter

Rev. Joseph Allen Tetlow, S.J. left Rome after 8 years on the Jesuit General's staff as Secretary for Ignatian Spirituality. He had earlier been dean of Loyola University in New Orleans and President of the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley. He was associate editor of the Jesuit weekly *America*. For ten years, while conducting a final training program for younger Jesuit priests, he acted as spiritual director to the clergy of Austin Diocese, an activity he continues in Dallas and Fort Worth. He has published extensively and his handbook on St Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises, Choosing Christ in the World*, has been translated into several languages. He is currently director of Montserrat Jesuit Retreat House at Lake Dallas, Texas where he gives retreats and workshops and writes.

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HOW WALL STREET IS GAMBLING
WITH AMERICA'S FINANCIAL FUTURE

The Casino Economy

BY CHARLES K. WILBER

Speculators may do no harm as bubbles on a steady stream of enterprise. But the position is serious when enterprise becomes the bubble on a whirlpool of speculation. When the capital development of a country becomes a by-product of the activities of a casino, the job is likely to be ill-done.

—John Maynard Keynes
*The General Theory of Employment,
Interest and Money, 1936.*

Starting in 2007 the U.S. financial system imploded. It was followed by a collapse of the economy into a recession that continues, with unemployment hovering at just below 9 percent. Recovery is moving along in the stock market, and consumer spending is reviving, aided by government fiscal policy. But two questions remain. First, how do we get unemployment down? And second, how do we keep a collapse like this from happening again? I have already discussed the first issue (*America*, 6/22/09); here I discuss the second.

Following the financial collapse that led to the Great Depression of the 1930s, the U.S. government passed the Glass-Steagall Act, which among other things separated commercial banking activities from riskier investment bank operations. Since 1980, however, one of the main thrusts of public policy has been to free up markets by deregulation (including repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act in 1999), cutting taxes and eliminating or reducing social programs. Both Republican and Democratic administrations have pursued these policies. The result has been constant federal deficits, a dramatic

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increase in income and wealth inequality, periodic financial scandals, decay of public services and infrastructure, the growth of large banks and finally the collapse of the financial services sector and the continuing economic recession. Throw in the cost of fighting two wars and the built-in escalation of so-called entitlement costs (Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security) and the prospects for normal economic recovery are less than rosy. The prospect of another financial disaster is all too probable.

When Big Is Not Better

A key question demands attention in the midst of all this: Will the financial sector be reformed so as to reduce significantly the risk of future implosions? A key issue in addressing this question is the very large size of the major banks and the fact that they are seen as “too big to fail.” This has an unfortunate effect on bank executives if they believe they will always be bailed out, even if they are reckless. The insurance industry calls this a moral hazard. A person who buys auto theft insurance, for example, has less incentive to be careful, say, by locking the car doors. If the car is stolen, the insurance company will compensate. Likewise, bank executives will be tempted to take on more risk than is prudent when they know they will be bailed out by government, as they were in the most recent financial crisis.

In an article on the op-ed page of *The New York Times* (12/1/10), Thomas Hoenig, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, wrote that despite financial reform legislation, the biggest banks still control our economy and pose a serious threat. After the last round of bailouts, “the five largest financial institutions are 20 percent larger than they were before the crisis. They control \$8.6 trillion in financial assets—the equivalent of nearly 60 percent of gross domestic product. Like it or not, these firms remain too big to fail.”

“Too big to fail” is a threat that should not be ignored. The financial system is the lifeblood of the economy. Firms need to borrow for investment purposes from banks and other financial institutions. Consumers borrow from banks and credit unions to finance big-ticket purchases like automobiles, houses, appliances and the like. The financial system and the entire economy are deeply intertwined, and if a very large bank goes bankrupt it takes many other firms down with it. The political reality is that very large financial institutions will not be allowed to go under, whichever political party controls government.

If large banks and other financial institutions will not be

allowed to go bankrupt, what can be done to reduce their incentives to take on excessive risk?

One possibility is to break up existing banks above some maximum size and enact regulations that will make it difficult for others to grow beyond that maximum. Then the much smaller banks can be allowed to fail when they overextend. This course, however, is unlikely. Neither political party has been serious about downsizing overgrown financial institutions. Why? Executives in the financial services industry are major contributors to both parties. The newly released report of the Financial Crisis Inquiry Committee notes that the financial industry spent \$2.7 billion on lobbying from 1999 to 2008 and individuals and committees affiliated with it took in more

than \$1 billion in campaign contributions.

In addition, government regulators often move back and forth between the private sector and government. Goldman Sachs, for example, paid

Lawrence Summers \$135,000 for one speech just before he was appointed to be President Obama’s economic adviser. The *Citizens United* decision by the Supreme Court, which allows corporations to make unlimited political contributions, has magnified the banks’ political clout, making it even more unlikely that Congress or the administration will enforce a banking reform that breaks up large banks.

The case of Ireland should ring warning bells. There the banks and their executives became so strong that even after having been major contributors to the economic collapse they were still able to dictate the direction of national policies. I do not see any conspiracy at work here, just the reality that economic power translates well into political power. Individual banks in the United States are much smaller relative to the government than in Ireland. Still, it is worth noting that both Standard & Poor’s and Moody’s Investors Service in January 2011 published statements that the AAA rating of government bonds might be in danger of being downgraded, presumably unless government policies were changed.

Ways to Reduce Risk-Taking

If breaking up the very large financial institutions is not on the table, what other policies might avert another implosion caused by the financial sector’s excessive risk-taking? One way to think about the “too big to fail” issue is this: When the government takes on an implicit liability for bailing out extra-large firms, that is a subsidy to those firms. This encourages smaller banks to get bigger so they, too, can benefit from the subsidy. Therefore, policies must reduce the

Political reform may be needed before the power of the financial sector can be restrained and our economy be reformed to serve all.

banks' incentive for risk-taking and/or discourage them from growing ever larger.

A partial, piecemeal approach would include minimum capital requirements for all financial institutions above a certain size. Switzerland, for example, mandates that their two largest banks, UBS and Credit Suisse, have 19 percent capital by 2019. This will give the banks a cushion during the next financial crisis so they can pay their debts and work out other arrangements to remain solvent. In contrast, according to the Financial Crisis Inquiry Committee, the five largest investment banks in the United States had only 2.5 percent in capital to cover potential losses. Regulations could also require that in a crisis some bondholders must accept non-payment or have their bonds converted to stock. Even these proposals will be fought by the financial services industry, particularly by the largest institutions. And there is no guarantee that the Congress or the administration will strongly push them.

