MINISTRY ISSUE

America

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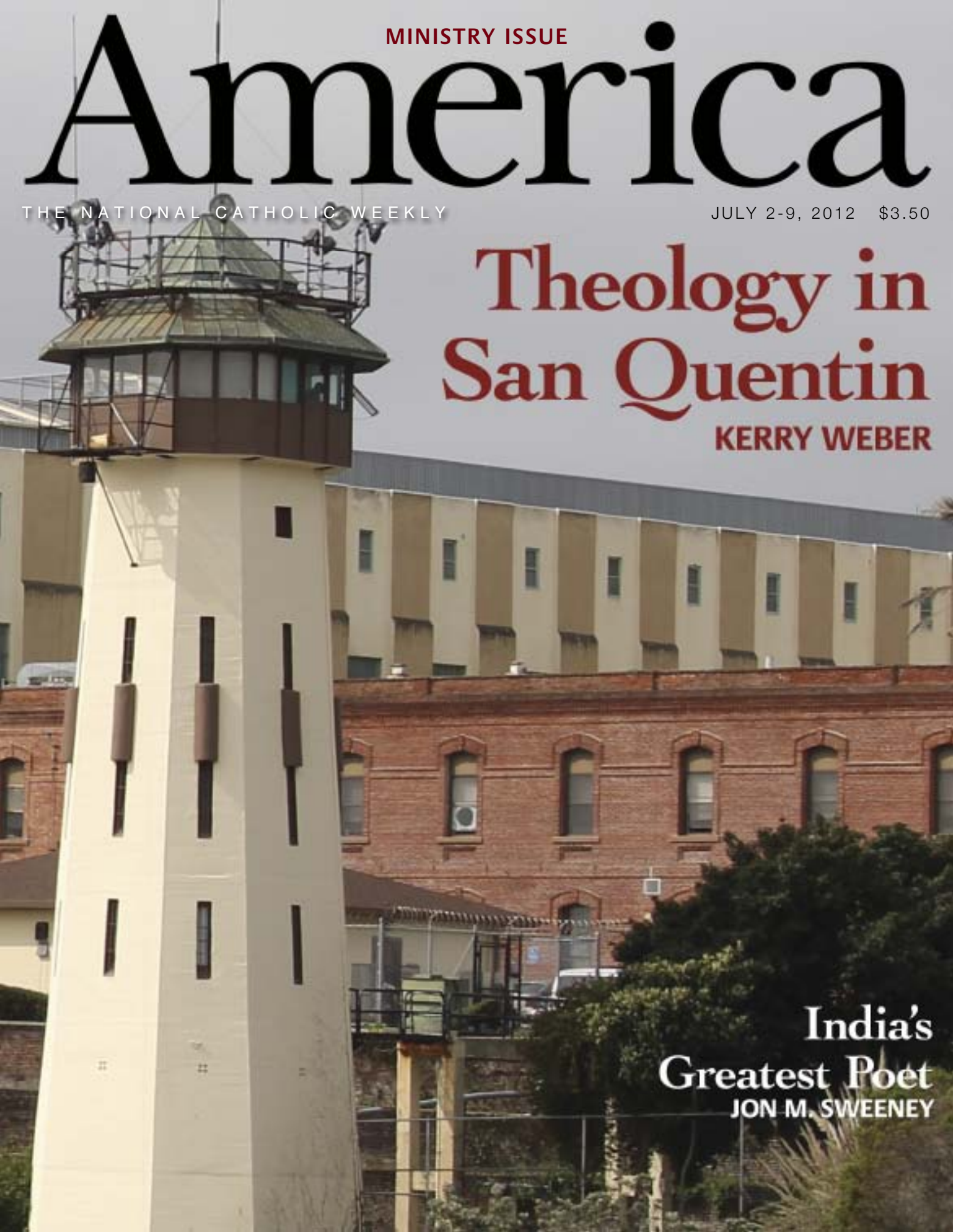
Theology in San Quentin

KERRY WEBER



India's Greatest Poet

JON M. SWEENEY

OF MANY THINGS

It began as a quiet walk on a sunny Sunday. Then I got entwined in an ever-widening circle as the shrieks became more audible. There, emerging from a gunnysack, was a 12-foot-long Burmese python, nimbly guided by its handler, but coming right toward me! Its khaki green and granite pattern was in sharp contrast to the blazing red azaleas behind it. Only in Central Park!

I continued my walk to my favorite vista: a modest shard of a space with a lagoon in the foreground against a stand of maples, elms and oaks, with the towering skyline of the city that seemed to be reaching up to the cloud-dappled sky. I sat and reflected on the beauty of the place and the calming effect that nature has on me. I was suddenly back on my grandfather's farm in Iowa.

A love of the outdoors has been a constant in my life. The summers and holidays spent on the family farm, my years as a boy scout and working my way through high school as a groundskeeper for a convent high above the Mississippi River all contributed to my kinship with nature. One day in my youthful adventures I saw a rattlesnake leaving my sleeping bag. I never camped there again. But the experience did prepare me for the python-sighting in Central Park.

As I reflect, I realize that many of my life-defining decisions were made in sylvan settings. The decision to join the Jesuits took place amid the vistas high above the Mississippi; to study theology in Europe was against the background of a sand pit in eastern Nebraska. And a Wisconsin lake-setting edged me to join the staff of **America**.

Wherever I travel I check out the landscape, the flora and fauna of the place, so to speak. When in art museums, fond as I am of 18th century portraiture, I first seek out landscapes—Fragonard, Bierstadt, Monet.

Occasionally I sit and review a mental Rolodex of my memories of natural phenomena: the density of a Brazilian rain forest, the majestic grandeur of the Iguazu Falls, the grace of a giraffe crossing the Serengeti, dusk descending on the Taj Mahal, a teal-colored sky threatening tornadoes, the teeming dullness of the Australian outback or the mesmerizing effect of miles of lush green Midwestern corn fields. I find great aesthetic value in creation. I often use these memories as background for my prayer and reflection. I find contemplation of nature's magnificence imparts peace and serenity.

Sometimes, of course, one can go overboard. I remember returning in the early '80s from a year in Australia. I had a wedding to bless in Minnesota, so I talked the groom into driving across western Iowa so I could be refreshed by the vibrant green fields. After two hours of corn, enough was enough, and a plane ticket looked pretty good.

Our very contact with nature has a deep, restorative power; contemplation of its magnificence imparts peace and beauty. The Bible speaks again and again of the goodness and beauty of creation, which is called to glorify God. The Book of Wisdom puts it this way: "For from the greatness and beauty of created things their author is seen." Nature is full of genius and full of the divinity.

In the Spiritual Exercises, St. Ignatius said God "labors" in creation; sustaining the plants and animals and us by breathing life into them. He compares the sustaining love of God to rays of the sun, constant and life-giving. And he loved stars!

