

America

The background of the cover is a photograph of a wooden bridge with a curved railing, leading through a forest. The ground is covered with fallen autumn leaves in shades of yellow, orange, and brown. The trees in the background have green and yellowing leaves, suggesting a late autumn setting. The overall mood is peaceful and scenic.

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

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Fall Books 1

GORDON S. WOOD

THOMAS H. GROOME

ALAN WOLFE

MARY KARR

Rejoice Always!

JAMES MARTIN

Hope has come to my family's home parish. A new pastor arrived a couple of months ago, and he began listening to people at sessions in parishioners' homes. When I visited over the Labor Day holiday, he already had held 18. His late predecessor failed ever to convoke a parish council meeting. Except for the rotations of lectors and eucharistic ministers, the channels of participation in the parish had dried up.

The poor new pastor will have to listen a lot. Surely he will be asked to meet expectations that even the most accommodating priest would be unable to satisfy, and the listening sessions will arouse hopes the most active parish would be unable to achieve. Even under the best of circumstances, listening can be a painful sort of asceticism.

It takes a very special listener to let us speak from our hearts. Such listening is a charism given for the "cure of souls"—and of the church. But because the charism of listening is so seldom given, or at least experienced, we need more mundane institutions to do our speaking, have ourselves heard and effect a little bit of the change we hope for.

After the Second Vatican Council, a variety of these institutions were established: parish councils, finance councils, diocesan pastoral councils, presbyteral councils, bishops' conferences and the Synod of Bishops. To the pain of many people who love the church, the promise of those bodies has been quenched. In some places, they were not tried at all; in others, they were begun and then allowed to atrophy. Still others, like bishops' conferences and the Synod of Bishops, were redefined from above as, at most, consultative bodies.

Bradford E. Hinze writes in the September issue of *Theological Studies* ("Ecclesial Impasse: What Can We Learn from Our Laments"): "Ecclesial laments have been particularly acute surrounding the implementation of practices of synodality, that is, the dia-

logical practices of communal discernment and decisionmaking..." A series of conferences taking place in New York and Connecticut put the general experience of Catholics more dramatically. People who love the church and want to serve it better are longing for something "more than a monologue," but for most Catholics, especially Vatican II Catholics, it is not to be found.

Numbed into acquiescence by the denial of participation, overwhelmed by unilateral decisions, all that the faithful, many priests and many bishops too can do is bring their anguish to prayer. Professor Hinze recommends recourse to laments, the biblical prayers of anguish, grief and accusations of betrayal.

Hinze contends that lament is properly an ecclesial act. "Groaning," he writes, "expresses for Augustine the voice of the church." Of all the psalms, the psalms of groaning are especially suitable for the present-day church, a gathering of saints and sinners awaiting its purification at the end of time. "The psalms," Augustine wrote, "are a mirror to us," the church. By reflecting on the psalmists' laments and our own, the church becomes what it is.

Furthermore, Hinze reminds us, "the laments are ours, yet not ours." They are the voice of the Spirit of God groaning within us. "The groaning of laments can be an expression of the indwelling agency of the Spirit in a suffering church and world." Often we ourselves may not grasp the meaning of these "sighs too deep for words," because the fulfillment we long for, the fulfillment the church longs for, is so much greater than we can conceive. Laments force us to understand the eschatological dimension of the church to which we belong.

When in our own living history we intuit the eschatological identity of the church, Hinze reassures us, we receive the gift of "prophetic obedience to the voice of the Spirit." *Ecclesia semper reformanda*.
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CONTENTS



FALL BOOKS 1

- 13 REJOICE ALWAYS!**
The surprisingly joyful theology of 1 Thessalonians
James Martin
- 19 AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM**
From a political theory to an article of faith
V. Bradley Lewis

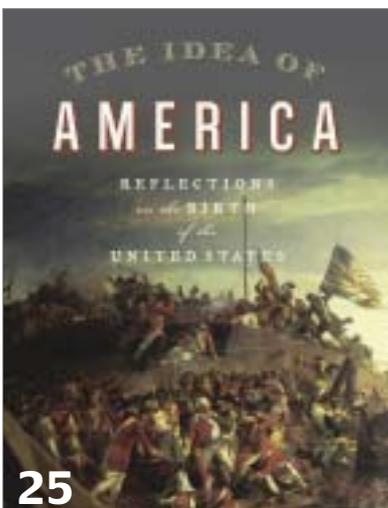
COLUMNS & DEPARTMENTS

- 4 Current Comment**
- 5 Editorial** Jobs Now
- 6 Signs of the Times**
- 10 Column** Civil Defense
John F. Kavanaugh
- 36 Letters**
- 39 The Word** Dressed for the Feast
Barbara E. Reid



BOOKS & CULTURE

- 25 FALL BOOKS 1** *The Idea of America; Political Evil; Will There Be Faith? The Deaths of Others; Between Heaven and Mirth* **IDEAS** Mary Karr and the Ignatian imagination



ON THE WEB

David Hollenbach, S.J., reports from the new **Republic of South Sudan**. Plus, Kerry Weber talks with **Mary Karr** on our podcast, and Andrew J. Garavel, S.J., writes on a forgotten Irish playwright. All at americamaagazine.org.



Needless Defaults

In today's tight economy, with college tuition and student unemployment at record highs, it is no surprise that the number of students who have defaulted on their federal education loans has increased. According to a recent U.S. Department of Education report, the overall default rate in 2010 on student loans, 8.8 percent, is the highest since 1997.

It is especially troubling that students at for-profit colleges make up nearly half of those defaults, even though the students comprise just one-tenth of all undergraduates. Unlike other schools, for-profit colleges tend to attract older, poorer students, many of whom are members of racial minorities. These are the students who stand to gain the most from a college education. What makes their defaults, and the low credit score that will follow them for years, so disheartening is that so many could have been prevented.

A new program, in place since 2009, allows college borrowers who fall on hard times to apply for an income-based repayment program. Under the program, the federal government will forgive a debt balance once the borrower has paid 15 percent of his or her discretionary income toward the debt each year for 25 years. Less time is required of public service employees. If students lose their job during that period, they can report their discretionary income while unemployed as zero. This allows them to forgo payment temporarily and prevents defaults.

So far the program is undersubscribed. For-profit colleges in particular should inform their students about these loans and also about the options students have if changed circumstances make payments impossible. Paying what one owes and doing all one can to prevent default should be part of every college education.

Google's Name Game

By now most people are familiar with Google Suggest. Type a name into Google's search engine and it will "suggest" (in a drop-down menu) what you may be looking for. The suggestions are generated by an algorithm based on the most recent popular search terms. For example, if you enter "Vatican," Google is likely to suggest "Vatican City." Key in "pop" and chances are you will see "Pope John Paul II."

How do other church figures fare? A recent test produced disappointing results. The search term "Benedict" turned up Benedict Cumberbatch, the latest actor to play Sherlock Holmes on television. Google's second pick:

Benedict Arnold. The pontiff did not even make the top four. To be fair, John Paul, minus his papal title, did not perform well either; he was outranked by John Paul Jones. If that seems ludicrous, then consider this: the John Paul in question is the former bassist for the rock band Led Zeppelin, not the naval war hero.

It comes as no surprise that musicians and film stars hold pride of place in our culture. Still, it is startling to see that reality represented so starkly on screen. On the Internet, Matthew (Lewis), Mark (Zuckerberg), Luke (Bryan) and John (Jay) are far more popular than the Evangelists. But take heart: some church figures still manage to rise to the top. Until some singer takes his name, Augustine is likely to remain a favorite on Google Suggest. And Ireneus has little to fear from pop culture poseurs. This, too, is a source of comfort: there is no confusion when you type in the name of Our Lord. Even on the Web, Jesus abides.

High-Speed, Low-Cost

These days, high-speed access to the Internet is available just about anywhere, including on phones, in airplanes and in coffee shops. But despite its apparent ubiquity, 40 percent of Americans do not have high-speed Internet in their homes, and 30 percent still have no Internet access at all at home. For some, the choice is intentional. Approximately 38 percent of those without home access to the Internet say they do not need or are not interested in it. For others, however, the lack of digital connection is not a choice. In urban areas, 27.6 percent cited the high cost as a deterrent, 19 percent cited a lack of computer or lack of an adequate computer, and 3.2 percent cited a lack of computer skills.

A recent push by Comcast is aimed at reducing these barriers. The company has begun offering high-speed Internet for \$9.95 a month to families with children that qualify for free school lunches. In addition, Comcast is offering vouchers for \$150 computers, as well as information packets that will help families learn how to use e-mail or set up security controls on a Web browser.

As unemployment rates and college tuition costs rise, access to the Internet can be crucial for families whose members are seeking jobs or applying to colleges or for scholarships. Of course, helping these groups was not Comcast's only interest. Creating this deal was a requirement for receiving approval for its merger with NBC Universal. Still, the offers are meant to be permanent, and they help provide an affordable path to digital literacy for families who otherwise may not have easy access to such resources.

Jobs Now

The U.S. economic “recovery” has not only stalled; it has been undermined—by a persistent decline in the financial well-being of most Americans. Last month, the U.S. Census Bureau documented another decline in the nation’s median income. It also found that more Americans are living in poverty (46.2 million) than in any year during the last five decades. Some 14 million Americans are out of work. Nearly 50 million Americans currently have no health insurance. This year, as last, banks will foreclose on more than a million homes, causing Americans to lose what traditionally has been their single greatest asset.

One remedy for most of these problems is clear: Put more Americans back to work at a living wage. Few adults can climb out of poverty or pay off a mortgage without a job, and jobs are scarce. There are four job seekers for every job available, a situation that is expected to worsen over the next few months when several corporations and many state and local governments lay off hundreds of thousands of workers. Soon the veterans will come home; they will need jobs too.

Meanwhile, a polarized, politicized and paralyzed Congress has been fiddling while America burns. Last year Congress let itself be distracted by a preoccupation with the debt ceiling, a long-term issue, when it ought to have united behind a plan to create jobs—a national emergency. One wag expressed appropriate urgency when he advised the Federal Reserve to act “as if its hair were on fire.” His advice applies to the president, Congress and business leaders, too. Tough economic times require urgent remedies and strong leadership.

With his American Jobs Act, President Obama has focused squarely on job creation. A conservative reading of several economic forecasts shows that implementation of his bill could add more than a million new jobs in 2012, cut unemployment by 1 percent and increase economic growth by at least 1 percent. These are modest but immediate gains, well worth the \$447 billion cost. To garner public support, the president is taking his bill directly “to the American people,” a strategy raised to an art form by Ronald Reagan.

According to polls, a majority support the plan’s basic approach. They rank job creation as their top priority, overwhelmingly approve of spending on infrastructure and education, and support federal tax increases on the highest earners. These are all included in Mr. Obama’s bill, so it ought to be wildly popular. But so far only half of those polled about

his proposal express confidence in the plan. Some object that the jobs bill offers too little too late and that Congress is unlikely to pass the measure. That is why the president must make a case for urgency—people need work now—and not wait until after the next election or inauguration. The former is governing, the latter the worst sort of politics. It is dereliction of duty for any elected official to put his or her own political future or that of a party above the suffering of millions of Americans.

Mr. Obama’s direct communication with the people ought to serve as an important civic reminder that in a democracy the people either exercise or abdicate real power. They demand relief and shape the plan or suffer the consequences. In their multiple roles not only as individuals but as organized workers, civic and business leaders, shareholders and members of clubs, boards and other voluntary associations, the people can actively suggest and promote remedies on behalf of the common good. The Tea Party and MoveOn exemplify the force of citizen action at different ends of the political spectrum. Encouraging ordinary Americans, who tend not to be extremists, to become more politically engaged could help move the country onto the right track.

The president is gambling on that. He appears to think that if he clarifies his own direction for the country, explains what he is prepared to do about jobs, homes, taxes and the economy, and how he intends to pay for his proposals, the public will see him as a moderate leader who has the best interests of the nation at heart. Clarity and moderation could strengthen the democratic process. So could executive strength, which Mr. Obama is showing at the 11th hour by his recent threat to veto any deficit reduction plan that would cut Medicare funding but fail to include tax increases on the nation’s wealthiest. According to polls, the public also supports this mix of cuts and raised revenues.

Short-term job creation is one part of a broader vision for the nation’s future. When coupled with fairer taxation, mortgage debt relief and judicious cuts to reduce the deficit, it could help build a solid basis for growth and restore public confidence. Ultimately, however, the country needs to develop a spirit of unity, exemplified by leaders who will work together to solve grave national problems. For now, the president is right to promote jobs. Let the people say Amen.



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

POVERTY

The American Dream: Out of Reach?

Jon Proctor knows the road to self-sufficiency is a long one. It is even longer when the weekly paycheck totals a little more than \$200.

"We're trying to get back on our feet," the 55-year-old divorced father of six said, explaining he has managed to schedule only about 30 hours a week stocking shelves at a Safeway supermarket on the overnight shift. Proctor, a Vietnam-era Army veteran, has moved among several Safeway stores in the Maryland suburbs of Washington and now in Alexandria, Va., where he stays in Christ House, a transitional housing residence for single men. Life, he admits, is far different now than when he worked for 15 years as an electrician and later as a bouncer at a bar, earning as much as \$500 a night.