An Asset-Based Approach

A more comprehensive approach to re-regulating the financial services sector of the economy, one that might have a chance of being accepted by Congress and the administration, is known as "asset-based reserve requirements,"

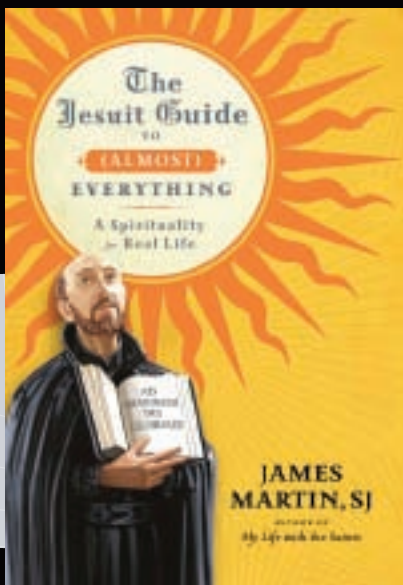
A.B.R.R. for short. Basically this shifts reserve requirements from a system based on banks' liabilities (that is, on their checking account deposits) to one based on the assets (loans receivable) of all financial institutions.

Under an asset-based system, the Federal Reserve Board of Governors would require every financial institution to have on deposit in low- or no-interest-bearing accounts with the Federal Reserve, as reserves, fixed percentages of each type of loans receivable (mortgages, auto loans, credit card debt, etc.). The percentages of reserves required would vary depending on the riskiness of the loans. This would force the lending financial institution to be more aware of the costs of riskier loans. Since the deposits with the Federal Reserve accrue little or no interest, risky loans that require a greater percentage of deposits would cause an institution to give up the alternative income that would come from less risky categories of loans. This also means that the Federal Reserve could increase or decrease the reserve requirement for a particular category to either dampen a bubble or bolster a sagging sector.

This is not a new idea. It has been around at least since the early 1970s, when two Federal Reserve governors recommended the approach as a way to direct loans to communities in need. In the 1970s Lester Thurow, an economist

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at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, argued for asset-based reserve requirements as a way to control the allocation of lending to various sectors of the economy. But the idea lost steam as the proponents of deregulation commanded center stage during the 1980s. In the early 1990s

Robert Polin, an economics professor at the University of Massachusetts, developed the idea into a specific tool for economic stabilization. In the late 1990s, the economist Thomas Palley, founder of Economics for Democratic & Open Societies, developed the details of the regulatory mechanisms required to make the asset-based reserve system practical.

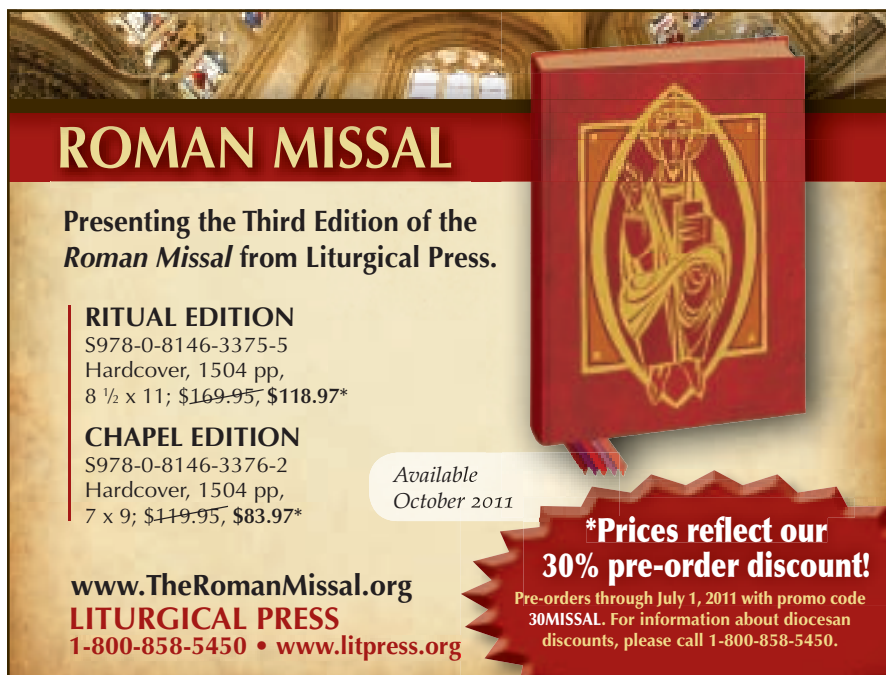
While a system of asset-based reserves would be far better than the outmoded liability reserve system we presently have, there will be opposition to any attempt to reregulate the financial system. This struggle will not be won overnight. Instead of hand-wringing in the meantime, ordinary Americans can take specific steps to further financial reform.

First, shift personal or family financial accounts from the big banks to a local community bank or credit union; this is a new application of a political tactic called “starve the beast.”

Second, do everything possible to keep the issue of financial instability and the promise of asset-based reserve requirements before the policymakers. Write elected representatives, donate money to Internet groups that keep the issue alive, write letters to the editor of the local newspaper and the like.

Third, urge your parish priest and local bishop to join the cause by reminding them that these financial implosions cause human suffering. That is the real issue—what happens to people, particularly the poor. For 30 years wages for most workers in the United States have been stagnant and poverty has worsened, while the income and the wealth of the richest 1 percent has grown dramatically. The economy has come to resemble a casino.

Political reform may be needed before the power of the financial sector can be restrained and our economy be reformed to serve all the people, including the poorest and least powerful. That too requires us voters to do what we can, letting our representatives know that we will hold them accountable, just as we expect them to hold the financial services sector accountable. **A**