As for me, I can be walking along a seashore, pausing on a mountain trail or smelling the fragrance of an apple orchard, and see that nature mirrors the ongoing process of growth, survival and transformation in its life and ours.

Shakespeare said it well in "As You Like It": "Our life finds tongues in trees, books in running brooks, sermons in stone and good in everything."

JOHN P. SCHLEGEL, S.J.

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Cover: The Arsenal Tower near the visitor entrance of San Quentin State Prison. Photo by Kerry Weber.

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ON THE WEB

E. J. Dionne Jr., right, discusses his new book, ***Our Divided Political Heart,*** and the theologian Kathryn Getek Soltis talks about **prison ministry** on our podcast. Plus, an audio slide show from **San Quentin**. All at americamagazine.org.

Young and Forgotten

In Chester, Pa., shortly after midnight one day in 1976, 14-year-old Trina Garnett, angry that her neighbor had not allowed her two sons to play with Trina, climbed into their house through a kitchen window and set it aflame. The house burned down and the boys were killed. Seven months later Trina was tried and convicted of arson and second degree murder and sentenced to two life terms plus 40 years in prison without possibility of parole. State law then allowed teenagers to be tried and punished as adults. The sentencing judge, according to Liliana Segura in a recent article in The Nation (5/28), called Ms. Garnett's case "one of the saddest I've ever seen" and expressed regret that there was no prison that could protect inmates so young and vulnerable.

The evidence that Tina was mentally unstable and should not have been held responsible was overwhelming. The youngest of 12, she could neither read nor write. Her mother died early and her father was a violent alcoholic who beat the family dog to death and made the children clean up the bloody mess. The children were frequently homeless. Trina had set herself on fire when she was 5, spent two years in a state mental hospital, was diagnosed as schizophrenic and was declared unfit for trial following a psychiatric evaluation. But a third assessment declared her competent. According to the law, her lawyer had no right to present mitigating evidence because she was not facing the death penalty. Early in her sentence at the State Correctional Institution she was raped by a prison guard and gave birth to a son, Rodney, who was passed to the care of her sisters. Today, 50, she suffers from multiple sclerosis and is wheelchair bound.

According to "The Lives of Juvenile Lifers: Findings From a National Survey," by Ashley Nellis (The Sentencing Project, March 2012), the criminal justice system has failed to protect child offenders who have been sent away not just to protect society but also to protect the children themselves from lives of violence and crime. Although the U. S. Supreme Court in 1976 found laws calling for mandatory death sentences cruel and unusual punishment, this right was not extended to mandatory life in prison.

In 1899 federal law recognized the differences in culpability between young and adult offenders and created juvenile courts in order, as the social reformer and Nobel Peace Prize-winner Jane Addams said, to secure the young offender's "orderly development in normal society." But the rising crime rate in the 1980s and 1990s, along with the growth of crack cocaine markets, increased access to illegal guns and the tripling of the rate of juvenile homicides led to calls for "law and order" toughness. States passed laws that tried teenagers as adults. Policymakers disregarded the evidence that developmental differences might affect a person's responsibility for a crime. Without a change in the law, the 2,589 prisoners now serving time for crimes committed as teenagers will die in prison.

On March 20 the U.S. Supreme Court heard two cases, Miller v. Alabama and Jackson v. Hobbs, of convicts who committed murder when they were 14. The appellants' argument: When the brain is 14, the sophisticated circuitry between the frontal lobe and the rest of the brain, which enables adults to control their behavior, is barely developed.

The Sentencing Project survey concludes that in many cases the offenders were doubly burdened: (1) by circumstances, like poverty, community violence, family members in jail, single-parent homes, sexual abuse, expulsion from school and the strong correlation between race and the imposition of the death penalty; and (2) by bad advice from counsel in court, where 66 percent of defendants took the option of life without possibility of parole rather than risk a trial that might lead to a death sentence.

One of the more damaging aspects of long incarceration is that, although the inmates may mellow in behavior, perhaps because they have lost hope to live in society, they stop growing intellectually and emotionally. Over 61 percent of juvenile lifers do not participate in rehabilitation programs. Although two-thirds have completed high school or a G.E.D. program in prison, lack of programming or inertia produce a long life of destructive boredom. The answer: Stop the practice of trying juveniles as adults; eliminate life sentences without possibility of parole for them and thus restore hope; encourage life-sentenced inmates to engage in rehabilitation programming; house young offenders with their age group until their 20s; and invest more in the local programs that successfully lower the crime rates.

One mentor described a Florida inmate who entered prison at age 15 in 1993. He became a poet and remained balanced amid chaos. But, his mentor said, the young convict felt despair because of his "fear of dying in prison, never having achieved any of life's goals that all young men think and dream about." The mentor added, "He no more belongs in prison than I do."

Union Sunset?

The "re-election" of Gov. Scott Walker in Wisconsin raises difficult questions about the health of democracy in the United States. It also offers new challenges to the members of what is left of the U.S. labor movement. The failed recall effort spotlights what will continue to be a problem in U.S. political life in the post-Citizens United era: finding a balance between legitimate political expression and the heavy thumb of money in local and national politics.

The Wisconsin vote suggests many reasons to be concerned about the fallout from Citizens United. At what point does the unfettered, anonymous flow of cash into unregulated "super PACs" present a terminal threat to the credibility of the democratic process? For all the talk of union muscle in Governor Walker's unscheduled rematch with Mayor Tom Barrett of Milwaukee, by the time voters headed to the polls on June 5, recall forces had been outspent by a jaw-dropping $27 million. And much of the $31 million raised to keep Mr. Walker in office came from silent partners outside the state in an election many national plutocrats considered a must-win showdown with the remnants of organized labor.

Because the recall effort failed, Governor Walker will continue to put pressure on public sector unions in Wisconsin, and around the country other anti-union office holders will be emboldened to follow his lead. Barely 10 years after what may prove to have been the height of their public esteem, after hundreds of them gave their lives on Sept. 11, 2001, public sector union workers have become this political era's "welfare queens": a largely mythological creature invented to agitate party stalwarts or turn the heads of capricious independents. Despite repeated allegations about compensation packages that grossly exceed those found in the private sector, analysis of comparable public and private sector positions shows negligible differences in pay and benefits. But those comparisons may ultimately miss the point. The problem is not that public employees are compensated too generously, but rather that private sector workers are buckling under decades of income and benefits stagnation.

What makes the union death watch especially galling, in fact, is how quickly fellow workers, overcome by pension envy, have been persuaded to turn on their union brethren. Their outrage might better have been directed at the relentless assault on the middle class within America's private sector, accelerated by the 2008 economic crisis and the breakdown in family wealth it caused.