Proctor landed at the residence run by Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington, Va., 18 months ago when his 25-year marriage dissolved. He moved out of a comfortable Bethesda, Md., home with little more than his clothing. He said he has been "on top" and is "now at the bottom."

"So if anybody's out there who has the same feeling of 'Hey, I've got it made,' don't count on it," he said, "because you could be in my situation in a heartbeat."

Proctor is among the growing number of America's poor. The Census Bureau reported on Sept. 13 that in 2010, 15.1 percent of Americans—46.2 million people, an all-time high—were living in poverty, the third straight annual increase in poverty.

Mentesnot Tejeji, resident manager at Christ House, said the number of people at its evening meal has doubled since he joined the staff in 2007. "We're starting to see new faces," he said. Tejeji suspects many of the newcomers face the difficult choice between paying for rent and utilities or for food.

The growing poverty points to serious challenges facing Congress and President Obama. Bishop Stephen E. Blaire of Stockton, Calif., chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, said on Sept. 14: "If people don't go back to work, there's

not going to be money out there in the community.... To me it's a very simple matter." He called upon Congress and the White House to "set aside the political stalemate that keeps people from working together."

"We have to keep people first," Bishop Blaire said. "I don't have the answers for what government can do and I don't think that's even our role as a church. Our role is to say the government needs to accept its responsibility. But it's not just the government; businesses, various entities, everybody has a responsibility."

Charles A. Gallagher, chairman of the sociology and criminal justice department at LaSalle University in Philadelphia, sees worsening poverty ahead unless any new jobs created offer a living wage and good benefits. He fears that the American dream will be unreachable for millions of Americans faced with the prospect of

Jon Proctor wipes the kitchen counter at Catholic Charities' Christ House in Alexandria, Va., a transitional living facility he now calls home.



working permanently in low-wage jobs.

"If people at the bottom of the economic ladder can get a job at all, they're going to be stuck in a job that pays minimum wage with no benefits. They will be assimilated into America, but they will be assimilated into the underclass," he said.

PASTORAL CARE

Can We Just Talk?

Deb Word finds shelter for homeless gay and lesbian teens who have been shunned by their own parents. "We see kids who think they are unlovable because of their orientation," Word said at a recent conference at New York's Fordham University. "We help



kids who have been suicidal over parental rejection,” she said. “We love them and we let them know that God loves them as well. These are God’s children, but somehow that message has been lost, and we need to find a way to shout that message louder than any other.”

Word is part of a grass-roots movement called Fortunate Families, which provides a support network primarily for Catholic parents of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender children. She knows the struggles of these young people intimately, and she shared stories of raising her son, who is gay, with the conference attendees.

She drew a standing ovation.

Titled “Learning to Listen: Voices of Sexual Diversity and the Catholic Church,” the conference held on Sept. 16, was the first of a four-part series called “More than a Monologue: Sexual Diversity and the Catholic

Church.” The series will also include conferences independently hosted by Fairfield University, Yale Divinity School and Union Theological Seminary. Each conference seeks to depict more clearly the experience of people in the church who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

Paul Lakeland, the Aloysius P. Kelley, S.J., Professor of Catholic Studies and director of the Center for American Catholic Studies at Fairfield University in Connecticut, said that while many people are aware of the church’s teaching on sexual ethics, the conferences would speak to issues that are not directly addressed by that teaching. Explaining the name of the series, he noted the often one-dimensional nature of views on sexual ethics. “Wherever you stand in the debate on sexual ethics, that’s a sort of monologue,” he said.

“But when we ask questions—What is the experience of gay and lesbian Catholics in the church? Or what about teen suicide?...we’re not in that one-dimensional thinking,” he said. “Rather we’re expanding people’s sense of what the life of gay and lesbian Catholics is like and the many ramifications in the church and what that means for everyone.”

During a panel discussion at the conference, Eve Tushnet, a freelance writer, shared her experience as a Catholic convert and the joys and challenges of her decision as a lesbian woman to lead a lay, celibate life. “It was through lov-

ing service and connection to women, among other things, that I was able to express my identity as a lesbian while being celibate,” Tushnet said. “I wish someone had told me how much I would have to fight for both parts of being gay and Catholic.”

Tushnet said many people suffer because of a general lack of respect for friendship outside marriage, but that she found comfort during her discernment by praying to both Oscar Wilde and St. Joan of Arc, among others. She said gay teens need to see more examples of “joyful, fruitful, celibate lives of service” in the church.

Other panelists shared stories of navigating the tensions between their faith lives and their sexuality and expressed the hope that as practicing members of the church, they could help to shape the conversation around such issues. “Was I at home in the Catholic Church?” Michael Sepidoza Campos said. “Eh, yes and no. Was I at home in the gay community? Eh, yes and no. But among these tensions were many experiences that were life-giving.”



Deb Word talked at a Fordham University conference about her work with homeless gay and lesbian teens.

Priests Urged To Preach on Poverty

The president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops is urging priests across the country to preach about “the terrible toll the current economic turmoil is taking on families and communities.” In a letter to his fellow bishops made public on Sept. 19, Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan of New York said, “I hope we can use our opportunities as pastors, teachers and leaders to focus public attention and priority on the scandal of so much poverty and so many without work in our society.” Special resources and materials to assist in that effort are to be posted on a section of the U.S.C.C.B. Web site dedicated to unemployment and poverty. “Widespread unemployment, underemployment and pervasive poverty are diminishing human lives, undermining human dignity and hurting children and families,” Archbishop Dolan said. “The common good will not advance; economic security will not be achieved; and individual initiative will be weakened when so many live without the dignity of work and bear the crushing burden of poverty.”

Holy Land Bishops Seek Two-State Solution

As the issue of Palestinian statehood was debated at the United Nations in September, the heads of the Christian churches in Jerusalem, including the Latin patriarch, Fouad Twal, reiterated their sense that “a two-state solution serves the cause of peace and justice.” In a joint communiqué released on Sept. 13, the bishops said that “Israelis and Palestinians must live each in their own independent states with peace, security and justice, respecting human rights, according to international law.” The Christian church leaders encour-

NEWS BRIEFS

The Freedom From Religion Foundation on Sept. 13 challenged the **constitutionality of the “parish exemption”** tax deductions that clergy are allowed to claim on housing expenses. + Catholic Charities of New Orleans received \$15 million, the largest single grant in its history, from the Baton Rouge Area Foundation to oversee an effort to provide direct assistance, counseling and job training to **Louisiana fishing families** affected by the 2010 B.P. oil spill. + **Troy Davis was executed** on Sept. 21 in Georgia despite petitions from more than 650,000 people around the world, including Pope Benedict XVI, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former President Jimmy Carter. + Urging improved **cooperation to end human trafficking**, Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, Vatican representative to U.N. agencies in Geneva, said on Sept. 14 that more must be done to strengthen a culture in which the relationship between men and women is based on mutual “respect and not on merchandizing the body.” + Discussing the **possibility of optional celibacy**, Edward Daly, former Bishop of Derry, in Northern Ireland, told the BBC on Sept. 13, “It may create a whole new set of problems, but I think it’s something that should be considered.”



Louisiana spill

aged negotiations as “the best way to resolve all outstanding problems between the two sides.” The church leaders also urged restraint from both Palestinians and Israelis whatever the outcome of the vote at the United Nations.

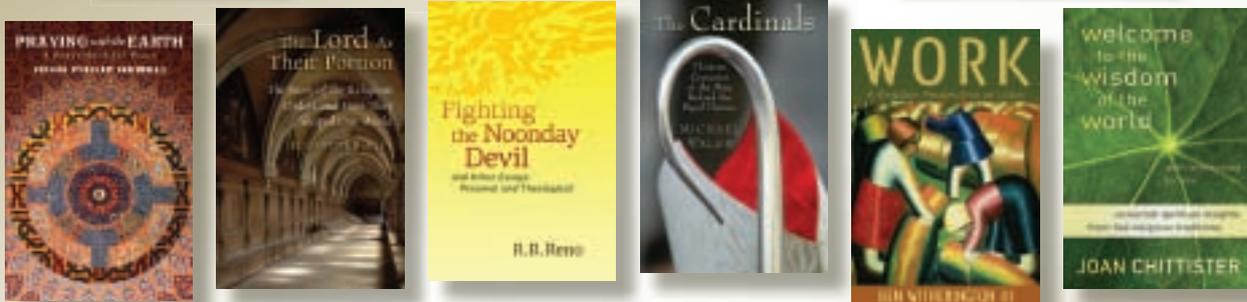
Mission to Iran

A delegation of Christian and Muslim leaders returned to the United States from Iran hoping that their six-day visit will improve relations between the two squabbling countries in a way that diplomatic channels have not. The four-member delegation, which included Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick, retired archbishop of Washington, hoped to be accompanied on the return home on Sept. 19

by a pair of American hikers who were incarcerated by Iranian authorities on charges of espionage and of entering Iran illegally. The two men were finally released on Sept. 21. The trip was arranged by Search for Common Ground “to try and deepen the relationship between the two countries by direct human contact on the basis of religious leadership,” said William G. Miller, senior adviser to the organization. Cardinal McCarrick believed discussions among Iranian and American religious leaders would deepen trust where diplomacy has failed. “The political channel doesn’t do too well right now. There should be another channel. The other channel is the religious channel,” the cardinal said.

From CNS and other sources.

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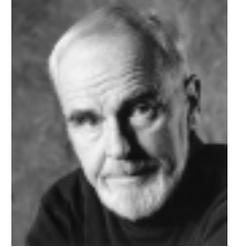


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Civil Defense

In early September The Wall Street Journal and NBC News conducted a poll that presages an election year of deep political turmoil. Of the Americans interviewed, 73 percent judged the United States to be headed in the wrong direction (no doubt for contradictory reasons). Only 44 percent of those polled approve of President Obama's leadership; 33 percent approve of his economic plans. Congress was held in worse regard: 82 percent judged the two houses unfavorably. In fact, more than half (54 percent) would prefer that the whole gang (including their own senators and representatives) be thrown out. Many commentators think the discontent is due to the terrible economic mess we are in. That is only part of the problem. It is exacerbated by hardened ideologies.

I have been wondering lately whether there is much value in writing about our political economy, so calcified is our national discourse. Why, after all, write a column asking for more civil debate from a relatively small readership when a media giant like Rush Limbaugh can rant over and over at 15 or 20 million listeners that President Obama wants to destroy the United States by destroying our economy? Even with the readership of a magazine like *America*, it becomes evident, after sifting through readers' comments on our Web site, that there is little chance of persuasion in the presence of fixed opinion.

If a columnist or blogger expresses concern about the inequitable distri-

bution of wealth and income or the plight of workers or unions, this is often ridiculed by commenters as leftism, class warfare or socialism.

Discussions in the Catholic press thus mirror the polarization of the mass media, depending on whether we get our information from MSNBC or Fox News. Even carefully mounted arguments offered in our "newspapers of record" meet with little more than namecalling.

The prestigious financier Warren Buffett recently wrote an op-ed piece for The New York Times. He pointed out that some of the super-rich, who make money from money, often pay less in taxes than people who make money from a job: "The mega-rich pay income taxes at a rate of 15 percent on most of their earnings but pay practically nothing in payroll taxes. It's a different story for the middle class: typically, they fall into the 15 percent and 25 percent income tax brackets, and then are hit with heavy payroll taxes to boot."

A frequently heard response to the Buffett column was that his ideas were "job killers," even though Buffett had pointed out that an average of two million jobs a year were added between 1980 and 2000—prior to the Bush tax cut. But one of the mind-boggling "refutations" of his proposals was that he is a socialist. Warren Buffett: a socialist? Yes, you heard it right.

This should come as no surprise when one reflects on how the word *socialism* is batted around. "Obamacare," we are told, is socialized medicine. This is so preposterous, one

might have thought the president had actually proposed a single-payer or three-tiered plan that would cover everyone in the country. Then at least we could have seriously debated two truly competing plans for saving our troubled health care system.

If we ever come to agree to overhaul our tax code completely, let it be accompanied by an admission that the poor indeed already pay taxes.

Since April, the mantra has been circulated by some news outlets that "47 percent of all households pay not a single dime in taxes." Even if that figure is true for income taxes, it will come as a surprise to middle class and poor families who pay federal payroll, state and municipal taxes.

As the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy estimates, the bottom quarter of taxpayers paid 12.3 percent of their incomes in state and local taxes in 2010. So much for "not a single dime."

To bring up such facts will inevitably be brushed off by some readers as just another salvo in the "class war" against the rich. This is simply not the case. I have only admiration for many wealthy families who have a profound commitment to service and solicitude for those in need. But if there is some kind of class war going on in our money-media society, it has already been declared against the working middle class and the poor. The only socialism we have in this country is for the super-rich and bailed-out banks.

Even
carefully
mounted
arguments
meet with
name-calling.

JOHN F. KAVANAUGH, S.J., is a professor of philosophy at St. Louis University in St. Louis, Mo.