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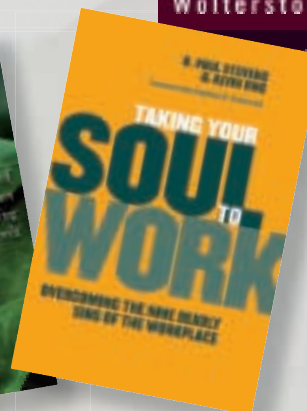
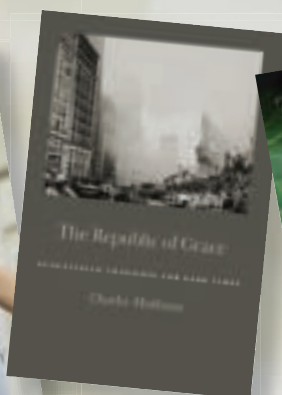
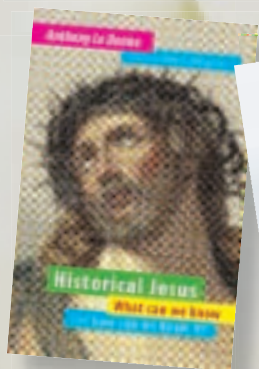
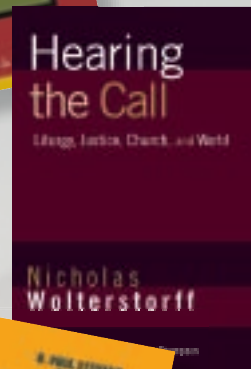
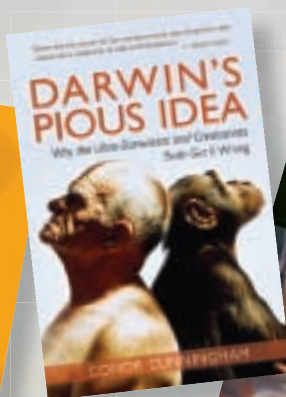
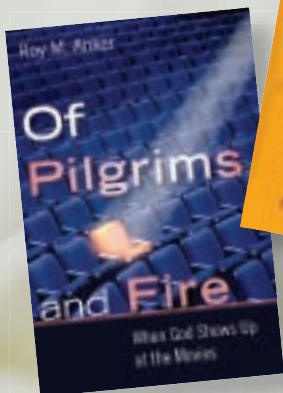
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THEATER | ROB WEINERT-KENDT

STAGE PRESENCE

A spirituality of theater

I have often thought of the theater as my church, and not only in periods when my actual church attendance has been spotty for one reason or another, including sleeping in from late nights after the theater. Indeed, analogies between theatergoing and churchgoing are easy to make: the audience as congregation, the liturgy as a kind of script, the priest as performer.

In the two decades that I have been writing about the theater, another less-happy analogy has begun to suggest itself. This instant-gratification age,

with watchable screens at our fingertips everywhere we turn (even in our pockets), can make it feel positively quaint to gather in a room at an appointed time to watch live people act their way through a story. Similarly, it can go against the grain of a hyper-accelerated, acquisitive culture to step off the treadmill to spend a few hours in worship and prayer. Drama and theology undergird much of the culture we take for granted; just think of the human stories we are repeatedly drawn to and of the larger stories by which we still make sense of the world.

Yet those of us who are still serious about actual religion and theater can feel like dinosaurs.

But when I think of theater as a spiritual practice and of theaters as sacred spaces, in their own way, I mean something more than these collegial resemblances. Theater's spirituality is contained in its very essence, and I understand that essence in a deeply Christian way. In simple terms, theater is an arena where narrative is incarnated. When a story is made flesh before us on stage, by actual people with whom we share breathing space, it is no longer just information, mere plot points. It is metaphor with the sweat and spit of life in it, and that makes all the difference.

This sense of immediacy, of shar-



Richard Howard and Suzanne Irving in "Night of the Iguana" at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, 2000

EASTER

Windy, same as usual. Shivering daffodils, huddled crocuses.
Sunbursts that are essentially a dark joke. Spattering of moist
Proto-hail, says our sister, who will eventually become a nun.
Funny that we remember single words spoken forty years ago.
The huddle of shoulders in pews, the hands held out for Hosts.
The rich russet scent of raincoats and overcoats and umbrellas.
The slight polite hesitation as someone looks to lift the kneeler.
The way everyone kneels except the very old and the surgicals.
The clasps pinning down mantillas and veils and white scarves.
The burly theater of it all, the ancient tidal rise and fall and ebb
And startling resurrection against all sense and patent evidence.
The awful genius of the faith is that it is so much more and less
Than religion; we have no choice but to insist on a resurrection,
And choose one among us to drag a cross, and then leap from it
And emigrate, but not before collecting documentary witnesses;
Otherwise we are all merely walking compost, and where is the
Fun in that, not to mention why not commit crimes twice daily?
And at the other end of the spectrum, not one soul on that rainy
Easter morning long ago cared a whit about theological matters.
They did not even care if the thin man once died and rose again.
They were there, in clans and tribes and couples, for each other,
Out of respect and affection, and habit and custom, and because
They wanted to give their children a thing they couldn't explain
Very easily, something to run away from and later back towards,
Something insistent that didn't make sense then and still doesn't.
Something you can easily disprove and can never actually prove,
Which is basically the point. We cover it with smoke and money,
With vestments and learned commentary, with visions and edicts,
But under the cloth there is only wild hope, to which we give His
Face, sitting there by the lake quietly eating baked fish and bread.
At the end of the meal we walked out into the rain, singing badly.

BRIAN DOYLE

BRIAN DOYLE is editor of *Portland Magazine*, at the University of Portland, in Portland, Ore.

ing the room with real people playing out imaginary situations, has several powerful effects, whether we notice them or not. The first is resistance—visceral resistance. A play does not envelop an audience in one swoop, immediately, the way a film can from its first shot. Even the best stage set has obvious fakery in it; we know the doors lead into walls and that the sky is a painted flat. Even the subtlest stage acting usually looks, at first glance, stagey. This is true even of plays that will end up absorbing us. It is as though our theatrical pupils need to dilate before they can see what they are looking at.

Put another way, suspension of disbelief—the crucial double negative that makes both faith and storytelling possible—is always a harder bargain in the theater. When a play is not successful, this deal is never closed, which is one reason why a bad play usually seems so much worse than a bad movie does. When one group of people in a room struggles for hours to win over another group in the same room, it is physically exhausting for both parties in a way that no bad movie, forever frozen in its missteps, ever is.

The flip side of that, and the second imperceptible effect of theater's "liveness," is an intense, almost overwhelming identification. If films more completely sweep us into their worlds, the result can be a sort of narcotized stupor, as we stare dutifully at vistas the camera has already digested for us. But a good play can trick us, slowly but surely, into relationship with its characters—into an emotional intimacy that feels almost dangerous, all the more so because it's live, in a moment, not to be repeated, with people *right there*.

Mind you, moments of total immersion, when you forget you are in a theater watching a play, do not last long. They are fleeting even in the best productions since you are always "waking up" to theater's artifice. That

is particularly true if the audience laughs or sighs or collectively generates the unmistakable, breath-held-in silence of total concentration. But this layered experience of being immersed, of losing ourselves a little bit, then snapping out of it self-consciously to note the collective feeling resonating around the room, is not a unique pleasure of theater—what we mean when we say a show moved or tickled us.

It is also why a good play is like a good church service, and it is what I mean when I say I have felt God's incarnate presence in a theater. From my particular seat I am wooed slowly by metaphors and symbols, texts and tokens, into relationship with something outside myself. What cinches it—what makes it personal—is that this relationship is literally embodied and shared in communion.