Also disheartening has been the muted response of the church as this coordinated attack on public service unions, the last redoubt of organized labor, rolls on. The Catholic Church and the union movement stood together throughout much of the 20th century, propelled by landmark Catholic social teaching and accompanied by church leaders, from Cardinal James Gibbons to Msgr. George Higgins. Unions, often led by lay Catholics, have been vibrant expressions of both the spiritual and civic dimensions of Catholic social teaching. It is not an exaggeration to say this partnership effected profound improvements in the daily life of all Americans, raising standards of living and educational attainment and bringing decency and dignity to the workplace. Those advances have been gradually turned back, and they may fall away even further in this new century.

Middle-class and working-class people throughout the United States owe much to the 20th century union movement. It deserves better than to be served up as a scapegoat for a national economic crisis that has been cleverly exploited by forces eager to accelerate the demise of organized labor. President Obama sensed defeat and stayed out of Wisconsin, another example of his sometimes too-calculating leadership. The president should be mindful that a symbolic stand in a lost cause or two could prove beneficial over the long term, even when it risks political embarrassment. Mr. Obama played it safe, and now union members in Wisconsin properly feel betrayed.

But these public sector workers and others in unions around the country need to shake off the sting of this loss quickly. Organized labor must do a better job telling its story. It is losing in the newspapers; it is losing on cable; and it is losing in private conversations around the country. Union leadership might want to use this setback as an opportunity to reconsider its strategy. Perhaps less huckstering for the Democratic Party and more actual organizing might be worth considering before it is too late. Restoring historical ties to Catholic social activists and finding creative ways to connect with nonunion working people through new media also seem avenues worth exploring. A shroud is being carefully fitted for unionism in the United States; an uninspired union movement and feckless political leadership are helping thread its seams shut.

PHOTO: SIGN READS, "GOVERNOR WALKER, THE WORLD IS WATCHING." BY SUZANNE TUCKER/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Vatican Warns Against 'Green Protectionism'


Men collect recyclable materials on the last day of the Jardim Gramacho landfill in Rio de Janeiro. The dump was closed before the Rio+20 meeting on sustainable development began.

As the international community looks for ways to protect the environment while promoting development, it must keep the good of human beings and the protection of human dignity as its central goals, argues the Vatican in a position paper prepared for the Rio+20 U.N. Conference on Sustainable Development, scheduled for June 20-22 in Rio de Janeiro. The gathering will mark the 20th anniversary of the landmark U.N. Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, also in Rio de Janeiro.

In a position paper published on June 14 by L'Osservatore Romano, the Vatican applauds the "unanimous consensus" that has emerged around the notion that "protecting the environment means improving peoples' lives." But it worries that too often the international community focuses almost exclusively on technological solutions to environmental degradation and treats the problems human beings face as simply another set of technological challenges. In promoting an economy that minimizes environmental damage and promotes conservation and preservation, the Vatican warns, care must be taken to avoid "conditioning commerce and international aid" in a way that would become "a latent form of 'green protectionism' that would penalize countries [that] do not have access to advanced technologies and have economies heavily reliant on traditional uses of the environment, such as farming, fishing and forestry."

Another study from Catholic sources urges world leaders to act on hunger as they prepared to meet at the Group of 20 summit in Los Cabos, Mexico, on June 18 and 19. "Food Security and the G20," published by

U.S. BISHOPS

How Well Are They Being Heard?

During its meeting in Atlanta on June 13-15, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops reaffirmed by a voice vote a recent statement of the U.S.C.C.B. Administrative Committee on religious liberty, gave a green light to a new statement on the economy and wondered aloud if they needed professional help to better communicate their message to the American public.

The bishops have good cause to worry about how well their message is being received by the U.S. public, even about how well it is accepted by U.S. Catholics. A recent survey by the Public Religion Research Institute reports that 57 percent of Catholics overall do not believe that the right to religious liberty is being threatened in the United States today. Catholics overall also believe, with most Americans, that most employers should be required to provide employees with health care plans that cover contraception at no cost. And more than six out of 10 Catholics over all say that religiously affiliated agencies that receive federal funding should not be able to refuse to place children with qualified gay and lesbian couples.

In a presentation on religious liberty issues, Archbishop William E. Lori of Baltimore, chairman of the bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Freedom, acknowledged the U.S. bishops' "fortnight for freedom" campaign has come under heavy criticism in the secular media, in the blogosphere and by some Catholics as being a partisan political effort. But the two-week period is meant to be free of politics and will emphasize church teaching on religious freedom, he said. The fortnight from June 21 to July 4 will be a period of prayer, education and action aimed at explaining how the federal health care contraceptive mandate violates religious principles.

At the end of an hourlong discussion of religious freedom in the United States, Cardinal Timothy Dolan, pres-

Caritas Internationalis and Coopération Internationale pour le Développement et la Solidarité (C.I.D.S.E.), a European consortium of Catholic development agencies, argues that access to food is about more than mere nutrition and is linked to wider issues that must be addressed by the G20. The G20 is an annual forum for international cooperation that brings together the world's major advanced and emerging economies. Many worry that this year the continuing calamity within the Eurozone will steal much of the participants' attention, even as the global economic crisis wreaks further havoc in the developing world.

According to the "Food Security" report: "It is the right of all human beings to live in dignity, free from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. There are nearly a billion people suffering from hunger in the world today. In every society food does not consist solely of material 'nutritional' elements, but also social, economic, political, cultural elements connected to food use, production and trade."

According to the report, food security is the consequence of precise choices taken by many of those who hold power—for example, unfair resource access, unfair market conditions, unheard voices, unresponsive institutional environments, a lack of technical solutions that use local knowledge and failure to acknowledge the complexities of local conditions in global policy decisions. Dominic Foster, author of the report and the G20 network coordinator for the United Kingdom's Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, said the Catholic agencies were "calling for urgent and tangible action from the G20 to address the root causes of food insecurity." He said, "Poor and vulnerable farmers need to be given fair and meaningful access to markets, and the G20 is central to addressing economic structures that prevent this from happening."

The C.I.D.S.E. secretary general, Bernd Nilles, said the G20 has a particular responsibility to lead the fight against global poverty "since more than half of the world's poorest people live in G20 countries."

ident of conference, asked the body of bishops if it would be willing to declare its approval of "United for Religious Freedom," the unanimous statement of the Administrative Committee issued on March 14. Bishop Stephen Blaire of Stockton, Calif., who recently provoked media speculation about the unity of the bishops in this self-described fight for religious liberty when he suggested the campaign should be thoroughly reviewed by the conference, seconded Cardinal Dolan's motion. The statement was affirmed in a surprise voice vote.

Al J. Notzon III, chairman of the lay-led National Review Board, presented a report marking the 10th anniversary of the "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People." Noting both progress and the need for continued vigilance, Notzon said the church's credibility continues to suffer because many believe clergy sexual abuse remains at a high level and that local bishops continue to cover up the problem.