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A choir sings "This Little Light of Mine" at the Catholic Festival of Faith in Rosemont, Ill.



THE SURPRISINGLY JOYFUL THEOLOGY
OF 1 THESSALONIANS

Rejoice Always!

BY JAMES MARTIN

You would think that the book many Scripture scholars agree to be the oldest in the New Testament would garner a great deal of respect. You would think that a document written only 17 years or so after the death and resurrection of Jesus would be pored over by contemporary Christians. You would think that Christians would know, as with the Gospels, even the smallest verses of this document by heart.

Well, you would be wrong; St. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians is not well known.

Still, by common consent, it is the earliest of Paul's letters and therefore the earliest writing in the entire New Testament. Scholars say that First Thessalonians was most likely written from Athens or Corinth around A.D. 50. As such, it predates the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. And buried in the letter is a remarkable little phrase that upends the typical conception of St. Paul as a cranky, grumpy, depressive prude.

Pastoral, Warm, Affectionate

First a little history. Paul is writing to the Christian community that he had founded in Thessalonica, located in the Roman province of Macedonia, on the northern shore of the Aegean Sea. (Today the town is Thessaloniki, in northern Greece.) In this brief letter he encourages his fellow Christians to have confidence in the second coming of Jesus, which they thought would happen in their lifetime.

Unlike some of Paul's other letters, here the apostle is not responding to any heated theological debate raging within the Christian community in the region. Nor is he scolding his fellow Christians for some litany of

JAMES MARTIN, S.J., is culture editor of *America*. This essay is adapted from his new book, *Between Heaven and Mirth: Why Joy, Humor, and Laughter are at the Heart of the Spiritual Life* (HarperOne). Reprinted with permission.

PHOTO: GUNS/KAREN CALLAWAY

horrible sins. Instead, he is mainly encouraging them to lead holy lives. The beginning of the letter, in fact, contains generous praise of the conduct of the Christians in Thessalonica, who he says are an example to other churches in the region. This may account for Paul's gentle words. First Thessalonians, says a commentator in the *HarperCollins Study Bible*, is "pastoral, warm in tone, and affectionate throughout."

Now back to that remarkable phrase. Toward the end of his letter, Paul offers a triad of Christian practice. "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

You could spend a lifetime meditating on that one sentence. You could spend a lifetime meditating on just the words "rejoice always." But is it possible?

What About Suffering?

Realistically, what would it mean to "rejoice always"? First of all, it does not mean that you cannot be sad about suffering or that you have to ignore the tragedies in the world around you. But at first blush, Paul's words certainly seem to imply that. In his book *Chasing Joy: Musings on Life in a Bittersweet World*, the Rev. Edward Hays, a Catholic priest and popular spiritual writer, notes that Paul's words are challenged not only by sadness in our own life but also by injustice in the world. Rejoicing always may seem not only impossible but offensive. "To do this in our present world is extremely difficult," says Hays, "since the daily headlines overflow with the bad news...." Isn't injustice in the world something to lament, not grin about? "To confront evil with joyfulness instead of outrage," he says, "feels like the cowardly complicity of silence."

But Thessalonica in the time of St. Paul was hardly a paradise. Under the heel of imperial Rome, many in the town were living as slaves. Those who were free may have been poor, illiterate and unable to obtain what we would consider even basic medical care. The Thessalonians would have known the meaning of suffering. And the Christians among them would have known persecution, something that Paul alludes to in the first few lines of his letter.

So how could Paul ask them to turn a blind eye to the realities of life?

He didn't. Paul was pointing to something deeper. It is

easy to be joyful when you are happy. Or to be joyful during those fleeting moments when the world seems like a fair and

just place for everyone. But how can you be joyful in sad times and in the face of injustice? Hays offers a suggestion, "To live in joy is to abide in God who is love, and being an authentic prophet requires loving who and what you denounce."

Here I think of the example of the great African-American spirituals. This is not the place for a long exegesis on that rich topic, but we can say, in brief, that one of the most lasting signs of the great faith of the African-American Christians is the legacy of their spiritual hymns, pieces of joy in the midst of intense suffering. These are signs of confidence in God. As the African-American theologian James Cone notes in his book *The Spirituals and the Blues*, "So far from being songs of passive resignation, the spirituals are black freedom songs which emphasize black liberation as consistent with divine revelation."

Deeper Than Happiness

The joy of those songs, forged in the fire of suffering, continues. One of the most vivid memories I have as a Jesuit novice is being invited to a predominantly black church in the Roxbury section of Boston. Before this I had never been in such a church. Yet from the moment the choir began singing "Lead Me, Guide Me" I felt swept away in a chorus of joy. Years later I would experience that same ebullience in the songs of the choirs in the churches of the slums of Nairobi, where Kenyans would be packed shoulder to shoulder (literally) as they shouted out the words to Swahili hymns. What these two groups (descendants of American slaves and East Africans) had in common was not simply the color of their skin but their abiding confidence in God.

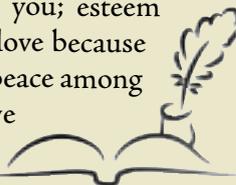
Joy, deeper than happiness, is a virtue that finds its foundation in the knowledge that we are loved by God. For Christians, the knowledge that Jesus has been raised from the dead is a constant cause for joy, even in tough times. This does not mean that suffering does not bring sadness. Of course it does. But suffering is not the last word—in Jesus' life or in ours. And that knowledge can lead us to a deep joy.

Just as I was writing this essay, I received some unpleasant

FROM ST. PAUL

But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

1 Thes 5:12-20





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medical news: I would have to have minor surgery in a few weeks—nothing life-threatening or serious, but something that I would rather not have to face. Praying about it the next morning, right before I was planning to write about joy, I realized that I wasn't feeling especially upbeat. But gradually, as I prayed, I realized that God would be with me all through this small malady and that God would give me the strength and intelligence to deal with it, to figure it out and to live with it, as God had done in the past in similar circumstances. That put me in touch with not only peace but joy. I can't say that I was happy. Or that I wouldn't have wished for different news, but I still, nonetheless, felt joy. This may be part of what it means to rejoice "in all circumstances."

As I've said, sadness is an appropriate and natural response to suffering. God desires, I believe, that we be honest about our sadness and share it in prayer with God. Knowing that God is with us, that God accompanies us, can lead us to a deep-seated joy that can carry us through difficult, and sometimes unbearable, times.

Likewise, "rejoice always" does not mean that we should simply "look on the bright side" in the face of injustice. The anger that rises in you over an unjust situation may be a sign that God is moving you to address that injustice. God may be speaking to you through your anger at what you see, through your disgust over what you have read, your shock over what someone has told you. (How else would God move people to action?) This is particularly the case when it is an injustice visited on another person, since anger over an injustice to yourself (rightful though the anger may be) may be tinged with selfishness and a sense of wounded pride.

An example: let's say you passed a homeless person on the street sitting beside a fancy restaurant and saw diners coming out, having spent hundreds of dollars on their meal but failing to give the man even a glance, let alone a few dollars or a kind word. You might be angry or sad. You would probably be moved to give the fellow some of your own money and maybe even spend some time with him. But you certainly wouldn't say to yourself, much less to him, "Be happy!" Witnessing the injustice, you would try, as far as you could, to lessen it. Out of such strong emotions and holy anger are born great works of charity.

Where is the joy, then? It comes from a loving trust in God, in the awareness that God is working through the compassion you feel, in the knowledge that God desires a just world where the poor are treated fairly and in the trust that God will help those who heed his voice to help bring about justice. So there is joy.

Joy, Prayer and Gratitude

One important key to St. Paul's suggestions is that all three parts of his triad of Christian practice—joy, prayer and gratitude—are intimately bound together. Let's consider how.

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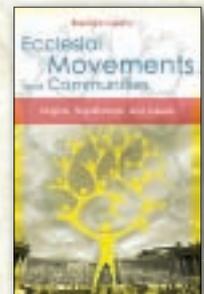
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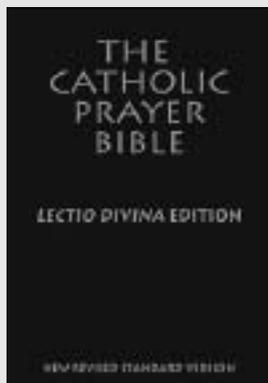
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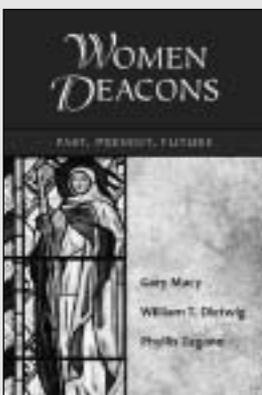
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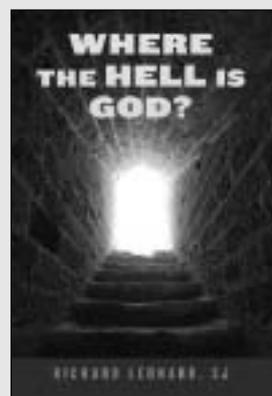
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Joy springs from gratitude. When we recall things, events or people for which and for whom we are grateful, our joy increases. Prayer also supports the other two virtues. A contemplative awareness of the world and an attitude of prayerful attentiveness make it easier to see life's blessings. Finally, joy moves us to gratitude.

Likewise, our gratitude over good news can lead to joy. Joy can also move us to pray. In our joy we want to be with God, to share our joyful life, gratefully, in prayer—just as we would share joy with a friend.

Thus, each virtue supports the others in a complex spiritual interplay. Prayer awakens gratitude. Gratitude leads to joy. And joy moves us to prayer. In this way, we are able to follow Paul's gentle advice to the Thessalonians almost 2,000 years ago.

Many modern believers think of St. Paul not as the Apostle of Joy but as the Apostle of Gloom. He is usually (and unfairly) characterized solely as a stern moralizer, intent on frustrating authentic human emotions, obsessed with tamping down human sexuality more than with recommending something positive. But here in his earliest letter, Paul is doing just that.

Of course there were other Christian communities that needed to hear sterner words. But to the Christians at Thessalonica, and to Christians today, the Apostle Paul advises three things. And the first of these is joy. **A**