No church or theater has ever put me in an unbroken trance state, where I felt I had entered another dimension, for any significant length of time. But both have let me glimpse into that "upper room," from the fictions of this world to the truth of the next. Those flashes have lit my way.

When I recall specific shows I could point to as epiphanies, I find no common thematic link among them. I have been transported at amateur productions of Bertolt Brecht, by toe-tapping musicals, by classic tragedy and by contemporary farce. I still recall the buzz generated by Tracy Letts's "Bug" at a small Off-Broadway theater; in that play an addled Persian Gulf war veteran believes the government has infected him with a disease and that tiny bugs are crawling all over his body. What sticks with me are not the play's violent shocks and jolts; instead, it is the unsettling indeterminacy at the heart of the show's premise. Was our hero a sinister paranoid off his meds, or an innocent human guinea pig in a

vast conspiracy? The play never definitively tipped its hand, and no matter how close we theatergoers were to the action in that intimate theater, we couldn't see whether those bugs were real or imaginary. It was a perfect instance of theater's ability to make us believe an embodied fiction; I still itch at the memory.

Plays with explicit spiritual themes can be less theatrically transporting, if only because most

dramatists conceive of plays with religious themes or characters as social "problem plays"—courtroom dramas, in effect, that weigh the claims of revelation against the testimony of experience. Religious faith is the subject of "A Man for All Seasons," for instance, but its telling does not model a religious experience. On the other hand, in a production of George Bernard Shaw's "Saint Joan" a few years back at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, N.Y., a visiting British company made that meaty play freshly revelatory by acknowledging and building on theater's essential artifice. The show began with the actors in modern dress, with scripts at hand; it was as if we were watching them at rehearsal. Over the course of the play's nearly four-hour running time, swords, breastplates and battle flags were gradually introduced, until by play's end we were fully immersed in Joan's world. Our transit from one reality to another, from an air-conditioned theater to 15th-century Orleans, was a journey we shared.

The most supernatural moment I have ever experienced in a theater took place at a production of Tennessee Williams's "The Night of the Iguana" some years ago at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. It came when Shannon, a defrocked minister in self-imposed Mexican exile, gave a farewell look to Hannah, a spinster who has heard his confession and

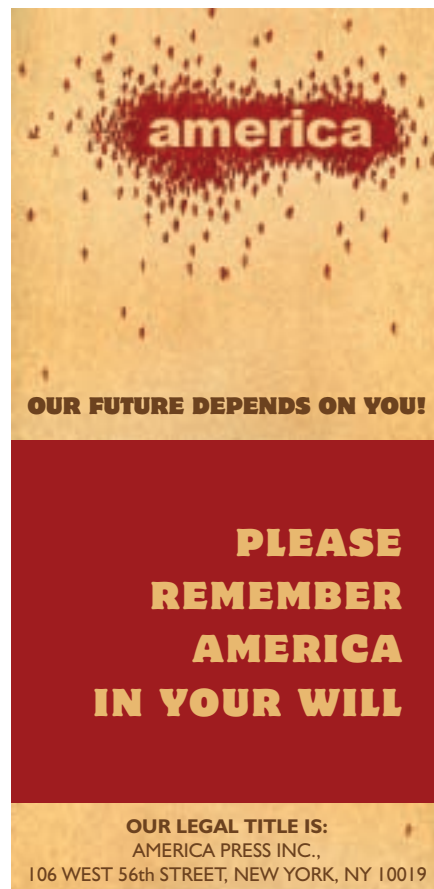
given him a kind of absolution. He says simply, "I want to remember that face. I won't see it again." That's all the script says, but I swear I heard another line of dialogue describing the image of Hannah, standing in a doorway, smoking a cigarette and looking up at the stars, as something along the lines of "a picture of a saint in a cathedral."

The thing is, there is no line like that in Williams's play. But there is a stage direction describing Hannah's first entrance: "She suggests a Gothic cathedral image of a medieval saint." I cannot to this day explain how that production put those words in my mind without speaking them, except by way of another memorable phrase from Williams's Blanche DuBois: "Sometimes—there's God—so quickly!"

ROB WEINERT-KENDT, an arts journalist and associate editor of *American Theater* magazine, has written for *The New York Times* and *Time Out New York*. He writes a blog called "The Wicked Stage."

ON THE WEB

John P. McCarthy reviews the film "The Conspirator."
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SOLOMON'S EPIC TREK

THE ELEPHANT'S JOURNEY A Novel

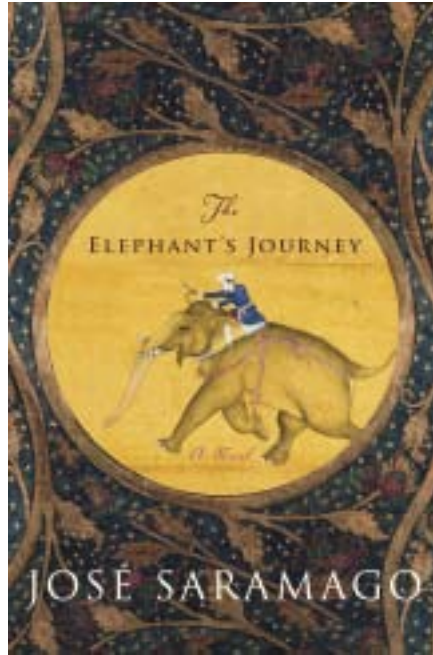
By José Saramago
Trans. by Margaret Jull Costa
Houghton Mifflin. 224p \$24

When the Nobel Prize-winning novelist José Saramago died last June at the age of 87, he left his readers a farewell gift in the form of a captivating novel, *The Elephant's Journey*. This modest but emotionally quite moving tale unfolds as Saramago wistfully reimagines a historical event of 1551, when King John III of Portugal presented to Archduke Maximilian of Austria an Indian elephant as a belated wedding gift.

Saramago came upon the story of the elephant quite by accident during a dinner with a friend in Salzburg, when he learned about the remarkable journey of the animal from Lisbon to Vienna. In previous books Saramago has used rather far-fetched premises to ground his plot, such as the idea that everyone had lost their ability to see or that people had stopped dying. In *The Elephant's Journey* Saramago employs a more plausible but no less interesting framework for reflecting on his favorite topics: the frailty and foibles of human nature and the mind-boggling wrongheadedness of religious and secular bureaucracies.

The novel opens with King John's wife hesitating at her husband's suggestion about giving the elephant away: "Deep inside, which is where the contradictions of the self do battle, she felt a sudden sadness at the thought of sending Solomon off to such distant lands and into the care of strangers." The queen apparently had no compunction about the way Solomon was originally removed from his homeland and carried off to distant Portugal and entrusted into the care of her court.