In his remarks to the assembly, Chaldean Auxiliary Bishop Shlemon Warduni of Baghdad made an impassioned plea on behalf of Iraq's dwindling Christian population and called upon the U.S. bishops to press the Obama administration to take steps to protect religious rights in the Middle Eastern country. "As leaders of the church in the United States," he told the bishops, "you bear a special responsibility toward the people and Christians of Iraq. In 2003 your government led the war that brought some terrible consequences. The U.S. government can and must do all it can to encourage tolerance and respect in Iraq, to help Iraq strengthen the rule of law and to provide assistance that helps create jobs for Iraqis, especially those on the margins."

A Minneapolis rally for religious freedom on June 8

Forced Abortion In China

The state of human rights in China came under scrutiny on the Internet after suspicions were raised about the alleged suicide of a labor activist and photos of a victim of forced abortion went viral. On June 2 a young woman from Shanxi Province was forced by China's family planning officials to undergo a chemical abortion at seven months gestation because she and her husband could not produce RMB 40,000 (about $6,400) in fines demanded because of their unauthorized second pregnancy. When family members posted a photo of the mother and the aborted baby, it quickly produced outrage across China. Human rights groups are also questioning the death of Li Wangyang, a union leader and dissident, who officials say hanged himself in a hospital on June 13. Family and supporters of Li, jailed for 21 years because of his involvement in the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, publicly challenged official accounts of his death.

Visit Report Challenged

Four Irish archbishops told the Vatican that a report on an apostolic visitation to the Pontifical Irish College in Rome contained factual errors. The four archbishops—Cardinal Sean Brady of Armagh, Northern Ireland; Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin; Archbishop Michael Neary of Tuam; and Archbishop Dermot Clifford of Cashel—were the college's trustees. They allegedly were criticized in the report as seeming to be "disengaged from college governance, with meetings, minutes, agenda and direct supervision irregular." The archbishops said that the visitation report "contained some serious errors of fact" and charged that it "would appear to prioritize its own view of orthodoxy, priestly identity, separation and devotion." They said its "harsh judgments on staff members" were "unsupported by evidence." The visitation to the Irish College in January 2011 was led by New York's Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan. Cardinal Dolan declined to comment on the claims, pointing out that the apostolic visitation process was confidential.

Step Toward Reform?

The White House will halt the deportation of as many as 800,000 young illegal immigrants and in some cases give them work permits, in a sweeping new initiative announced by the Department of Homeland Security. People under 30 who entered the country illegally or overstayed their visas when they were under the age of 16 will be immune from deportation if they have not committed a significant misdemeanor or felony and have graduated from a U.S. high school or joined the military. They can apply for a renewable two-year work permit, which will not provide a path to citizenship but will allow them to work legally in the country. Applicants will have to prove they have lived in the country for five consecutive years. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano said the move "is the right thing to do," and will help the agency focus on deporting criminals. "It is not immunity; it is not amnesty," she said. "It is an exercise of discretion so that these young people are not in the removal system."

From CNS and other sources.

NEWS BRIEFS

Philippine protest against U.S. troops

The **Philippines Ecumenical Bishops Forum** on June 11 criticized the possibility of more American troops arriving in the Philippines as a threat to the nation's independence and sovereignty. ✦ In comments filed on June 15 with the Department of Health and Human Services, the top three officials of the **Catholic Health Association** urged the administration to expand its religious exemption from new H.H.S. contraception requirements. ✦ The **Catholic Church in India's Kerala State** has adopted "Toward Green Meadows," a new conservation policy to help fight a "looming environment crisis," calling for the use of solar energy, rain harvesting and efforts to counter Kerala's widespread deforestation. ✦ **Kim Bobo,** executive director of Interfaith Worker Justice, will receive the 2012 Pacem in Terris Peace and Freedom Award on Sept. 16 in Davenport, Iowa. ✦ **Terrence W. Tilley,** chairman of the theology department at Fordham University in New York, received the Catholic Theological Society of America's John Courtney Murray Award for excellence in Catholic theology on June 9. ✦ The Vatican applied on June 13 to control the **new Internet address** extension ".catholic" and decide who is allowed to use it.

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AMERICA'S NAVY

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KYLE T. KRAMER

So Precious, So Fragile

A few weeks ago my wife called me with news that nearly stopped my heart. "Eli almost drowned," she reported about our 5-year-old son.

Eli had been wading around the edge of our pond with his 8-year-old twin sisters, intent on pulling out weeds and skipping stones. My wife, Cyndi, chatted on a cordless phone a short distance away. In the blink of an eye (which is all it ever takes, of course), she looked over to see the girls, both strong swimmers, stroking halfway across the pond. Eli, not yet a strong swimmer, nonetheless had a mind to follow them, and in those same few moments he had gotten himself too far out from shore.

Cyndi, also not much of a swimmer, kicked off her shoes and sprinted over. She waded in fully clothed and managed to grab Eli just as his floundering failed and he slipped beneath the dark surface.

Initially, I was furious that the children had disobeyed Cyndi's orders to stay on the shoreline—an anger I knew was fueled by my terror at what could have happened. But our crying, contrite children dissipated my rage; and for several days afterward, I stumbled around in a kind of dazed luminosity. Whenever our son flashed his wide, impish smile, I could vividly imagine us and the world bereft of that smile, and I could not hug him tightly enough. Whenever he cut loose with his ever-ready laugh, I could hear the terrible quiet of that laughter forever silenced. My gratitude that he was still among us grew deep and wide and tall, like a tree planted in full sun. I saw (and still see) with fresh clarity how fragile Eli's life is—and in that very fragility, how precious.

Since Eli's near-drowning, I have begun to discern the same pattern of fragility and preciousness everywhere I look, as if I finally learned a foreign language, and suddenly what had been gibberish to my ears became clear speech. I saw Cyndi's and my marriage, strong and resilient after 10 years, yet always vulnerable to the unkind word, or a pattern of neglect and "creeping separateness." I saw our farm, whose hay and trees and crops are in the flush of their spring vigor now, but which can be—and have been—grievously damaged by careless use.

> We should not hold on to living things too tightly.

I also see the pattern well beyond the close-at-hand circle of our household. Our nation's hard-won and vital democracy seems on the brink of complete hijack by moneyed corporate interests and intransigent politicians. Our church, the earthen vessel called to embody Christ's love in the world, is deeply and painfully divided, endangered as much by tribalism and a lack of charity within as by the "culture of death" without. Our planet's thin living surface, suspended between lifeless rock below and lifeless void above, groans under our insatiable demands on its resources.

Everything of real worth is also vulnerable, from the life of a child to the health of the global commons. Failing to understand this, because of distraction or take-it-for-granted apathy, virtually ensures we will lose much that we ought and need to keep.

I have thought, naïvely, that the main task in healing our culture lay in helping people come to see the value and vulnerability of all we want to cultivate and preserve. But Eli's close call reminded me that such an awakening, though crucial, is merely the first step.