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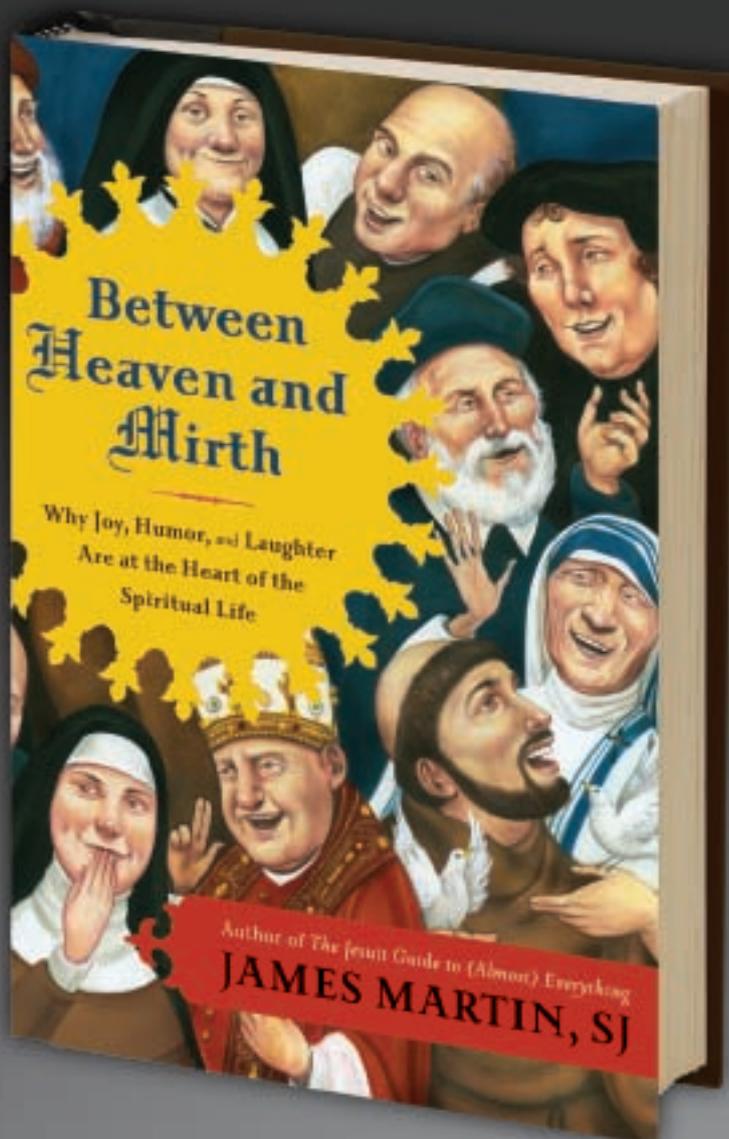
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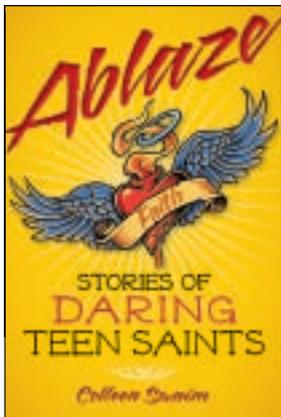
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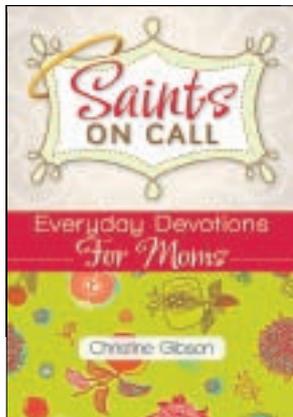
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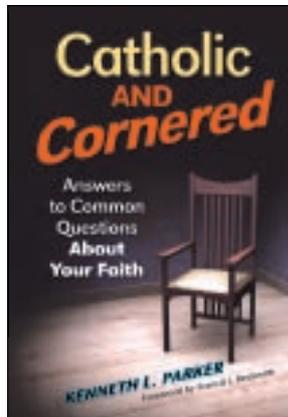
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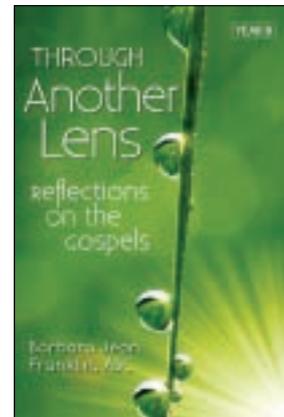
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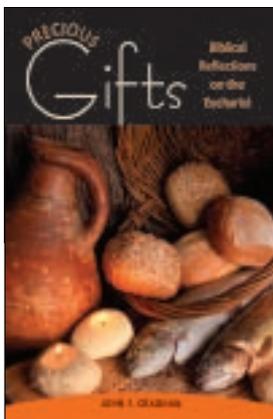
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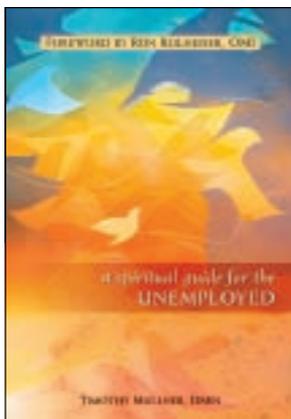
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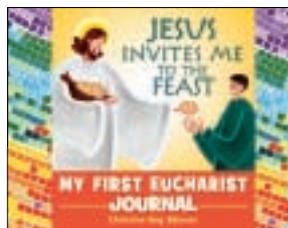
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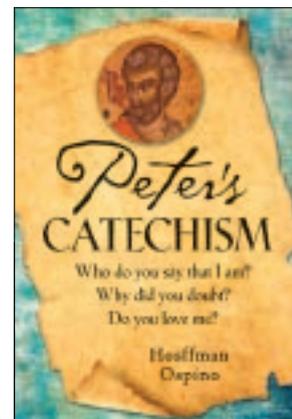
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American Exceptionalism

From a political theory to an article of faith

BY V. BRADLEY LEWIS

‘**A**merican exceptionalism” has become one of the most frequently heard terms in conservative political argument in the United States. That one might not “believe in” American exceptionalism has correspondingly become a serious accusation—so much so that many liberal politicians (President Obama among them) have felt a need to profess their faith in the notion as well. But just what is American exceptionalism? Why has belief in the exceptional character of the United States suddenly become a box that must be checked by candidates for office? Should it be so? What sorts of policies or conduct might the slogan promote in domestic and foreign policy?

The current prevalence of the term American exceptionalism suggests that it is deployed primarily as a weapon, a fairly crude one, in the ongoing culture wars. But it also sometimes serves as justification for an aggressive international promotion of American ideals connected to wars of a different kind. Its origins are more interesting and more complicated, and its implications may give us salutary pause in reflection as Christians and Americans.

The idea of American exceptionalism is not new. Its proximate origin is in the work of social scientists in the mid-20th century who were concerned to explain just why socialism had not caught on in the United States as it had in other countries, especially in Europe. America alone seemed to lack a serious and electorally viable socialist party, and the disputed ideological territory was notably narrower in the United States than in other countries.

An Egalitarian Ethic

These thinkers had a distinguished 19th-century and European predecessor in Alexis de Tocqueville, whose

V. BRADLEY LEWIS is an associate professor in the School of Philosophy at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.



Democracy in America argued the thesis (not entirely comforting to his European readers) that while the United States offered Europeans a glimpse into a fated democratic future, it was also a distinctive society with historically particular characteristics that made it quite different from the nations of Europe.

Foremost among these was the lack of a tradition of inherited status and hierarchy. This and its largely uninhabited territory offered the possibility of extraordinary social mobility, which served as a potent source of energy in American life. Not all the manifestations of this met with de Tocqueville’s approval, but by and large he thought it led to a more free and humane society. It seems an odd thing that a piece of social science should become a piece of ideology, but there is more to the matter than that.

One can add to these characteristics of American democracy the idea—going back to the earliest Puritan settlers and exemplified by the image of America as the biblical “city upon a hill,” which appears in John Winthrop’s 1630 sermon to the settlers still on board the *Arbella*—that America had a unique role in God’s providence. A secularized version of this seems to have captivated many of the founders. Some historians see it in the very first of the Federalist Papers, in which Alexander Hamilton describes the American political experiment as one of universal relevance for the future of all people: “It seems to have been

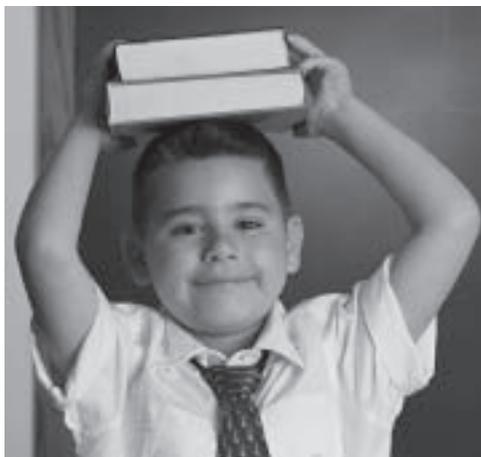
reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.”

A similar note was struck during the nation’s most perilous moments by Abraham Lincoln, who, in making a case to Congress for emancipation in 1862, called America the “last best hope of earth,” a phrase frequently repeated by conservative writers of late, albeit an odd one for any Christian to accept.

One notes here both a sense of American exceptionalism as a kind of datum, a way of empirically describing certain important facets of American political culture, and as the object of a kind of faith. American exceptionalism thus counts as both fact and value. But there is something beyond this; the new prominence of exceptionalism seems related to a new kind of worry in the new world about the old. Exceptionalism was originally associated with the contrast between a European society that was rigidly hierarchical, where a person’s destiny was largely determined by her origins, and a new world in which the present and future were always pregnant with liberation from the past, where one could achieve whatever one’s talents made possible in an environment of freedom and possibility.

The new emphasis on American exceptionalism is being made partly to contrast the United States with the postwar European project, which is now exhausted. It also has its roots in the worry that such a failure could become our own. The worldwide economic crisis of the last two years has hit Europe hard; and this, combined with Europe’s less flexible labor laws, extensive systems of entitlements and demographic near-collapse, has appeared to many as evidence of something more serious than a recession. Add to this the immigration into Europe of a large number of Muslims, and many Americans see not just decline but the last days of a great civilization. Across the board Europe presents an image of a future many Americans want to avoid at all costs. Doubtless, this anxiety is related to the continuing effects of the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2011, but the deeper roots of the notion in American thought give it a resonance that was clear in last year’s elections and will likely figure in the presidential campaign just beginning.

Comparisons between 19th-century Europe and the United States, however interesting they may be as history, are water long under the bridge. The implied comparison with contemporary Europe seems of much more importance. This is in one way related to what the founders thought. It has seemed to many that part of Europe’s problem is that it has lost faith in its own ideals and appears listless and indifferent in the face of its fate. The debate over



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the unsuccessfully proposed European constitution, which mentioned Europe's classical heritage but ignored its Christian past, was noticed in the United States, as are data that consistently show religion to be more alive and more publicly relevant on this side of the Atlantic. Americans have watched with foreboding the economic crises in Greece and Ireland. Moreover, German chancellor Angela Merkel's recent admission (followed quickly by similar statements from France's Nicolas Sarkozy and Britain's David Cameron) that multiculturalism has failed seems another significant sign. It is comparisons of this kind that transform the fact of exceptionalism into not only a value but also a slogan. Indeed, much recent U.S. discussion of Europe has a kind of Tocqueville-in-reverse quality.

Are Principles Destiny?

There is, however, still another and deeper sense in which one can understand exceptionalism. While national identity in most countries is cultural, a function of language and other traditions, America's sense of its identity is also crucially tied to principles, those of the Declaration of Independence with its emphatic statement of self-evident truths about human equality and rights grounded in nature and nature's God. Lincoln also described America in the

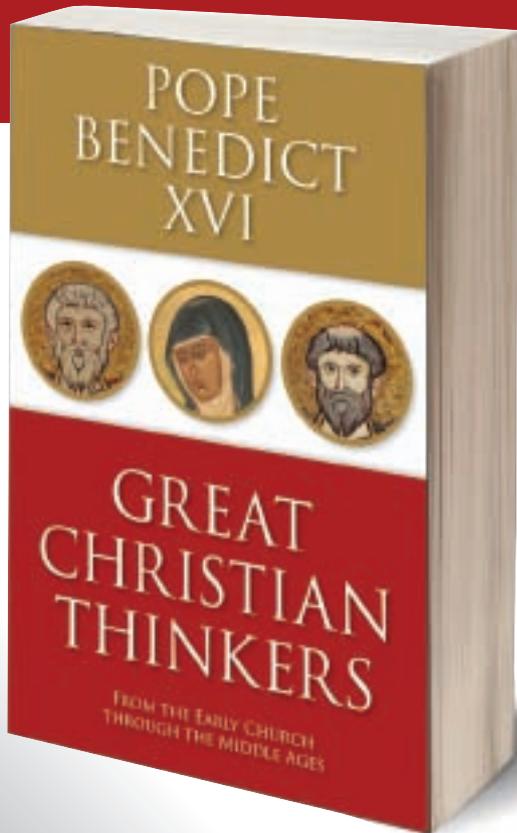
Gettysburg Address as a nation "dedicated" to a "proposition." This is a rare and significant thing. The proposition, that "all men are created equal," is not all there is to American political culture, a complex reality that, like our institutions, is always changing in greater or lesser ways. But the principle at the heart of the American regime functions to discipline and develop our institutions and culture.

The Declaration of Independence was central to the rhetoric of the civil rights movement and will account in no small measure for its ultimate success. It is also, in my view, central to the rhetoric of the right to life movement, as it should be. Of course, not everyone sees it this way, and that presents a challenge. The U.S. commitment to principles requires interpretation and continuing appropriation of those principles. This is a contentious process in which different parties argue for rival interpretations that must be continually reformulated, extended and defended. What it means to be a people dedicated to self-evident truths is less settled than one might have expected. Let me suggest an example.

The declaration affirms our endowment with certain unalienable rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." What does it mean to speak of a right to pursue happiness? It seems important that the right is not to happiness itself. What government could guarantee happiness?

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To make “pursuit” the object of the right might suggest a kind of agnosticism or relativism on the part of government, perhaps a neutrality toward conceptions of happiness. This has sometimes been either recommended or condemned as a good or bad aspect of the liberal political philosophy of the founders. On the other hand, one might take it to refer to the government’s commitment to securing for its citizens a kind of equality of opportunity or, as Lincoln himself put it in 1861, “to afford all an unfettered start, and a fair chance in the race of life.” But just what is required here is still under dispute. Some would point out that guaranteeing everyone an unfettered start requires a great deal of intervention that may ultimately be intrusive and unsustainable.

A third interpretation is distinct from but not incompatible with the second, because it can help one think about filling in or applying the second sense more concretely. This interpretation would see in the phrase “American exceptionalism” less a commitment to classical liberal political philosophy (understood as implying relativism or even neutrality, as seen in the first interpretation) and more a view of the institutions of government as essentially instrumental—a means toward the flourishing of the persons they serve and no end in themselves. Another great French thinker deeply interested in the United States, the 20th-century Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain, wrote, echoing St. Paul, that

“the state is for man; man is not for the state.” Similarly, Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his social encyclical “Charity in Truth” (2009) that the political common good is “sought not for its own sake, but for the people who belong to the social community and who can only really and effectively pursue their good within it” (No. 7).

This last notion is crucial and can bring us back to one of the early statements of American exceptionalism by Alexander Hamilton: “It seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.” While the slogan of American exceptionalism has sometimes of late taken on a kind of chauvinistic color, as a positive mandate to spread the American way of life around the globe, one can imagine it quite differently; and Christians in particular, whom St. Augustine called citizens of the “pilgrim City of God,” should do so.