Under Saramago's deft hand the journey of the elephant and his keeper, Subhro, accompanied by a large retinue, becomes a metaphor for any individual or social group's progress through life. The elephant signifies the ineffable and



the strange. As one character comments, "while I can more or less understand a cat or a dog, I can't understand an elephant." Solomon/Suleiman is a compelling symbol of otherness for the villagers who see the procession pass by. We are those villagers, and for Saramago the elephant serves as a classic example of a hermeneutical paradox—we move through life as blind persons grasping different parts of the elephant and reporting our own confident versions of reality.

In the elephant's epic journey from Lisbon to Vienna the travelers face threats from wolves, weather and treacherous terrain in the Alps. In the middle of the journey the Archduke takes possession of the animal and changes his name from Solomon to Suleiman; he also changes his keeper's name from Subhro to Fritz. This

change from the name of a Jewish wisdom figure to the name of an Ottoman sultan suggests Maximilian's desire to have a kept adversary. Saramago sees rulers as twisted versions of Adam and Eve, who assign names arbitrarily and thus live in an illusory paradise of their own creation.

Solomon/Suleiman performs a number of seemingly extraordinary feats along the way. His trumpeting, for example, helps a lost man wandering in dense fog find his way back to camp. When a young girl, to the horror of onlookers, runs into the elephant's path, the elephant gently snatches her up to safety. These actions, combined with references to the elephant-headed Hindu god Ganesha, lend Suleiman something of a divine aura.

When locals misunderstand an overheard remark and tell a local priest that the elephant is god, the priest tries to exorcise Solomon, but out of laziness brings ordinary water instead of holy water. When the elephant interrupts his ritual and nudges him to an ignominious fall to the ground, the priest concludes that somehow the elephant knew the water was not sanctified. Saramago takes delight in pointing out religious duplicity and delusion.

While a number of Saramago's books were tinged with an overly strident dismissal of religion, his approach softens somewhat in this book. He seems unable to leave behind the faith of the church he holds in rather low esteem. The novel's epigraph is telling: "In the end, we always arrive at the place where we are expected." Saramago's phrasing here—not "where we expect" but "where we are expected"—mischievously suggests the question, "Expected by whom?" It is an example of what might be called the theistic passive voice, implying that beyond death someone (God?) expects us. As theological claims go, this is highly understated, even veiled. But it

may suggest Saramago's interest in teleological and theological matters as he approached the end of his life.

Saramago will be remembered primarily for his unique and endearing narrative voice, which inserts itself into the novel frequently to express qualms and uncertainties, or simply to let the reader know that the author is never far from the text itself. This lends a metafictional liveliness to the text, because the narrator appears to be just as fickle and unpredictable as the elephant, expressing his sentiments and his authorial qualms and dilemmas. Saramago stops just short of saying something like, "Dear reader, at this

point I must take a coffee break." His narrative voice is garrulous, fallible and always charming.

The novel's final signature gesture is left for the queen, as she closes herself in her room to weep at the death of the noble animal. The reader cannot help feeling something of the same sentiment about the passing of Saramago, a literary giant who himself journeyed away from Portugal as a man of gigantic gifts of the imagination, creating a truly unusual body of fiction.

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

PAUL NIENABER

THE STUDENT POPE

THE ABACUS AND THE CROSS

The Story of the Pope Who Brought the Light of Science to the Dark Ages

By Nancy Marie Brown
Basic Books. 328p \$27.95

It is perhaps a commonplace that travelers should expect to examine and reinterpret their native notions when on a journey—the language, the conceptual vocabulary, the customary hometown currencies must be exchanged for other coin in other marketplaces. Similar shifts can take place when traversing the history of a less-than-familiar age. Touring the late 10th century via Nancy Marie Brown's masterful recounting of the life and times of Gerbert of Aurillac, the French monk who became Pope Sylvester II, requires an intellectual Baedeker of sorts, one that Brown aptly and affably provides. Even the book's title and subtitle require a bit of verbal reorientation, as an early medieval abacus and ninth-century science do not map readily onto contem-

porary notions of those entities. But a large measure of what makes this book intriguing is precisely these and other bits of connotative dissonance that Brown deftly elucidates and resolves throughout.

Gerbert is the axis around which her narrative revolves; she unwinds the track of his life thoughtfully, with a scholar's care to avoid overstatement or drawing unsupported conclusions. The future pope is revealed as a life-long student, an avid bookman, an innovative teacher and textbook writer and an inquisitive and passionate investigator. Brown notes that Gerbert was the first Christian teacher of arithmetic to employ Arabic numerals in the classroom and was skilled in the use of the astrolabe and other instruments of astronomical observation.

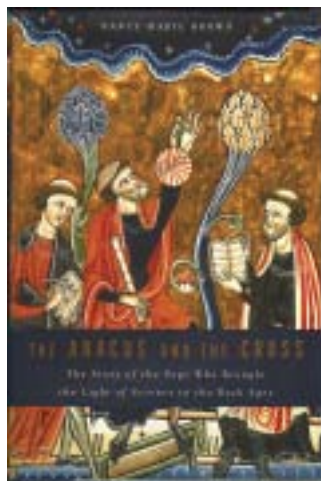
It is not until later in the story that what could be called Gerbert's spiritu-

al motivation comes to light. His passion for understanding the order of the universe, whether revealed in the intricate and intellectually satisfying connections of arithmetic and geometry, in the harmonies of stretched strings and windblown pipes or in the celestial mechanisms of fixed star and wandering planet—all these orders, for Gerbert, were ways to illuminate the mysteries of the Cosmic Orderer. This may seem to modern eyes to be a dry field to till, but for this monastic scholar, it was a fertile plot for "contemplating, admiring, and praising the wondrous meaning of nature and the wisdom of its Creator."

As Gerbert's story careers toward Rome, his gifts as teacher and man of letters do not serve him particularly well. Here again, Brown brings to light a sense of the seat of Christendom perhaps alien to contemporary readers, one more connected to statecraft, empire and political machination, with the papacy "just one more center of

power," less linked to current notions of moral, theological or spiritual leadership. Through his connections with the Holy Roman Emperor Otto III, who sought to restore the Roman Empire, Gerbert was elected Pope Sylvester II, the first French pope, in the year 999. Neither Otto nor Gerbert flourished long

thereafter; Otto died three years later, at the age of 22, and Gerbert died within a year of Otto's passing. With Gerbert's death, according to Brown, a world ended, one in which "Muslims, Christians, and Jews could sit down together and translate works of science from Arabic and Greek into Latin; the world in which a peasant boy who had excelled in such science could end up as pope." Scholarship, then as now, is



subject to buffeting by the winds of political change.