Anger and fear were reflexive for me when we almost lost Eli, and my mind raced with ways to protect the precious, fragile life of our children. Should we bulldoze the pond, as my grandmother pointedly insisted when she was alive, or surround it with an electric fence, as my parents suggested? Keep the kids on leashes?

Perhaps a similar reaction undergirds the fundamentalisms of our day: we realize the fragility of what we hold dear but think the only way to protect it is with a clenched fist and binary thinking.

Fundamentalism is futile, however. What we are ultimately trying to protect is life itself—of children born and unborn, of a civic community, a church, a biosphere—and whenever we hold on to living things too tightly, we snuff them out, despite our best intentions.

There is a still more excellent way between apathy and angry fundamentalism. But it is a messy, mysterious, cruciform, paradoxical way: loving, but holding loosely; being grateful for all that is valuable and vulnerable, but giving it up into a much vaster safekeeping than our own.

KYLE T. KRAMER *is the author of* A Time to Plant: Life Lessons in Work, Prayer, and Dirt *(Sorin Books: 2010).*

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George Williams, S.J., with two students in a classroom at the Catholic chaplaincy in San Quentin State Prison in California.

PHOTO: KERRY WEBER

A Jesuit chaplain brings St. Ignatius to San Quentin.

Theology Behind Bars

BY KERRY WEBER

The classroom is small and lined with shelves filled with colorful books. A beige statue of the Virgin and Child sits in a niche, below a panorama photograph of Nazareth and beside a painting of the Last Supper. On a stack of metal folding chairs the words "Catholic Chapel" are stenciled in black paint. From inside the room, a visitor could easily mistake it for any other religious education classroom. It is only when one steps outside that the guards and the gates and the barbed wire that make up so much of San Quentin State Prison in California, become visible. It is then that you realize this is no ordinary classroom.

Each week, George Williams, S.J., stands in the front of this room wearing his priestly garb and collar. In front of him sits a group of up to a dozen men wearing another sort of uniform: the navy sweats, powder blue scrubs and denim jackets issued by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation. Once a week the men gather to attend Father Williams's class called "Introduction to Church Teaching." At other times, they might be there to attend "Introduction to Church History" or "Philosophy as an Introduction to Theology," or they might be in the next room, the chapel, to learn more about St. Ignatius Loyola in "Introduction to Jesuit Spirituality."

The classes are the brainchild of Father Williams, the Catholic chaplain at San Quentin, who was inspired by both the Protestant chaplaincy at the prison and the Jesuit schools in the Bay Area. When he learned that a local Baptist seminary was offering college-level courses for San Quentin inmates, Father Williams wondered why he had not yet taken advantage of the wealth of theology resources at area schools like the Jesuit School of Theology, the University of San Francisco and the Graduate Theological Union. He decided to create a program of his own,

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recruiting a few volunteers from the nearby universities as teachers. Each class is different, and each teacher is free to take his or her own approach. A majority of the students are Catholic and a number are interested in converting, but others attend out of general interest, including one Rastafarian, a couple of Buddhists and a few Protestants.

In his introductory course, Father Williams uses the DVD's from the Rev. Robert Barron's "Catholicism" series along with selections from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. He often pauses the video to discuss the topics with the men. He stresses to his students that he is not there just to teach them doctrine, but to help them to think critically and to approach the church with questions. And they do: What does the church think about the death penalty? How does the church explain the nature of God and Jesus and the Trinity? If there's a loving God, then how come there are places like this? "Use your brain," he tells them, "because God gave us brains and hearts, and he expects us to use both."

The pilot program, which began in February 2012, was designed to last 12 weeks, and Father Williams has been asking for feedback from the men in order to refine the program. He hopes the classes offer a chance for spiritual growth. San Quentin is unusually open to creating new rehabilitative programs for inmates and was receptive to the idea and grateful for it. The inmates were as well.

Like a Family

Johnny, 35, is a student in both the church history and Ignatian spirituality classes. He has a young face, a mop of brown curls and a crucifix and miraculous medal on a chain around his neck. Baptized in 2010, he has tried hard to learn about his Catholic faith, even working as an assistant clerk in the chapel in order to stay as close as possible—physically and spiritually—to the church. He helps fill requests from prisoners who cannot get to the chapel, sending them Bibles, prayer cards or rosaries. Growing up, Johnny was part of a nondenominational household but rarely went to church. After entering San Quentin, he began exploring the various chaplaincies. "It was always the Catholic Church where I felt most comfortable," he says. "Maybe that's because of the family setting here, with the Father and with Virgin Mary as our mother and all the angels and saints. It felt more like a family here than anywhere else."

In his 16 years of incarceration, he says the three months he has spent at San Quentin have been among his best. "The more I learn, the more I want to share with others," he says. "And the more I meditate on things I'm doing in the church program, the better I am at learning more about who I used to be and how I'm different now and what caused me to do what I did to get to be here."

Kevin, 37, is taking three classes sponsored by the Catholic chaplaincy. Incarcerated for 22 years and in San Quentin since December 2011, he came to the classes because he felt himself struggling spiritually and was not quite feeling himself. "Almost anything we do of a positive nature really helps, but when you're doing religious-based study…it focuses on your relationship with others and so it helps you to think before you react, and think about how you're coming across, about being more polite or respectful." Kevin can name a few times when another prisoner addressed him in an aggressive manner; but instead of becoming angry, as he used to do so often, he just bit his tongue. The other person eventually apologized.

Father Williams has found that his own understanding of faith has benefited from his discussion of Scripture within a prison setting. "I think there is something about being in this environment that brings the Scriptures alive in a way you don't get in a parish," he says. "Over at death row we're talking now about the Passion of Christ. Jesus was sentenced to death and these men are sentenced to death. There are so many parallels. Being arrested, put on trial—unfairly, in Jesus' case—and then sentenced to be executed and then being executed by the state. It's uncanny how you hear the stories in a different light here."

Raised in Oakland, Calif., Ed, 59, has been incarcerated for 13 years and in San Quentin for two and a half of those. He is taking courses in Jesuit spirituality and church history. As a cradle Catholic, he saw the classes as refresher

courses but soon realized their potential sources of strength. "I only have two things in this environment. One is my spirituality and my ability to come and participate in religious services. The other is my communication with my daughters," he says. "That is about all I have. The likelihood of my getting out is very, very remote at best." He has found comfort in the life of St. Paul. "Paul has been one that's been there, done that," Ed says. Faith "provides a wonderful escape from the environment we live in," he says.

More Than Their Crimes

Many of the men at San Quentin are serving sentences ranging from 15 years to life in prison for violent crimes. Father Williams says it is sometimes difficult to get people on the outside to see these men as more than their offenses. A letter arrived recently on behalf a man who will soon come before the parole board. He has been in prison 34 years, since he was 18. "How many of us are the same people we were in 1978?" Father Williams asks. "Given the chance, these men really blossomed as aware human beings," he says. "The other side of that is if you take a man or woman and throw them into a place where they're neglected and mistreated and shamed for 20 years, they're going to change, too, but for the worse."