While some have taken Hamilton’s vision as grist for the project of aggressive dissemination of America’s values and political institutions and demanded assent as a condition of participation in the debate, one can just as well interpret it as meaning that the fate of self-government in the United States may provide the world with lessons and examples apart from

American policy, just as it did for Tocqueville and in a different way for Maritain. In this view America is called upon by its exceptional historical status to be a model of self-government (including, among other things, self-restraint), and its status as a model is related to its history, to its place as eldest sibling in the family of political modernity.

The United States has shown and will continue to show the world something about the fate of political freedom. Americans should be conscious of this and even intend it—not through force, however, but by example. That will require serious attention to our own problems, financial, political, cultural and moral. The rhetoric of exceptionalism here is less helpful than a renewed commitment—thoroughly patriotic—to self-critical reflection on just what lessons the rest of the world takes from our culture, institutions and policies. This commitment would return us from the rhetoric of exceptionalism to reality. **A**

Then **Still.**

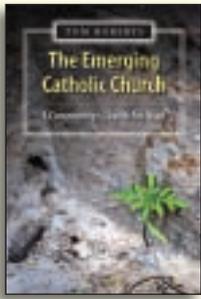
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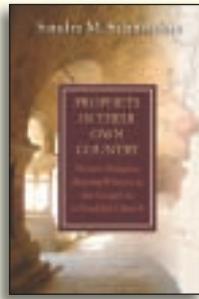
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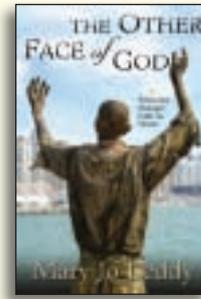
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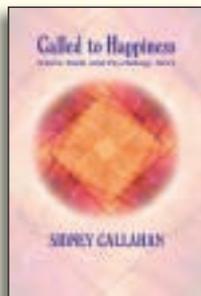
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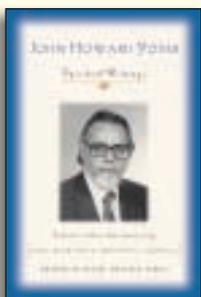
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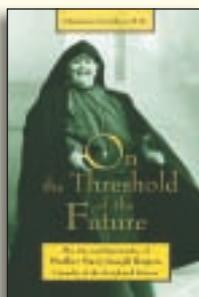
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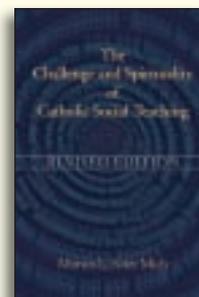
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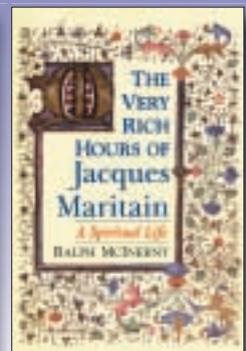
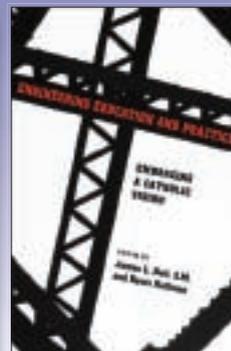
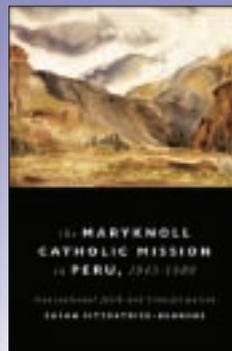
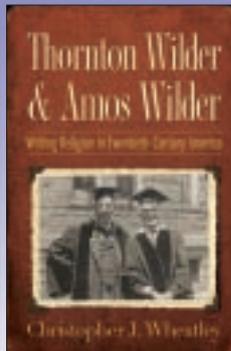
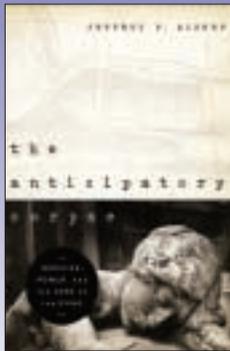
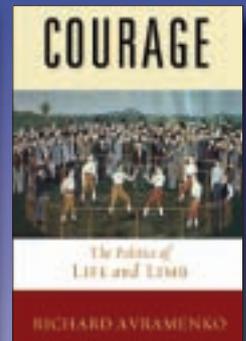
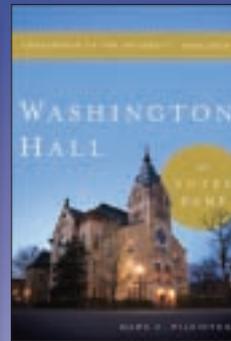
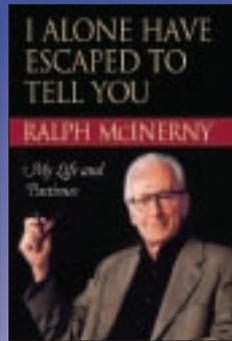
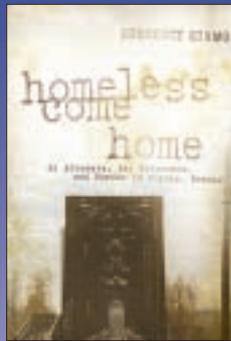
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FALL BOOKS 1 | THOMAS MURPHY

IN THE BEGINNING

THE IDEA OF AMERICA Reflections on the Birth Of the United States

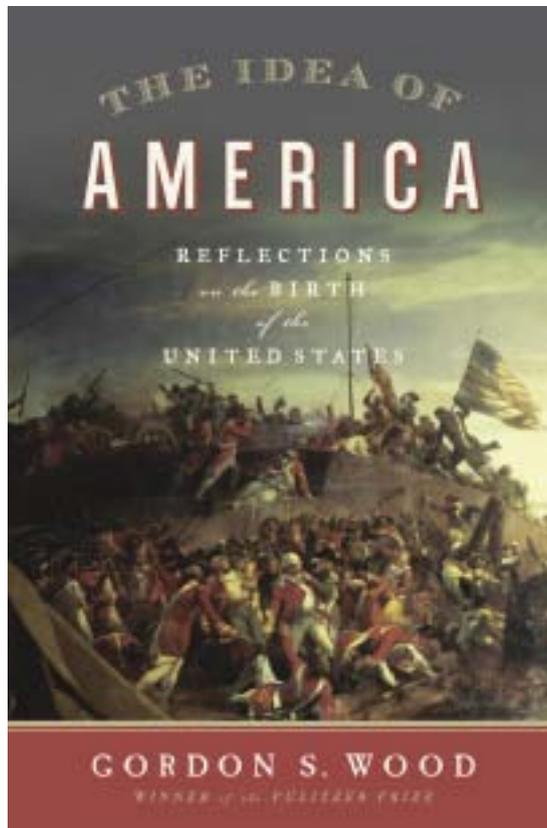
By Gordon S. Wood
The Penguin Press. 400p \$29.95

There is a discrepancy between the popular narrative of the American Revolution familiar to most Americans and its academic interpretations. In the popular understanding, a unified group of colonists heroically expelled the foreign British and then quickly agreed on a new plan of self-government that was an instant model for the world. Academic interpretations have stressed how divided the people actually were over the break with Britain and over how to govern themselves afterward. In this book of essays, the Pulitzer prize-winning historian Gordon Wood synthesizes the scholarly interpretations and then attempts to reconcile his own work with the popular understanding.

Three academic interpretations stand out for Wood. The Progressive thesis, named for a political movement of the early 20th century that opposed the concentration of wealth in American life, presented the Revolution as a chapter in a lengthy struggle between a populist majority and an elitist minority for control of society. The populists led the war for independence, the elitists created the Constitution, and the presidencies of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson solidified the triumph of the common man.

The cold war, with its emphasis on the need for national unity against the Soviet Union, produced a consensus school emphasizing the fundamental unity of the revolutionary generation.

The civil rights movement pro-



duced a third school, which emphasized the Revolution as a time of some cultural and social reform that nevertheless further marginalized women, native Americans and African-Americans.

Wood finds each of these theories to be flawed by some historians' tendencies to view past events in light of the pre-

occupations of their own days. The Revolutionary generation did the same, as Wood shows in an essay on its selective reading of ancient Rome. This habit, however, is unfair to historical reputations.

Wood insists on treating the American founders as figures of their own time. Consider his comparative essay on Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine. Jefferson's motives in advocating limited government are sometimes reduced to his wish to avoid the abolition of slavery. But Paine, an abolitionist, was one with Jefferson for limited government. Both belonged to a democratic movement that had enormous faith in the capacity of ordinary men for self-rule. Wood also agreed with Abraham Lincoln's observation in 1858 that Jefferson's writings on equality created a framework for later generations to use in addressing slavery.

The author's own view is that the Revolution extended beyond political upheaval to create massive social and cultural change. At its beginning America was a colonial society, hierarchical and patriarchal, and bound together by kinship ties and patronage relationships. At its end, what remained was an incomplete yet advancing democratic society that was much more egalitarian.

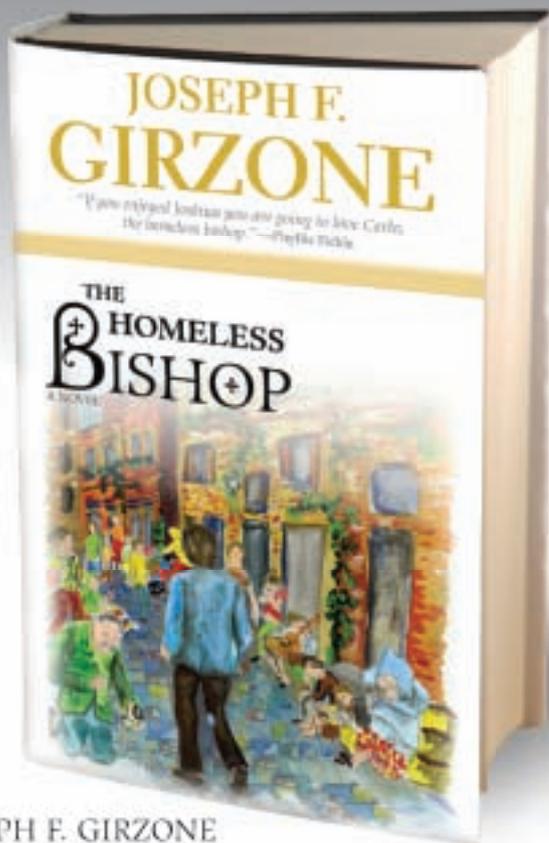
For Wood it is a mistake to take sides in political arguments of the past.

The better alternative is to determine why participants held the views that they did. Some scholars, for example, deplore a tendency of the revolu-

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JOSEPH F. GIRZONE,

a retired priest, is author of the *Joshua* series including *Joshua: A Parable of Our Time* and *Joshua and the Children*, which has sold more than 3 million copies.

tionaries to see a British "conspiracy" against colonial liberty, believing that such views are a sign of paranoia. Wood answers that the Enlightenment gave these people a belief in an underlying order to all human events. Nothing happened in human society unless some human will, whether malevolent or benevolent, was behind it. To champion chance was to undercut human reason and will. The Enlightenment may have emphasized human initiative far too much, but it did not lead the revolutionaries into mental illness or unreality.

Wood admires the anti-Federalists despite their opposition to the Constitution. He feels that they had a better understanding of future U.S. politics than the Federalists. The anti-Federalists understood that political conflict was natural and that it was generally not desirable to be disinterested in such a conflict. They were quicker than their rivals to understand that impartial figures like George Washington would be the exception rather than the norm in American life.

Still, the Federalists showed great political skill in the way they accomplished the ratification of the Constitution by reaching out to both the intellectual and the popular culture of their time. (If Wood has a bias of his own, it is that today's separation between academic and popular culture is deplorable.)

Also worth noting is an essay on the emergence of the U.S. judiciary as the defender of individual rights. Alexander Hamilton's conviction that judges would be best suited to check the potential tyranny of a popular legislative majority was a major change from the English tradition of presenting Parliament as the defender of rights and led toward John Marshall's vision of a powerful Supreme Court.

Wood argues that republicanism has survived in American life by absorbing some positive aspects of

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monarchy into the presidency, particularly the capacity to foster national unity, and acquits John Adams of the ridicule he has received for calling the United States “a republican monarchy.”

Finally, Wood shows why the Revolution indeed had the global significance most Americans associate with it. The world’s first Enlightenment nation was founded to

celebrate universal human traits, especially the thinking processes of sense and reason. This helped the new nation avoid tribalism, welcome immigrants and develop a humanitarian outlook. Thus arose the world’s capacity to identify with America.

THOMAS MURPHY, S.J., is a professor of history at Seattle University.

MICHAEL SEAN WINTERS

DEALING WITH THE DEVIL

POLITICAL EVIL

What It Is and How to Combat It

By Alan Wolfe
Knopf. 352p \$27.95

Alan Wolfe has written yet another book that should be required reading for anyone concerned with politics and religion and, most importantly, the estuary where politics and religion mix. In this book, Wolfe examines political evil and, echoing Hannah Arendt, argues that what political evil is, and how to combat it, are among the most urgent issues of our time.