Brown carries her scholarship lightly and provides diverting glimpses into the monastery scriptorium, paper manufactory and refectory along the way. Misconceptions regarding other *medievalia* are debunked as well: the earth was not commonly thought to be flat; Christianity was not always at war with Islam; science was not at loggerheads with theology; there was no widespread “Terror of the Year 1000.” With the caveat that such terms as *science*, *astronomy* and *experiment* need some reinterpretation when Brown employs them in reference to Gerbert’s activities, her point is not badly made.

It may be argued that Gerbert’s natural philosophy directs itself differently when compared to that developed several centuries later by Galileo, Descartes and Newton—but then, finding in Gerbert’s Cosmic Orderer the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob requires a shift of the intellectual compass as well.

The Abacus and the Cross provides at once an engaging encounter with a figure of interest and influence, and a way to see the issues Gerbert confronts as having modern parallels. A grand tour, indeed.

PAUL NIENABER S.J., is associate professor and chair of physics at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota in Winona, Minn.

THOMAS QUIGLEY

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

THE HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN LATIN AMERICA From Conquest to Revolution and Beyond

By John Frederick Schwaller
New York Univ. Press. 336p \$35

Having spent the past 40 or so years immersed in books and articles dealing with religion and the church in Latin America, I was surprised to come across John Frederick Schwaller for the first time. He was not a name I was

familiar with, but with a little digging I discovered he is a major scholar of 16th-century Mexico and an authority on the Nahuatl language.

He had spent several years with the esteemed Academy of American Franciscan History, worked with the late Antonine Tibesar, O.F.M., and contributed to the academy’s journal, *The Americas*.

In the 1960s and ’70s, when world attention was being drawn to events challenging the church to the south—today’s human rights movement traces

its origins to the persecution by military dictatorships of the church in Brazil, then Chile and elsewhere—the brilliant Argentine historian Enrique Dussel wrote his magisterial *A History of the Church in Latin America*.

What Professor Schwaller has accomplished in this work is a rather pleasant review of the pre-Columbian civilizations—the classic Maya, the Aztec and the Inca—followed by the Iberian history of the late Middle Ages and the missionary endeavors of the early Spanish Franciscan and Dominican friars in New Spain (Mexico and Central America), the vice-royalty of Peru (western South America) and the Portuguese in Brazil.

This is his area of specialization, and he tells the story well, if a bit superficially. He provides a more detailed account of ecclesiastical offices of the time than one is likely to find anywhere but on Wikipedia and has useful things to say about the mendicant orders’ dependence on charity (or the crown), as contrasted with the Jesuit business enterprises throughout much of the region. The sons of Ignatius, we learn, were “the leading landowners in much of colonial America” before being expelled from the Spanish colonies by the Bourbon reforms in the mid-1700s, as they had been from Brazil by the Portuguese reforms under Pombal.

Turning to Mexico: the 1810 revolution was inspired in large part, according to Schwaller, by Miguel Hidalgo’s belief that “the Church had suffered mightily as a result of the Bourbon reforms.” This may cast a more pious light on this revolutionary priest who fathered children and had himself declared generalissimo of his rebel forces, which led ultimately to his defeat as well as to his own excommunication and execution. But he is revered today as the Father of the Nation.

On reading of the 1882 Colombian concordat with Rome, I was struck by

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the absolute independence granted the church in matters of the law: the church was to have autonomy from civil jurisdiction, and the ecclesiastical courts would be the sole venue for ecclesiastical cases.

By the second to last of 11 chapters, “The Mid-Twentieth Century Church,” Schwaller enters the period when much of the West looked upon Latin America and its church with either excited enthusiasm or grave concern, depending on where one stood. It is a story that this Nahuatl scholar tried hard to grasp but that finally eluded him.

A number of verbal errors suggest a lack of familiarity with much of the modern history of the church. The name of Leo XIII’s encyclical is always given as “De Rerum Novarum.” A layperson, as contrasted with a cleric, is a “laic.” The author insists on calling episcopal conferences councils but calls CELAM—Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano—a conference. We do not refer to the Holy Spirit as “the third arm of the Trinity,” nor is celibacy one of the three religious vows. *Cura animarum* does not translate as “cure” of souls but as their care.

Although published this year, most of the book draws on earlier articles and talks. References to important church documents focus on the early social encyclicals and the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Finally, there are passing references to Medellín (1968) and, ultimately, Puebla (1979), with no mention of Santo Domingo (1992) or Aparecida (2007), much less the Synod of Bishops for America (1997).

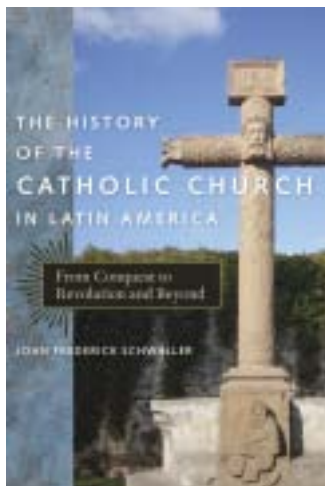
More serious are misunderstand-

ings of key events in the recent life of the church. “CELAM played an important role” at Vatican II, Schwaller writes. Not so; very few Latin American bishops besides Dom Helder Câmara spoke up. It was Manuel Larraín, bishop of Talca, Chile, who spoke with Paul VI at the end of the council, proposing that the Latin American bishops convene to consider the application of the council to their region; hence Medellín. The auto accident that took Larraín’s life did not occur “en route to the conference” but while he was traveling from Santiago to Talca in June 1966.

A kind of philo-Protestantism plays out in much of the book. Latin America has historically lagged behind other areas of the church in ecumenical relations, but one winces on reading that in Chile in the 1970s, “nearly a quarter of the population was already Protestant,” but the official 2000 census indicates a drop in the total Protestant population to 15.1 percent, with Catholics at 70 percent. The Committee of Cooperation for Peace in Chile, which was the ecumenical predecessor of Cardinal Raúl Silva’s Vicariate of Solidarity, could hardly be described as “an alliance of Lutherans and Jews,” and the truly monumental story of the late 20th-century’s martyrs and confessors is but a minor sidebar here.

One wishes the author had consulted more widely than he seems to have done the excellent works cited in the bibliography.

THOMAS QUIGLEY was a longtime policy advisor to the U.S. bishops on Latin American and Caribbean issues.