The American tendency toward individualism makes it easy for society to disconnect from those in prison, says Kathryn Getek Soltis, an assistant professor and director of the Center for Peace and Justice Education at Villanova University, who also has served as a Catholic chaplain at the Suffolk County House of Correction in Boston. "Our theological understanding of incarceration and punishment has to take into account that [prisoners] are still full members of our community," she says. "There's no conception of the common good that can exclude people who are behind bars." Ms. Soltis argues that those outside the walls have a "heightened responsibility" to ensure that prisoners participate in the common good, to the extent possible. "Giving them the opportunity to see that they have the ability to do good is so critical to their human dignity," she says.

The theology classes at San Quentin help to encourage the inmates to realize their inherent self-worth. "This isn't just something people come to in order to hide behind the Bible or to try and find a way to let the board let them out," Kevin says. "Some of us have no chance of getting out, and yet we still continue to come here because we find the enrichment very fulfilling. We're human beings, and most of us come here with a sincere heart, despite any of the things we may have done in the past. And some things are violent and terrible. But not everybody is just an animal who is locked up. To be judged by just a small portion of our lives compared to the totality of our lives is wrong." Ms. Soltis said that her students, after tutoring prisoners,

often echo Kevin's sentiment: the inmates are human beings, not statistics. "The students' second realization is, 'Oh my gosh, I wasn't expecting them to be human beings.'" Ms. Soltis said, "It's a damaging assumption to be carrying around."

Visitors from the outside can help provide healing realizations for the inmates, too. Alan, 50, was baptized last year and is taking the Ignatian spirituality class. He says the classes have helped him to grow not only as a person but as part of a community. "It makes us feel like we're wanted, and sometimes in prison we feel a little bit out of the loop. When people come from the outside, it is just such a great feeling for them to be with us and pray and learn in the Catholic tradition." The classes have helped him learn to move on with his life as best he can. "I've learned about forgiving myself for what's happened with addiction and the causes that make us what we are today," he says. "But it's a struggle."

ON THE WEB
An audio slideshow from San Quentin.
americamagazine.org/slideshow

Seeing this struggle is one reason Father Williams chose to be ordained in 2004, after spending 15 years as a Jesuit brother. "If there's one thing in prison that people desire, it's forgiveness. And often self-forgiveness is the hardest part," he says. "I realized that the guys really needed confession, and I wanted to be able to provide them that sacrament because it's profoundly healing for the guys in here, and my favorite part of being here, really. In prison, that's where the rubber hits the road—in the reconciliation room."

Father Williams hopes that eventually the classes will earn the men college credit. "Prisoners are some of the best students because they really want to learn," he says. "A lot of them, for whatever reason, were not given the opportunity. They were told they were stupid, or they didn't have good schools, or there was so much dysfunction they didn't go to school." Once, a sociology professor from Patten University, in Oakland, Calif., brought her students from the outside to meet with the men to whom she had taught the same course in prison. They discussed issues around criminology, and Father Williams had a chance to sit in. He was surprised and impressed by the response of the inmates. "The guys not only had read the material and were reflecting on it, but they also had lived it," he says. "So they were bringing real lived experience to academic discussion, which you don't always find."

And the classroom experience continues to help with the way the men live their lives. "In here there are so many people who seem to be discouraged or upset or angry, and what we're learning from the church are ways that we can reach out to them," Johnny says. "You try to do for others first. That way you're always taken care of because while you're busy doing for others, God is taking care of you." A

Matt Malone to Succeed Drew Christiansen As Editor in Chief

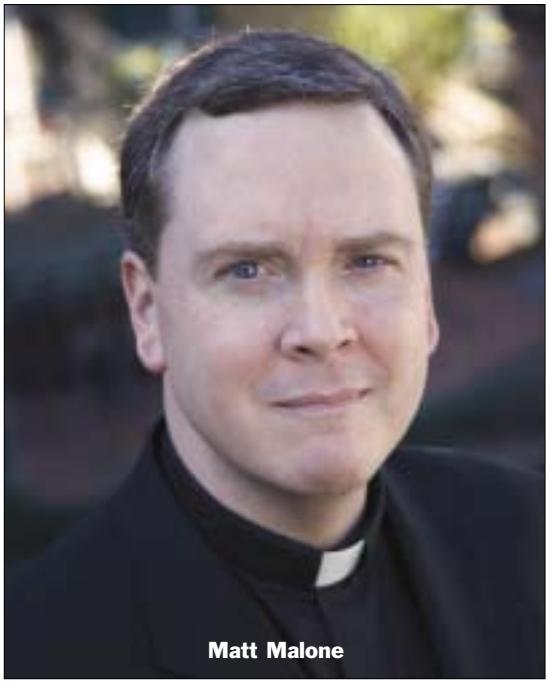
For over a century, **America** has provided a provocative and distinctly Jesuit voice on religion, society, politics and culture. That proud history continues as **America**'s board of directors on June 5 named Matt Malone, S.J., to succeed Drew Christiansen, S.J., as the magazine's editor in chief. Father Malone, 40, will assume his appointment in October. The board first approved plans for a transition at its September 2011 meeting.

Father Christiansen has served as editor in chief since 2005. He will be on sabbatical for the next year, serving as a visiting scholar in the department of theology at Boston College. Father Christiansen has accepted an appointment, beginning in January 2014, as Distinguished Professor of Ethics and Human Development at Georgetown University, with a joint appointment to the School of Foreign Service and the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs.

Father Malone served for two years as an associate editor of **America** from 2007 to 2009, when he covered foreign policy and domestic politics. He had earlier won a first-place award from the Catholic Press Association for a moving essay recounting his father's decision to forgive the man responsible for the death of Matt's brother Joseph in a drunk driving incident in 1984.

Before becoming a Jesuit, Father Malone served as deputy director of MassINC, an independent public policy research center, and as co-publisher of CommonWealth, an award-winning review of politics, policy, ideas and civic life.

He received his undergraduate degree from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, a master's degree in philosophy from Fordham University and a graduate degree in theology from Heythrop College in Great Britain and The Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium.



Matt Malone

"We are pleased to welcome Father Matt Malone back home to **America**, a place that is meaningful to him as both a journalist and a Jesuit. A talented writer and editor, he is uniquely qualified to help lead **America** into its next century," said Albert C. Pierce, chair of the board of directors of America Press Inc. John P. Schlegel, S.J., president and publisher, added, "As the 14th editor in **America**'s 100-year history, Father Malone knows he has big shoes to fill, and we are confident that he will exceed all expectations."

About his new role, Father Malone said: "I am honored by this appointment and grateful to be able to return to **America**. The publication has a storied tradition and is well positioned for a bright future. **America**'s mission has never been more relevant. Questions of faith and culture, democracy and Catholicism—the very questions that **America** has explored for more than a century—will continue to dominate the public argument. I look forward to continuing the conversation."