Wolfe is one of the few writers who is as comfortable with Augustine as he is with Kissinger. He belongs to that rare breed of analyst who can combine historical analysis and philosophic insight and apply both to a survey of contemporary politics. He is unintimidated by the intellectual heights he has decided to scale in this book and suspicious of particular partisan or ideological blinders. Whether one agrees or disagrees with his arguments, this book should become the starting point for discussions of U.S. foreign policy.

The central argument of Wolfe’s book is that when focusing on political evil, Americans tend to focus on the evil and not the politics, and this tendency must be resisted. Denouncing

terrorists and ethnic cleansers as evil may be true, Wolfe argues, but it is not necessarily helpful. Too much focus on the evil in the world seems to demand absolute, Manichean views of how we should respond. This has the unfortunate consequence of depriving our foreign policy makers of a range of diplomatic tools that might more effectively bring political evil to an end.

The U.S. response to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, illustrates the problem. “The last thing the citizens of democratic societies should do in the face of terror is to allow themselves to be terrorized,” Wolfe writes. “Unfortunately, this is exactly what they do when they give their support to those leaders who claim that terrorism is a form of unreconstructed evil that must be eradicated from the face of the earth through the mobilization of military might.” The complicity of politicians is evident. For them the political value of serving as a focus of national unity in time of crisis is obvious and, in Wolfe’s analysis, led to the U.S. embarking upon two unwinnable wars.

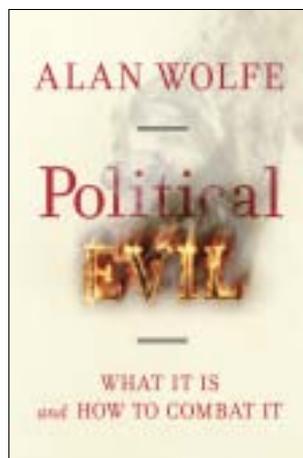
Ever since Neville Chamberlain

capitulated to Hitler’s territorial demands regarding Czechoslovakia, Munich has been a dirty word in foreign policy. Chamberlain’s appeasement in the face of radical evil contrasted thoroughly with Winston Churchill’s intransigence, and Churchill was vindicated by history. But Wolfe argues that Nazi Germany embodied radical evil, as did Stalinist Russia, and that while it was a mistake to negotiate with radical evil, negotiating with political evil is sometimes necessary even if it is distasteful. Not all evil contains the threat that totalitarianism contained, but politicians continue to invoke the specter of Munich to define contemporary foreign policy battles in ways that only tie their hands from finding real solutions to the political evil they face today.

Wolfe is a master at delivering a phrase that captures the essence of a debate without reducing the issues, or the actors, to caricature. “Those who plan and carry out political evil no doubt have malevolence in their hearts or malfunctions in their brains. But it is not their insides that ought to concern us; it is their acts.” “When confronted with political evil, we are better off responding to the ‘political’ rather than the ‘evil’... Fighting evil with evil contaminates, but fighting politics with politics does not.

“The best way to help political evil’s victims is to grasp why they are being victimized. We should not lose our heads just because people lose their lives.” Wolfe has a fine turn of phrase. One wishes he had been in a position to advise our political leaders these past 10 years since 9/11.

Nonetheless, I have two difficulties with Wolfe’s book. First, in his analysis of Augustine’s treatment of evil, Wolfe rightly states that Augustine wrestled



with the problem of theodicy by concluding that evil lacked substance. But the more important point of Augustine's teaching on evil is that evil is an absence of the good. When William Wordsworth celebrated the French Revolution ("Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive"), he dismissed "the meagre, stale, forbidding ways/ Of custom, law, and statute." He was wrong. Custom, law and statute are marks of a civilized and humane culture. The fabric of rules that can sometimes seem like so much of an encumbrance are precisely the kind of civic good that makes political evil less possible. Chaos is evil, and it is an evil that calls forth other evils. The accoutrements of civilization—the "meagre, stale, forbidding ways/ of custom, law and statute" are positive goods essential to human flourishing.

Second, Wolfe has kind words to say about what he terms "secular Calvinism." He writes that "secular Calvinism's great advantage is its ability to remind us to keep a watchful eye upon any political leader whose pretensions toward grandeur may lead

him or her down the path to political evil." Maybe I am too much of a stiff-necked Roman Catholic to give any credit to John Calvin. But I also suspect the Christian humanism of St. Thomas More contained similar but non-Calvinistic impulses that would provide a check on political hubris. Indeed, More's life and writings stand as a huge rebuttal against those who contend the Reformation was a necessary precursor to the advantages gained by the subsequent Enlightenment. I would have preferred an Enlightenment rooted in More's humanism over the one we ended up with.

Still, Wolfe's book is easy to commend. It is thoughtful, its range is extraordinary, its insights acute and its prose commanding. This is a difficult topic, and difficult topics require clear-headed thinking. Few people writing about politics and morality today are more clear-headed than Alan Wolfe.

MICHAEL SEAN WINTERS writes the blog *Distinctly Catholic* at *The National Catholic Reporter*. His biography of Jerry Falwell will be published in January 2012.

WILLIAM J. O'MALLEY

HOPE FOR A FUTURE CHURCH

WILL THERE BE FAITH? A New Vision for Educating And Growing Disciples

By Thomas H. Groome
HarperOne. 368p \$15.99

After nearly a half-century teaching religion, I found myself turning page after page of this fine book, saying—sometimes even aloud—"At last! Someone who really understands!" Thomas Groome realizes that in communication, no matter what the form, the crucial element is not the speaker, nor even the validity of message, but the audience. If the message is ignored,

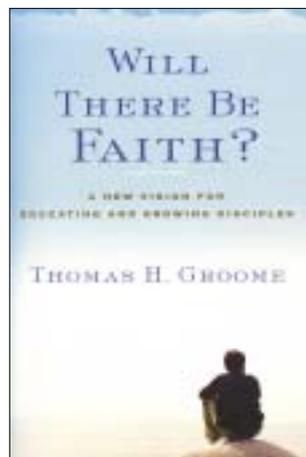
or even scorned, the fault is with the speaker, who has yet to find a method to connect meaningfully with the intended beneficiaries—like selling hockey skates to Bedouins.

As a theology professor in Boston College's Institute for Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry, with lifelong, hands-on experience reaching young people, Groome sees that the problem isn't with the

"what" (the obvious essentials of the faith) or even with the "how" (the catechetical methods a canny teacher uses to capture their attention). The innermost core of the religious education problem is the "why": How do we convince our young audience that the Gospel message is even worth bothering about? Why should they value forgiveness and resurrection when (1) guilt trips are bad for you and (2) their own deaths are so remote as to be unreal? He asks, will there be faith? Will our overprotected, overstimulated young find Christianity worth apprehending, owning and carrying into the future? That is a sobering—and very real—question.

Groome sums up the present "faith" of the audience, who could be the next generation of believers, as "moralistic therapeutic deism." They accept—as they were brainwashed to do—"a purely self-sufficient humanism" in which "people no longer have sins, but 'issues.'" What's more, they have not objectively more important, but surely more pressing concerns than connecting with some invisible God in a visibly imperfect church: SAT's, looks, popularity, wrestling practice, single-parent homes, sex. And he acknowledges—as few do—that Christianity is a "lifelong journey of conversion," which does not fade away with the final diploma. If celebrants and participants in parish liturgies are lackluster, it is foolish to believe the next generation will be attracted by their lethargy.

Unlike the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the bishops' new *Framework for High School Catechetics*, Groome's answer is completely down-to-earth, experiential, practical: From life to faith and back to life. Start where the audience is, their real-life preconceptions,



priorities, prejudices. Teach as Jesus did, from the bottom up, not from the top down. From the very first moment, find a focusing event to engage their attention, a concrete life-situation or a puzzlement that can lead toward the Scripture or doctrine. I offer an example:

Can you remember a time when someone was cruel to you? Tell us about it. How did it feel, in your gut? Now flip that: Have you ever done something casually cruel yourself? Were you aware the same pain was going on inside your victim? Now, in Matthew 25 Jesus says the only question God uses to judge our lives is by how kind we were to those we scorned. As Jesus said to the lawyer who provoked the parable of the Good Samaritan, "Go and do likewise."

Genuine learning begins with honest curiosity, or it is already so much easily forgettable chaff. Do not offer them answers before the question itself is intriguing. *The General Directory for Catechesis* insists that the one receiving instruction "must be an active subject, conscious and co-responsible, and not merely a silent and passive recipient" (No. 167). They should be trained not as sheep but as discerners, critical thinkers who become able to solve most quandaries without running to "the priest." All these insights are so obvious it is a wonder they are so rare.

The author not only develops a solidly reasoned theory for forming disciples, but each segment offers five concrete, practical strategies to engage families, schools and parishes with a generation baptized but as yet unconverted. Such concrete, specific schemes came to Groome not from theological research but from face-to-face grappling with the daunting challenge of offering salvation to those unaware

they need it. Who needs God when you have a cellphone? And unlike other attempts to direct that effort, Groome aims not for encyclopedic breadth of doctrine, but sincere depth of personal conviction in both the instructors and in the instructed—not just conformity, but conversion.

In order for all the worthy catechetical attempts by the church to have a

chance, every religious education director in the country—in fact, anyone with serious hope for the future of the Catholic faith in America—needs this book. Urgently.

WILLIAM J. O'MALLEY, S.J., most recently published *The Wow Factor: Bringing the Catholic Faith to Life (Orbis) and On Your Mark: Reading Scripture Without a Teacher (Liturgical Press)*.

THOMAS MASSARO

BLOOD ON OUR HANDS?

THE DEATHS OF OTHERS

The Fate of Civilians In America's Wars

By John Tirman

Oxford Univ. Press. 416p \$29.95

We recently entered the age of the fighting drone. The U.S. military now stockpiles and deploys thousands of computerized airborne drones of many sizes, from blimp-like contraptions to the aptly named Hummingbird, smaller than your hand. All undertake stealthy surveillance of enemy targets. The largest remote-controlled devices launch missiles with enough firepower to destroy vehicles and entire building complexes. We have been hearing about successful hits on terrorists delivered by drones for years now in places like Yemen, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

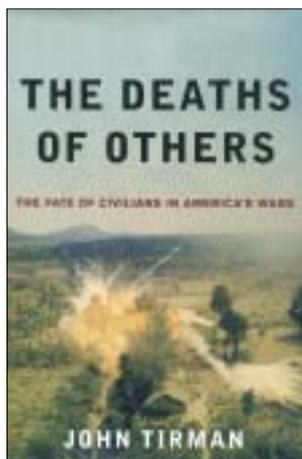
But recent media reports also recount disturbing instances of errant drone strikes that kill innocent civilians and even allies. The tactical advantages of unmanned drones (fewer U.S. lives in harm's way) are accompanied by new perils of missions gone awry, when highly touted preci-

sion weapons fail to live up to their promise. The challenges surrounding the use of new generations of drones prove to be not only technological in nature, but moral as well.

There is scant mention of aerial drones in John Tirman's stunning new book *The Deaths of Others*. For the most part, it focuses on much earlier events, with data-packed chapters on the deaths of civilians in World War II, Korea, Vietnam and the early years of U.S. involvement in Iraq.

But the analysis contained in its sweep through the history of American interventions abroad is directly relevant to our new age of drone warfare. The same ghastly dynamic has been at play time and again: powerful weapons, aggressive military strategies and rules of engagement calculated to save the lives of U.S. service personnel often wind up causing the deaths of many innocent civilians in the lands where these military conflicts unfold.

At the heart of this volume from John Tirman, a distinguished M.I.T. researcher in international studies, is that most Orwellian of phrases: collat-



eral damage. Surgical strikes and precision weapons are chimeras. Despite explicit provisions of Geneva Conventions that claim the force of international law, many nations fail to enact adequate measures to prevent civilian casualties during armed conflicts. Is it fair to call these atrocities and violations intentional? The answer to this pivotal question lies in a shadowy territory that involves matters far beyond actual battlefield conduct.

Tirman limits his analysis to the United States, probably a wise decision for a single-volume study, although comparison to other nations' war-fighting histories might prove illuminating. To explain why a generally compassionate, even idealistic nation like the United States so frequently fails to enact adequate civilian protection, the author delves into features of U.S. culture that will make many readers uncomfortable. One is the perennial raw nerve of racism. Prevailing negative stereotypes of Asians and Arabs

have played a palpable role in the framing of military rules of engagement that tolerated or directly caused great loss of civilian life in Korea, Vietnam and Iraq. The author supports his case by providing chilling investigations into the atrocities at No Gun Ri, My Lai and Haditha, each constituting direct and clearly unjustified killing of unarmed civilians by U.S. forces.

A more diffuse set of explanatory causes resides in even deeper recesses of U.S. attitudes toward the rest of the world. Drawing upon numerous social critics, including his mentor Howard Zinn, Tirman highlights a "frontier myth" that exerts great sway over U.S. policy even today. A resulting strain of American exceptionalism leaves little room for self-doubt and contributes to a political culture that too readily justifies reactive violence against perceived threats to the imagined proper order of civilization, or even a divinely ordained destiny. Relying on an analysis of cultural archetypes like this to

explain policy directions is neither an original contribution nor a stance likely to go undisputed, but Tirman lays out his strenuously argued case with considerable cogency.