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America 

LETTERS

Might Is Not Right

“How much death is too much death?”—a question you ask in your editorial “The Lessons of Libya” (3/28)—is not just a “vexing” question. It is the wrong question. The right question is, when will people realize that killing is killing, whoever does it?

Colonel Muammar el-Qaddafi’s shooting of peaceful demonstrators is wrong, and so is the opposition’s violent response. In each case people are maimed and people die. Qaddafi’s violence is despicable, but the opposition validates it by responding in kind. Qaddafi and the opposition share responsibility for multiplying the killing and suffering, and for tens of thousands of refugees fleeing to Egypt.

The international community should have no part in it. Might does not make right. When will people ever learn?

BOB KRASNANSKY
Ellicott City, Md.

In Defense of Waterboarding

It is the assumption of “Divided on Torture,” by Kenneth R. Himes, O.F.M. (4/18), that waterboarding is torture. It is not. It also assumes that an adequate Catholic philosophy of torture has been clearly adumbrated. It has not. The author’s reflections inevitably lead to confusion on other issues, including abortion and capital punishment. In fact, abortion has always been treated by the church as inherently evil. Capital punishment is not inherently evil; it is sometimes morally required. Waterboarding is an open question.

I am astonished that so many feel so confident in their moral judgment on matters relating to extreme conditions of violence and survival. It is simple to pontificate during periods of peace brought on by the 101st Airborne Division and friends.

CHRIS MULCAHY
Fort Myers Beach, Fla.

‘To the Least...’

So many “Christians” claim that the United States is a Christian nation founded on Christian principles, and yet they defend torture. For a time there were popular bracelets marked WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?). In the final analysis that is all that matters. Somehow those who watched “The Passion of the Christ” and were appalled at the treatment of our Lord would turn around and apply the same treatment to other human beings.

LARUE WITHERS
Matherville, Ill.

Love and Live Together

Daniel F. Polish’s heartfelt sentiments regarding the State of Israel (“A Spiritual Home,” 4/11) merit sympathetic reading. I wish, however, he had not taken offense at the Kairos Palestine document, a Palestinian Christian manifesto calling for justice, peace and love among all the inhabitants of the Holy Land, embracing all ethnicities and religions.

Rabbi Polish complains that Kairos Palestine “sets out an offensive disconnection between Jews and the Land of Israel as the cradle of our civilization.” I don’t see this in the document. It

does not challenge Israel’s right to exist within its pre-1967 borders. The injustice it identifies is the occupation in 1967 and subsequently of Palestinian lands, the illegal expansion of settlements and usurpation of land and water resources. Kairos’s explicit message to Jews is that “we are able to love and live together.”

CAROLE BURNETT
Silver Spring, Md.

Restorative Justice Is Tough

The Signs of the Times item “Is Restorative Justice Possible in Aftermath of Scandal?” (4/18) provides a glimmer of light in a bleak church. Archbishop Diarmuid Martin’s statement that all parties must be willing to tell the truth and “take ownership of the truth, even when the truth is unpleasant” filled me with a sense of relief. When he mentions the “stumbling stone” confronting the community, he means a blockage that has revealed the pathology so many have been describing for decades. I have observed the process of restorative justice for years. It has a powerful effect on offenders and victims alike. I have seen school bullies weep as they listened to how they



CARTOON BY HARLEY SCHWADRON

offended others. It is the guts of the sacrament of penance. This is tough stuff, but it is a revelation of where the church stands today.

VIC O'CALLAGHAN
Springwood, New South Wales, Australia

Hooray for the Callahans!

Re the Matteo Ricci, S.J., award (4/7): I say, kudos to both Dan and Sidney Callahan and the editors of **America**. The Callahans have long championed important ideas and sound reasoning in various fields, even at times disagreeing agreeably. I would call them an ideal couple with their enlightening research—and good grandparents too.

I urge them to write more frequently for both **America** and

Commonweal. The people in Washington should take notice of Dan's ideas on containing medical costs.

ANDY GALLIGAN
Tracy, Calif.

Less Sex, Please

I watched a good part of the "Mildred Pierce" series on HBO (Maurice Timothy Reidy, "A Mother's Love," 4/11). It has strengths in creating the period, good acting and an authentic feel. But it has the same weakness as most modern films. Its treatment of sexual transgressions appeals to base instincts, with gratuitous sex scenes and extended nudity, making the viewer a voyeur. To explore an issue

today means sex scenes, foul language, slow-motion scenes of violence, exploding heads and bodies. I am showing my class the classic film "Johnny Belinda," which deals with the brutal rape of a deaf and mute girl, jealousy and hypocrisy. But there is no nudity or cheap thrills in the powerful rape scene. The Motion Picture Code had its weaknesses, but it was better than the free-for-all we have today.

FRANK C. TANTILLO
Freehold, N.J.

Who Served the Meal?

Thank you for Sister Lou Ella Hickman's poem, "A Woman at the Last Supper" (4/11).

I have been trying to acquire a copy of a painting by a Polish artist depicting women and children at the Last Supper. After all, this was Passover time and traditionally the children would be there to ask the questions. And, of course, who served the meal? I have no problem seeing women there, in spite of the convention that depicts only Jesus and the Twelve.

JULETT BROADNAX
Bedford, Tex.

Editor's Note

In response to "Career Interrupted," on Robert F. Drinan, S.J. (3/7), and the review of *Bob Drinan: The Controversial Life of the First Catholic Priest Elected to Congress* (4/4), we have received several letters stating that Gabriel Richard, S.S., was the first. Drinan is considered the first because Richard was elected in 1823 as a nonvoting representative from Michigan, which at the time was a territory. It did not become a state until 1837.

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Walking Into Hope

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER (A), MAY 8, 2011

Readings: Acts 2:14, 22-33; Ps 16:1-11; 1 Pt 1:17-21; Lk 24:13-35

“We were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel” (Lk 24:21)

They are walking away from Jerusalem, away from the place where their hopes were shattered. Cleopas and his unnamed companion—perhaps his wife?—stride in the direction of Emmaus, known in Roman times as Nicopolis, “Victory City.” They were in sore need of a victory.

As they tell the stranger who joins up with them, they were hoping that Jesus would be the victorious one, the one who could redeem them, but once again the Romans had crushed their hopes of liberation. As they go, they debate how to understand the things that have happened, blind to the victorious one alongside them.

Today’s Gospel is a story of how Jesus’ followers moved from expectant wishing to being grounded in true hope. What they had been wishing for was someone who would rescue them from bondage, someone who would singlehandedly transform their situation for them. Most likely they thought this would happen through a violent wresting of power.