Father Schlegel also praised the contributions of the current editor in chief, noting Father Christiansen's leadership through a period of major transition, including instituting a new board of directors comprising Jesuit and lay trustees, expanding **America**'s Web presence and leading the publication through its centennial celebration in 2009.

Mr. Pierce noted Father Christiansen's important role: "**America** has always been committed to ideas and to rigorous and civil dialogue, and Father Christiansen championed both during his seven years leading the publication. From politics to social justice to foreign affairs, he challenged **America**'s readers to consider the most important issues of the day and, in the process, created a platform for faith and freedom."

Father Christiansen noted: "**America** has always played a key role in 'the broad middle' of U.S. Catholic life, and many readers have told us they regard it as a lifeline in sustaining their Catholic commitment. I wish Father Malone and the whole staff well as they continue the journey of **America**'s second century. Matt possesses the talent and experience to help take this Jesuit ministry into once unimagined space in the digital universe."

IDEAS | JON M. SWEENEY

PATHFINDER

Learning from India's greatest poet

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was born in the British century and lived half his life in the American century. Since the 21st century may turn out to be the Chinese/Indian century or the century of the global south, we will likely hear more, not less, about Tagore.

Last year, during the 150th anniversary of Tagore's birth, the West learned much about the "Shakespeare of India." He is one of the world's best-known poets, and in the East, the term poet still means something greater than a writer of verse. A blend of Dr. Seuss, Socrates and Shakespeare would only begin to approach the reach of Tagore in the Indian imagination. His work is studied by every schoolchild from Gujarat, on the Arabian Sea, to Kolkata, Tagore's birthplace, on the Bay of Bengal. In the United States, where there are more Indians than Episcopalians, and in Canada, where there are more Indians than Muslims, one can easily find millions schooled on Tagore's ideas.

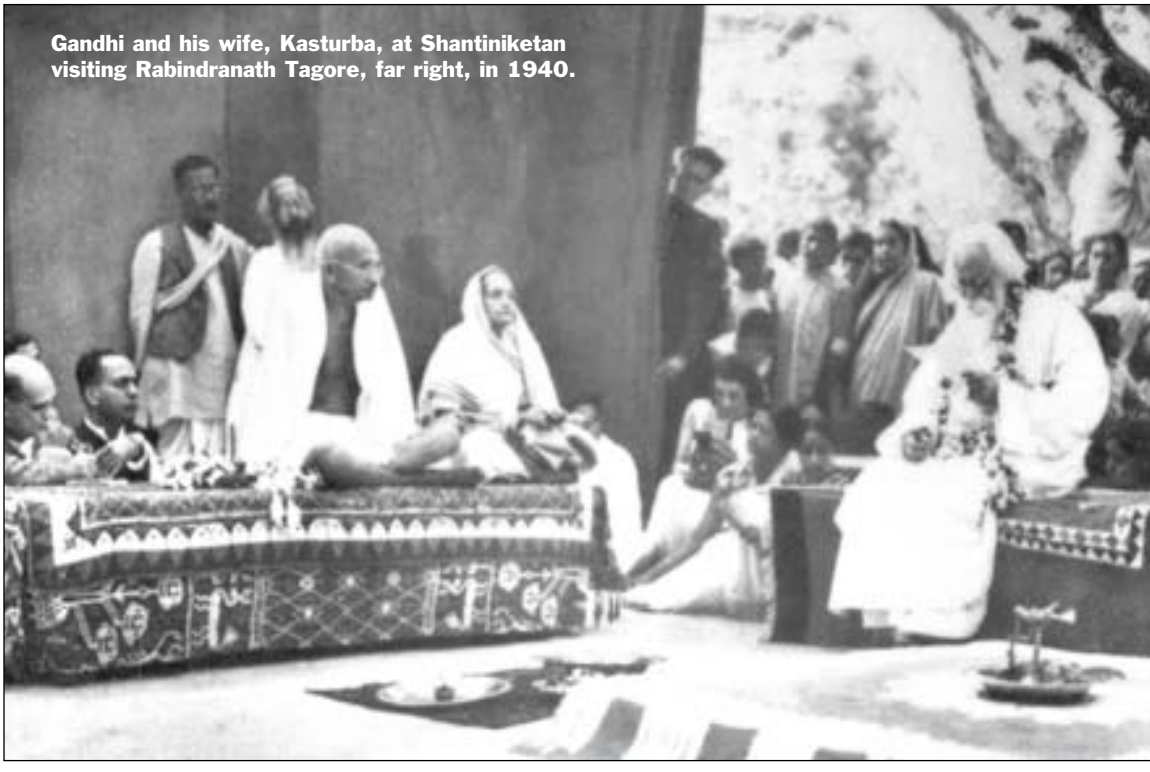
Primarily Tagore is remembered for his contributions to education, religion and politics.

As an educator, he created an alternative school that grew into a university. It was informed by what we now commonly refer to as the values of the "global village." His pedagogy was multilingual, multi-ethnic and multicultural. He valued all religious traditions and taught that all people could and should realize the wonders of "the expansion of the human spirit." This shocked the protectors of the caste system, in which he himself had been raised.

In religion also Tagore forged an original path. He built upon the broad possibilities in his native Hinduism, expanding the message of divine love and embrace to people of all faiths and backgrounds. He attempted to overcome barriers between people of faith. At Oxford University in 1930, he said, "The God of humanity has arrived at the gates of the ruined temple of tribe."

Politically, Tagore was a defender of Indian nationalism. But he often spoke against any nationalism that leads to separatism because his first loyalty was to humankind. "Pride patriotism is not for me," he once famously said. "I earnestly hope that I shall find my home anywhere in the world before I leave it."

Personally, Tagore grew familiar with death; he lost his mother while still a boy and later grieved over the suicide of his sister-in-law. When he was 41, his beloved wife, Mrinalini, died, followed by the deaths of three of his children, all under 10. His poems are



Gandhi and his wife, Kasturba, at Shantiniketan visiting Rabindranath Tagore, far right, in 1940.

PHOTO: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS/UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER

ON THE WEB

Select poems by Rabindranath Tagore.
americamagazine.org/culture

The Wedding Suit

She was from having to learn to read and write
before her parents did and then having to teach them.

She was from her father jumping out of the window
at 3:00 A.M. during Prohibition because the police

were chasing him, and from a mother who squawked
like a chicken when she was upset and who got kicked

out of shoe stores because she complained so much
about the way the leather stretched too tight over the toe.