Besides the author's documentation of the sheer magnitude of death-dealing in direct and indirect ways, the most disturbing revelations of this book pertain to how the American public invents ways to ignore the blood on its own hands. The key observations in this regard fall under Tirman's analytic category of "the epistemology of war." Of course, the natural inclination is to focus our attention on the loss of U.S. lives, though our war casualties are usually few compared with those of other nations. But our psychological coping strategies, defense mechanisms and willful obliviousness regarding preventable harm wrought to civilians in advancing U.S. objectives cry out to be exposed.

Most media outlets also avert their eyes, willing accomplices to our

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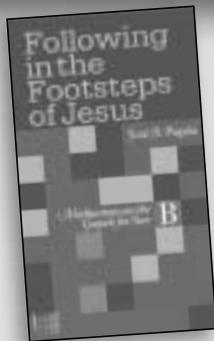


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endemic blindness. As if to reveal a glimmer of a silver lining in this dark cloud of a book, Tirman lifts up a variety of heroes (investigative journalists during the Vietnam War, public health professionals calculating credible body counts of Iraqi civilian casualties over the past 20 years of deadly sanctions and occupation) who display the courage lacking in most of us, who refuse to face up to ugly truths.

Tirman renders us great service by providing a fuller picture of the consequences of war and challenging us not to reject data simply because it is not congruent with our favored worldview. Admittedly, spending time with this book may obscure two important facts: that the U.S. military ordinarily comports itself quite commendably, and

that the American public is generally quite compassionate to the war victims it does acknowledge. But neither military practices nor public attitudes should be insulated from all criticism.

The advent of aerial drone bombers offers a new opportunity to reject unethical means, even those employed in pursuit of justifiable military goals. If Americans today marshal the resolve to enact workable norms ensuring that our use of drones will always discriminate between civilians and legitimate enemy targets, then we will at last be facing up to the crucial moral questions raised in this book.

THOMAS MASSARO, S.J., is professor of moral theology at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry in Chestnut Hill, Mass.

MARIE ANNE MAYESKI

JOY TO THE WORLD

BETWEEN HEAVEN AND MIRTH

Why Joy, Humor, and Laughter Are at the Heart of the Spiritual Life

By James Martin, S.J.
HarperOne. 272p \$25.99

This book ought to find a place on everybody's Christmas list this year, both the wish list and the shopping list. It is a book to be received with joy, savored and given. It reaffirms the fundamental mystery of God's love and redemption that is at the heart of the Christmas mystery of Incarnation.

The overall design of the book is simple and straightforward, characteristics that mark the best spiritual writing. The subtitle suggests the plan: *why joy, humor, and laughter are at the heart of the spiritual life*. In nine chapters and a conclusion, James Martin, S.J., distinguishes among the three and carefully but simply explores the theologi-

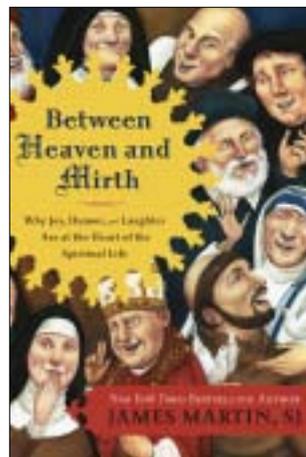
cal and scriptural foundations for each. In doing so he mingles scholarship, personal reflection, anecdote and jokes. He moves from the profound to the lighthearted, from God to everyday pratfalls with grace, taking the reader with him as he goes.

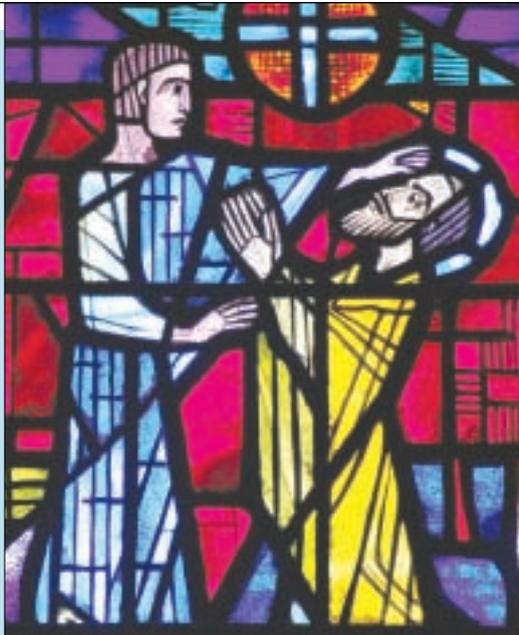
Martin confronts the issue of "religious seriousness" right up front (Chapter Two) and explores historically, if briefly, why and how so many people experience religion generally, and Christianity specifically, as gloomy and disheartening. He examines how, right at the beginning, the laudable goals of the New Testament writers tended to obscure the humor of Jesus himself, and he finds traces of humor in the Gospels and, indeed, in many of the

Old Testament writings that preceded them. He examines the thinking of influential early Christian fathers and explores the possibility that humor and especially communal expressions of joy were feared as subversive by the religious authorities, especially in societies where such authorities had secular power as well.

Chapter Three recalls the simple truth that joy is a gift from God. Here Martin culls some of the best-known episodes and sayings from very popular saints and adds others, saints and sayings, less well-known. Sts. Katherine Drexel and Teresa of Avila trade wise witticisms with Sts. Francis de Sales and Francis of Assisi. Pope John XXIII adds his own remarks, showing that he too had joined the long, illustrious line of those who made themselves "fools for Christ's sake." This leads directly to Chapter Four, "Happiness Attracts," in which Martin gives "11½ serious reasons for good humor." In spite of its whimsical title, this chapter points out the very important relationship between humor and the work of the evangelizer as well as the integral role humor plays in the virtues of humility, courage and hospitality. Martin shows the power of humor in the church's prophetic role, enabling the person of faith to speak truth to power and shock listeners into recognizing the realities of the kingdom, much as Jesus did in the parables.

In subsequent chapters, Martin shows the way joy gives us insight into our true vocation and how God might well be "in favor of excessive levity." By such levity God keeps us in our place, as it were, aware of the foibles and limitations of our humanity and our need for redemption. Again, such levity can subvert our personal tenden-





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A Passionate Voice for Compassionate Care

cy and the church's frequent recourse to pomposity, to the conviction that, as a church, we are more than God's instrument and wielders of an authority that belongs to God alone.

Almost every chapter of Martin's work unfolds the riches of Scripture. But additionally, he devotes three separate small sections to a more detailed commentary on a specific passage: Psalm 65, the Lucan narrative of the Visitation and Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians.

I have said above that his work is grounded in the fundamental Christian mysteries; but in fact Martin calls upon the wisdom of many religious traditions, demonstrating that however the divine reality may be encountered, God's presence is accompanied by joy. Not that he in any way encourages a Pollyanna faith, nor an unprophetic, which is to say empty, proclamation of the Gospel. Nor does he suggest anything like the popular message that if one believes firmly, all the goods of the world come magically to hand. Martin speaks of how joy can be present in small and large sorrows and even when we experience deep anger at injustice.

He could have done more with this theme. He speaks of joy's relationship with sadness at significant length; but he only affirms that God speaks to us through our outrage at the injustice we both see and experience. How joy and even laughter might shape the way we hear God's voice in the outrage calls for further exploration. But he ends with very practical examples of how to stimulate joy and laughter in our daily lives of prayer, work and relationships and how such prayer, in particular, might indeed bring us to understand what our righteous anger demands of us.

Many decades ago, when I stood at a turning point in my young life, I had a conversation with an older, very holy religious woman. We spoke of the possible paths I might take, and when the

conversation was over and I was leaving her office, she called me back from the door. "Remember," she said, "that God can shape you by great joy as much as by great sorrow." I have returned to her words many times in what has turned out to be quite a long life, trying to understand them in

changing circumstances and choices. *Between Heaven and Mirth* is something of a commentary on her sage, prophetic advice.

MARIE ANNE MAYESKI is emerita professor of historical theology at Loyola Marymount University Los Angeles and author of *Women at the Table* (Liturgical Press).

IDEAS | TIMOTHY O'BRIEN

TO SEE WITH GOD'S EYES

Mary Karr and the Ignatian imagination



PHOTO COURTESY OF HARPERCOLLINS/MARION ETTLINGER

In any conversation about Ignatian spirituality, the phrase "finding God in all things" crops up quickly. Although those precise words do not appear in the text of St. Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, the idea does; it is a "grace" that Ignatius

desired for those making their way through the Exercises. But while it is widely considered a hallmark of the saint's spiritual legacy, finding God in all things is not a skill most believers are born with. Nor is it an easy task.

Just ask Mary Karr, the bestselling

author, poet and practitioner of Ignatian spirituality. "I don't much care to see God in all things," Karr has written, calling it an idea that "doesn't innately appeal to me." When I met with her this summer in New York, I asked what she meant. "I want to find God where I want to find him. You know, when it's convenient, when I'm ready—like maybe Christmas Eve or Easter, where we've got it kind of taped off."

Karr's own writings show that God is not so easily managed. Her poem "Disgraceland" recounts how she "lurched out to kiss the wrong mouths,/ to get stewed, and sulk around." Meanwhile, "Christ always stood/ to one side with a glass of water./ I swatted the sap away." Eventually, Karr stopped getting "stewed" and took a different kind of drink: the water she had long refused. She converted to Catholicism in 1996 and, several years later, "made" the Exercises in daily life (praying with Ignatius' meditations while continuing her normal tasks, rather than sequestering herself for a monthlong retreat).

I spoke with Karr about finding God in all things not simply because she understands the Exercises but because she is a writer. Recent years have seen a surge of literary interest in what the Rev. Andrew Greeley has termed the Catholic imagination. Father Greeley's work followed the book *The Analogical Imagination* (1981), by the Rev. David Tracy, in which the author outlined two different modes of Christian imagination. The "dialectical" imagination, which he associates with various Protestant thinkers, highlights God's transcendence or separateness from creation. The "analogical" imagination is yoked to Catholic thinkers and stresses God's immanence or presence in the created realm—in all things. But how do we recognize it?

Ms. Karr has spent years—and thousands of pages, many unpub-

lished—looking for God in her own story. And a harrowing story it is, marked by experiencing a turbulent early life, surviving a sexual assault, coping with her own alcoholism and mental health issues and raising her son even as her marriage crumbled.

The Kindness of Strangers

“It’s horrifying. I wouldn’t recommend it,” she says of revisiting these memories while writing her three memoirs, *The Liar’s Club* (1995), *Cherry* (2001) and *Lit* (2009). “Still,” she continues, “I do think it’s what God wanted me to do and what I needed to do.” When I ask her where in these painful memo-

diverse places—spiritual and geographical. “My sister and I were stranded in Mexico,” she recalls, with no way back to their family home in Texas. “Then some stewardess and pilots just decide to fly us back because we need to go.” In these acts of kindness, in the fact “that people didn’t sell us into slavery”—she says with a laugh—and “that things actually turned out as well as they did,” she sees the workings of grace.

Still, writing honest memoirs demanded that she relive “devastating” memories. “I had to occupy that mind—that helplessness and dependence of a kid—in order to feel what was actually going on at that time.”

Paradoxically, in these places of great vulnerability, hurt and abandonment, we are closest to God—and vice versa. In such moments, as they are lived and as we relive them in memory, we find God in our stories. “It’s only in heartbreak that we turn to God,” she tells me. Elsewhere, she has written, “People usually (always?) come to church...as to prayer and poetry—through suffering and terror, need and fear—flaming arrows gone thump in the heart.” This idea, which runs

through her work, reappears even more starkly in a poem from *Sinners Welcome* (2006): “Only in tears do I speak/ directly to him and with such/ conviction.”

It was in moments of tears—especially when trying to get sober—that God found *her*. “Some of my Protestant friends claim to turn out of virtue. I don’t have enough virtue to turn.”

Beware the Stairmaster

Even if interactions with others can reveal God’s presence in one’s life, relationships can be places where God remains elusive. “I’m a peasant by nature, but I’m not a naturally democratic person. I don’t like most people. I’m a little bit of a misanthrope,” Karr deadpans.

“My natural reflex is that I’m being attacked,” she says. No doubt part of this mistrust is instinctual, the result of having been abused as a child. As Exhibit A, she tells a tale that has me suddenly grateful for the table between us: “I was once on the Stairmaster at the gym, and a friend of mine just touched me from behind—nothing untoward—and I broke his nose with my elbow.”

What about the difficulty of finding God in other people when our first instinct may be fear or suspicion? “My sense of other people as the enemy is a constant threat to my being able to love them,” she says. The only solutions, she has come to believe, are prayer and acts of love. The grace of prayer, for her, is “restraint of pen and tongue.”