What they got instead was a new story, a new way of seeing and hearts inflamed with hope. The door was opened to a new way of being for them and for us that far transcended anything for which they had wished.

In 1990, three years before he

became the first president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel offered these reflections on hope: “Hope is a state of mind, not of the world.... Either we have hope or we don’t; it is a dimension of the soul...an orientation of the spirit;...it is not the same thing as joy that things are going well...but rather an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.... Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.” Havel captures poetically what Luke tells narratively about how hope began to burn in the hearts of Jesus’ first followers. While blindly fleeing Jerusalem because things did not turn out well, according to their wishes, the disciples come to see that Jesus’ death is not the end of all their wishful longings nor an isolated act that rescues them but is the culminating point of a whole way of life that embodies hope.

In the breaking of the bread, the disciples do not see only a changed Jesus; they come to see the whole world as changed. Jesus has liberated them from sin and death, but the saving work is not completed until disciples embrace

his way of living eucharistically. Only when Jesus’ followers live in such a way that they risk their own bodies being broken and blood poured out in love for others is hope fanned into flame. Cleopas and his companion are able to choose to return to Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets (Lk 13:34) and could kill them, when their eyes become opened.

Sight is transformed not so much in one magical moment but in a lengthy process of praying and studying the Scriptures, of walking with others and struggling to understand from their perspective, of daily taking, blessing, breaking and sharing bread in eucharistic gatherings, all



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- How is Easter hope different from the fulfillment of wishes?
- In what ways have Scripture study and the Eucharist fanned the flames of hope in your faith community?
- Ask Jesus to walk with you into Easter hope.

the while urging Jesus to “stay with us.” When a transformative moment happens, when we let go our puny wishes and become aflame with hope, the Jesus we thought we knew vanishes, and the risen Christ remains.

In Jerusalem, Cleopas and his companion rejoin the gathered community, who are likewise transformed. Together with the women who had gone to the tomb and Simon, they see with new eyes and tell a new story, able now to lead others in the ongoing journey into hope.

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The Open Door

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (A), MAY 15, 2011

Readings: Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Ps 23:1-6; 1 Pt 2:20b-25; Jn 10:1-10

“I am the gate for the sheep” (Jn 10:7)

Some years ago there was a television quiz show called “Let’s Make a Deal,” in which contestants were given an opportunity to exchange a modest prize for a chance at a grand prize. Suspense built as they were asked to choose: door number one, door number two or door number three. Two doors concealed “zonk,” or gag prizes. Behind the third door was something very desirable, like a trip, a car or large amounts of cash. Every once in a while someone would get lucky and choose correctly.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus speaks of himself as the door that leads to the most desirable of gifts. Unlike the quiz show designers, who for their own gain might deliberately try to mask the location of the grand prize, Jesus shows himself openly to be the gateway and declares his desire for all to choose this door.

At the beginning of today’s Gospel selection, Jesus speaks about himself as the shepherd of the sheep who enters the sheepfold properly, through the gate. He contrasts himself to the thief or the robber who scrambles into the sheepfold some other way and who will have no success in getting the sheep to follow him out. He is a stranger, and the sheep will run away

from him; they do not recognize his voice. Later in this chapter of John’s Gospel, Jesus elaborates further the image of himself as the Good Shepherd, but in today’s Gospel the focus is on himself as the gate for the sheep.

An important aspect of this image is that the gate swings in two directions. Not only do Jesus’ followers come into the sheepfold through him, but they are also led out by him. All who are led in by him find in the embrace of the believing community a place of refreshment and rest, a space where wounds can be healed and where all can be nourished by the word and at the table. But whoever enters is also led out to find pasture, the verdant space of mission. Jesus is the gate that opens in and out.

Later in the Gospel, the image of the open gate takes another form. Jesus’ open side, pierced by the soldier’s lance (19:34), also beckons us to enter, so that we can then go out in the power of his risen life. All who enter into his way of life, which offers the most forgotten and downtrodden verdant pastures of plenty, risk reprisals from those who try to enter another way. Even should one’s life be taken for entering into this sheepfold,

Jesus’ open side also provides a portal outward to life birthed anew. Before his death, Jesus spoke to his disciples of his passion as labor pains that would give way to joy when the new life was born (16:20-22). The blood and water that flow from his open side recall the “rivers of living water” that Jesus promised would flow from within (literally “from the womb of”) him and from the heart of each believer (7:38).

The open tomb on Easter morning completes the image. The gates of

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- What is the “open door” that Jesus is inviting you to go through at the present time?
- What form does coming in and going out of the gate that is Jesus take in your life?
- Have you tried to climb in another way?

death have been breached by the One who came so that all “might have life and have it more abundantly” (10:10). The door now lies wide open for all. The invitation to enter through Jesus and his way of life is difficult for some to accept. The Pharisees, representing those who choose not to understand, do not accept Jesus’ invitation to come in and go out with him and through him. They think there is another way over or around the gate.

But there is no trick to choosing the correct door. It stands wide open before us.

BARBARA E. REID



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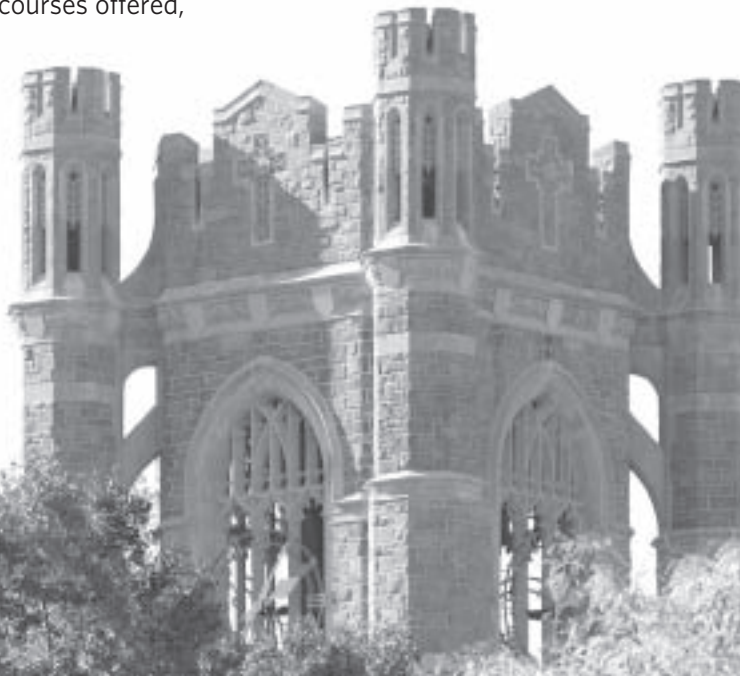
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