Love is a verb, in other words, not a noun. “If you live in New York City, where it’s 105 degrees, I have to walk out of this apartment wondering where I’m going to be of service.” She tries to be of service, first to her students at Syracuse University, where she holds an endowed chair. Their phone calls are answered on the assumption that it may be “a call from Jesus.” She also ministers to women, especially those who have been abused or who are trying to get sober and raise children. Yet she is quick to note that this is not just a way to overcome the attack instinct but also a ministry to herself, a necessity of self-care.

In Sin and Salvation

Above the sink in Ms. Karr’s apartment is a familiar quotation from Dorothy Day: “Don’t call me a saint. I don’t want to be dismissed so easily.”

Descending Theology: The Resurrection

By Mary Karr

*From the far star points of his pinned extremities,
cold inched in—black ice and blood ink—
till the hung flesh was empty. Lonely in that void
even for pain, he missed his splintered feet,
the human stare buried in his face.
He ached for two hands made of meat
he could reach to the end of.
In the corpse’s core, the stone fist of his heart*

*Began to bang on the stiff chest’s door,
and breath spilled back into that battered shape. Now
it’s your limbs he longs to flow into—
from the sunflower center in your chest
outward—as warm water
shatters at birth, rivering every way.*

From *Sinners Welcome* (HarperCollins, 2006).
Reprinted with permission.

ries she sees God at work, she pauses.

“So many people just came and got me.” She recalls Walt Mink, a mentor and college professor, who first employed her and later even offered to adopt her into his family so that her tuition bills would be paid. Even after she left school, Mink’s support and care followed her. Others, sometimes complete strangers, also “got” her in

Though Saint Mary Karr's canonization dossier would prove a lively read—what saint muses about greeting God with “You amateur!” at the Pearly Gates?—we spend more time discussing the specter of easy dismissal. In conveying the search for God in the things of this world, Karr walks a careful line—neither devolving into pious pap nor alienating nonreligious readers.

“I want to speak in a way they'll be able to hear,” she says of her readers. For this reason her writing occupies a unique position in the literary world. Though acutely aware of a “certain type of church lady who doesn't like me,” she speaks convincingly of God to believers and nonbelievers alike. Standing astride the polarities of sacredness and secularity, she addresses both the pre- and the unconverted at the same time and in the same voice. Her task, as she sees it, is to write truthfully about the unavoidably religious world she inhabits, without alienating those who “don't want to hear about Jesus.”

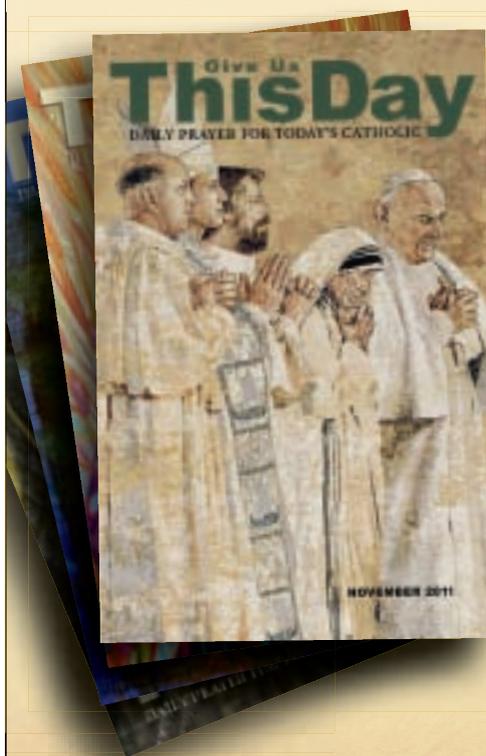
Karr's gritty—even coarse—stories of sin and salvation have an undeniable authenticity. She shows us that grace is not always graceful. But if God is to be found in all things, then it is precisely in these all-too-human tales that God is at work.

Returning to **America's** headquarters after our conversation, I waited for a walk signal in Times Square. It was one of the last places on earth I would choose to seek God. We were a noisy, sweaty, pushy bunch of human beings that afternoon. Yet it is precisely here that believers take up the demand of St. Ignatius to seek God in all things. Or, as Ms. Karr would have it, “to love the world the way God loves the world, or at least be present in it to try and see where God is.”

TIMOTHY O'BRIEN, S.J., a summer intern at *America* this year, is a Jesuit scholastic studying at Loyola University Chicago in preparation for ordination.

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LETTERS

Just Asking

Re the Signs of the Times item "Church Membership Trends Downward" (9/12): Total births from 2000 to 2009 in the United States did not fall, but rose slightly during the first decade of the century to 4,131,019 from 4,058,814. But the statistics are not broken down according to parents' religious affiliation. Some dioceses have reported dramatic drops in marriage rates as well, even though the average marriage rate in the region has remained stable or gone up.

Have baptized parents decided not to baptize their children in the church? Is it possible that parents as well as teens are not attracted by a return to the church of the 1950s? Are they dismayed by the church's increasingly obstructionist role in civil society—especially on health care or priests telling parishioners that voting for a certain person is immoral? Have parents heard that parish priests increasingly tell girls they may not serve at the altar? Do families with daughters question raising children in a church with so little respect for women and girls?

SOPHIA WEISS
Richmond, Va.

Almost a Member of Our Family

The review of "The Help," by Michael V. Tueth, S.J. (9/12), reminded me of my early years in Louisiana and the "servants" who worked at our family home. I remember the black "outside servant" who seemed to me at that age to be almost a member of our family. I could never understand why black people had to step off the sidewalk when whites passed by.

Like the child cared for by Aibileen, I experienced caring from the help and did not seem to notice their different color. No wonder Jesus said, "Unless you become as little children you will not enter the kingdom of God."

(REV.) JIM SCHEXNAYDER
Pacheco, Calif.

Child Starves, Penguin Saved

My God is not an angry God! But when I saw the picture of the malnourished 7-month-old boy ("Somalia Famine," Signs of the Times, 8/29) and then learned from this morning's news that Happy Feet, the penguin found wandering in New Zealand, was taken some 2,000 miles back to the South Pole, I presume my God is a puzzled God, saying, "What are my people thinking?" We have money and interest for feel-good projects, while our brothers starve from our inattention.

LARRY DONOHUE
Seattle, Wash.

No Rest for Flannery

In response to your editorial "The Universal Call" (9/19), I have no criticism of the process by which saints are canonized; I just don't know enough about it. But as someone who has devoted much of his life to studying the work of Flannery O'Connor, I wonder why her cause is not fast-tracked. The iconography is easy: her attribute will be a peacock. And while she can share in the work of being patron of writers and the handicapped with other saints, she can herself take on another class of people who need an advocate in heaven: adults who live with their mothers.

BRIAN ABEL RAGEN
St. Louis, Mo.

No Watered-Down Saints

Your editorial "The Universal Call" (9/19) smacks of the modern practice of making sure every little kid on the soccer team gets a trophy or of college-level grade inflation. Some achievements are simply hard. It costs a lot to attend medical school or to

become an Olympic champion or to excavate dinosaur bones. Some things are simply difficult and expensive, and should probably remain so, in order that they not be watered down to insignificance.

JOHN DRAKE
Columbus, Calif.

Join the Movement

The report in Signs of the Times, "Cardinal Meets With Reform-Minded Priests" (9/19), reminds me of the song, "The Spirit is a-movin' all over this land." Our mother church is witnessing a similar call to reform and renewal in so many countries. In

Austria, Australia, Ireland and now in United States as well, we are experiencing a call to deeper dialogue and genuine renewal.

Recently I was part of a group of 27 priests who met at Mundelein Seminary in Chicago to begin our nationwide group called the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests. We stress that we are canonical priests wishing to stay within the bounds and disciplines of the church, but we likewise call for a more open spirit of dialogue. We uphold the vision of the Second Vatican Council and prepare for its 50th anniversary in 2012. We hope that more witnesses will come

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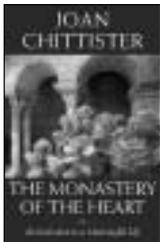
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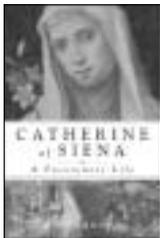


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forward, because the Spirit will genuine renewal, not just institutional stubbornness of "Oh, we will have to build bigger churches."

(REV.) BOB CUSHING
Coredele, Ga.

Immature Breeding The Immature

Re the Signs of the Times report "Vatican Calls Claims of Irish Interference 'Unfounded'" (9/19): The Vatican said the report brought to light serious failings in the accusations of sexual abuse but said the local bishop and his vicar general were to blame. Here again Pope Benedict XVI and his bishops refuse to take responsibility for the sexual abuse flourishing worldwide. Do these celibate men in the Vatican have any sense of shame at all?

As a Catholic physician who has met with many abuse victims, I am appalled that the Vatican is not willing to be held accountable for these abuses. There have been at least 19 bishops documented as abusers in the United States, according to bishopaccountability.org. It is sad to be a Catholic today and see our bishops acting as adolescents. Instead of allowing priests to marry, they keep seminarians in a psychosexually immature state. This has produced immature leaders who put protecting their fellow priests above protecting innocent children.

ROSEMARY EILEEN MCHUGH, M.D.
Chicago, Ill.

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Dressed for the Feast

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), OCT. 9, 2011

Readings: Is 25:6-10a; Ps 23:1-6; Phil 4:12-20; Mt 22:1-10

“Everything is ready; come to the feast.” (Mt 22:4)

Two different kinds of invitations came to me in the mail this week. One came by postal service. The paper was of rich stock, and the lettering was exquisitely embossed. It was addressed by hand with elegant flourishes. A stamped envelope was included for the R.S.V.P. The other came electronically, as an e-vite, sent to a vast list of friends and acquaintances. The invitation encouraged the recipients to spread the word to others. No response was necessary—one could just come and bring a dish to pass around.

In today’s Gospel, the host of the great banquet seems to have used the ancient equivalents of both these kinds of invitations as he prepared for the wedding of his son. When those who have received formal invitations are summoned to the feast, they refuse to come, even after two attempts by the servants. The king then instructs the servants to go out to the streets and invite everyone they find. They do so, gathering in “the bad and the good alike,” and the banquet hall is filled.

Matthew’s version of the parable does not highlight the status divisions between the first and the last invited. Nor are the latter said to be poor, crippled, blind and lame, as in Luke’s ver-

sion (14:15-24). Matthew does not elaborate on the excuses that the first invited gave, nor does he mention the necessity to compel the second tier of invitees. Instead, Matthew focuses on the profligacy of the host and the expected responses.

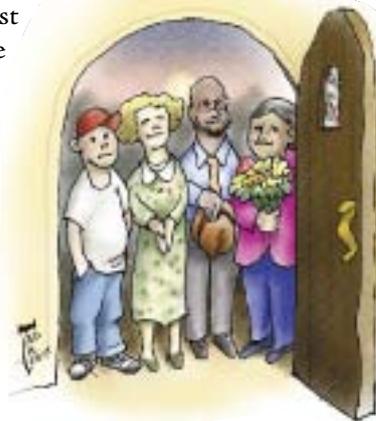
This is the third in a series of three parables directed at the religious leaders, who would be expected to be the first to receive and respond affirmatively to God’s invitation through Jesus. But these are not the ones who fill the banquet hall. Jesus, as the Old Testament figure of Woman Wisdom incarnate, calls out to all “from the heights out over the city” (Prv 9:3), extending an e-vite to any who are willing to “walk in the way of understanding” (Prv 9:6).

But there is a catch. One must come properly attired. In the Pauline letters we find frequent use of the metaphor of putting on clothing to signify the way of life one embraces. The Colossians are exhorted, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Col 3:12; see also Rom 13:14; Gal 3:37). Likewise, Matthew would have all the guests clothe themselves with good deeds and faithfulness, ever ready for the banquet. More is needed than just showing up.

The Matthean version of this parable veers away from parabolic form, as it becomes a highly allegorized sketch of salvation history. While the extravagant generosity of the king in opening the banquet hall to all is a most apt depiction of God’s invitation to us through Jesus, the vicious retaliation against those who killed the king’s

servants and the burning of the city are not depicting God’s doings; they are allusions to the killing of servants like John the Baptist by Herod and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. by the Romans.

As in other Matthean parables,



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Sit at the table of Woman Wisdom and ask her to feed you with insight and understanding.
- As you approach the eucharistic table, pray that Christ will clothe you with the proper attire for his eternal feast.
- Pray for one new piece of spiritual “clothing” each day this week.

where unresponsive characters are thrown into “the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth” (8:12; 13:42, 50; 24:51; 25:30), there is a warning here that refusal of the divine invitation has dire consequences. God does not inflict fiery punishment, but those who ignore God’s invitation and do not allow themselves to be clothed in the garment of Jesus’ ways of love and forgiveness choose for themselves a place at the table of retaliatory violence and destruction.

BARBARA E. REID

BARBARA E. REID, O.P., a member of the Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids, Mich., is a professor of New Testament studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Ill., where she is vice president and academic dean. Her latest book, *Abiding Word: Sunday Reflections for Year B (Liturgical Press)*, is a compilation and expansion of articles that first appeared in *America*.

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