She was from so many cousins in the house on Sunday
afternoons she lost track of which one was Virge or Paolina

or Marguerite, but she had the one very special cousin,
Tootsie, who was like her sister, but who died from TB

when they were both only 20, and whose death
she never fully forgave, even though she was from rosaries

and novenas and suffering on the cross and offering
it up. She was from getting married on a Thursday morning

in a gray suit, not a wedding dress, because 31 was too old
back then to be a real bride. And she was from a wedding breakfast

at her cousin Nazzi's bar on Canal Street and from a husband
who farmed acres of strawberries and eggplant and spent

more time planting and pulling weeds, and walking the rows,
singing *c'e la luna mezz'o mare* than he did in the house talking

with her, and who dropped dead one Easter Monday,
when the children were still too young to have a dead father

and she was too young to have a dead husband.
And she was from having to learn to live alone and hating it

because the house was even noisier now with all that silence
and she could not bear to live in all the clatter.

SUSAN BUCCI MOCKLER

SUSAN BUCCI MOCKLER *teaches composition and is a poet in the schools in Arlington, Virginia. Her collection of poems,* Noisy Souls, *was published by Finishing Line Press in 2010. This poem was the first runner-up in the Foley Poetry Contest of 2012.*

full of searching for love, dwelling in darkness and offerings of everyday moments to God.

More than a poet and educator, Tagore was also a novelist, a playwright, a musician, a social reformer, a visual artist, a philosopher and the author of hundreds of short stories and morality tales. His verses are sung as the national anthems of India and Bangladesh. A polymath from a wealthy Brahmin family, he used much of his wealth to create Western-inspired educational systems for the children of India. He traveled in the West to learn how East and West might create a sustainable future together.

Tagore's intellectual path was similar to that of his contemporary, Mohandas Gandhi. Both men traveled to England as teenagers. After taking classes at the University of London in English literature, Tagore said he felt East and West meeting in friendship inside of him. He spent the next decade in rural East Bengal managing his family's estates. There he began to eschew his aristocratic lifestyle, becoming his country's most innovative social reformer and educator. He did this by making art that was accessible to the average Indian and by writing novels, like *Home and the World*, and plays, like "The Immovable," that revealed the corrupt influence the religious elite can have on politics.

Both Tagore and Gandhi were deeply religious men. But Tagore shared neither Gandhi's asceticism nor his view that asceticism would somehow save the poor and oppressed in Indian society. The two men debated important issues, including the purpose of war and how India might best gain independence. Early on, Tagore criticized the spiritualizing of Gandhi's principle of *satyagraha*, or passive resistance, writing: "Passive resistance is a force which is not, in itself, necessarily moral. It can be used against truth as well as for it." The notion that the current generations of

living Indians should sacrifice their educations, their families, their very lives for the cause of *satyagraha* was never acceptable to Tagore.

W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and others trumpeted Tagore's writings; they had heard his public readings in London after the 1912 publication of *Gitanjali: Song Offerings*. Still, Tagore was rarely understood in the West. He lectured often in the United States, but Americans, seeing the poet's flowing beard as he read his mystical verse, regarded him as one who had just stepped out of a Bengali forest. *Gitanjali*, still in print and widely read, sounds as if phrases were lifted directly from the King James Bible. "Here is thy footstool," one verse begins. "Thou hast made me endless," begins another. In translating his own work, Tagore retained constructions that were older, hence alluring. The book became a bestseller because the language was more, not less, florid and fantastic than the contemporary idiom. In 1913, to the surprise of the world's literati, Tagore was named the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize for Literature.

He lived to see his homeland on the cusp of independence, something Tagore had spent much of a century working for, but he was a citizen of more than India.

Though Tagore lived through World War I and witnessed some devastations of the next war, he could see beyond the violent destruction. In his final public lecture on April 14, 1941, Tagore said: "As I look around I see the crumbling ruins of a proud civilization strewn like a vast heap of futility. And yet I shall not commit the grievous sin of losing faith in Man. I would rather look forward to the opening of a new chapter in his history after the cataclysm is over and the atmosphere rendered clean with the spirit of service and sacrifice."

His values and worldview still resonate for those who seek to bring about the kingdom of God. For Tagore urged being conscious of the ways the natural, human and divine world commingle; developing a sense of wonder that lives beyond childhood; and holding within ourselves the kinship of all other human beings.

Today, one most easily finds Tagore's books in New Age shops. But that is unfortunate, for he was a realist and a lover of truth. Embracing the world while standing with both feet firmly planted among his native people earned him the reputation of a prophet. More important, Tagore was a profoundly human being.

JON M. SWEENEY *is an author of many books, including* The Pope Who Quit: A True Medieval Tale of Mystery, Death, and Salvation *(Image, 2012).*

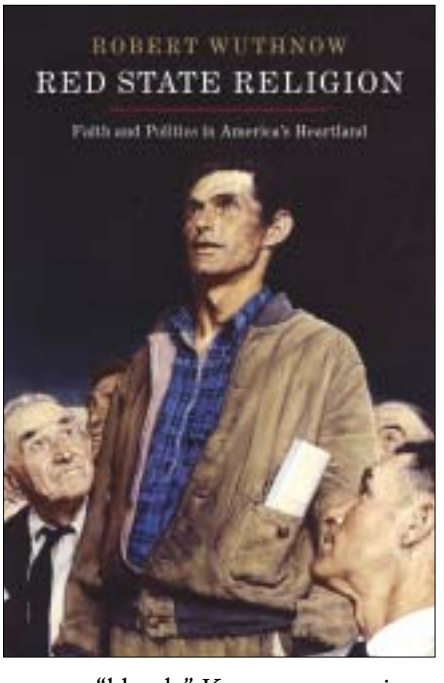
JOHN A. COLEMAN

THE MATTER WITH KANSAS

RED STATE RELIGION
Faith and Politics In America's Heartland

By Robert Wuthnow
Princeton University Press. 484p. $35

Abraham Lincoln delivered a stirring speech about slavery at a Methodist church in Atchison, Kan., in 1859. Congregational preachers migrated



west to "bloody" Kansas to urge it to vote to become a slave-free state. It did so in its constitutional convention of 1859. In that Constitution, the drafters stated: "Kansans were grateful to Almighty God for our civil and religious privileges." Kansas has voted Republican more than any other state in the union, voting for a Democratic president only four times since 1861 (1896, for William Jennings Bryan; 1932 and 1936, for Franklin Roosevelt; 1964, for Lyndon Johnson). Although it has elected Democrats as governor or to the House of Representatives or Senate on regular occasions, almost 70 percent of all its elected officials have been Republicans. But that party also has never been a monolith in Kansas.

In 1896 William Allan White, the sage of Emporia and Pulitzer Prize winning journalist, wrote his famous essay: "What Is the Matter With Kansas?" Allen, a progressive Republican and close friend of Teddy Roosevelt, was complaining about the rise of populism in the Kansas prairies, as farmers resisted Eastern banks. In 2004 Thomas Frank picked up that theme, in his similarly entitled book, *What's the Matter With Kansas?* in which he argued that Kansans' political predilections belied their true economic interests. In an essay on Prohibition, H. L. Mencken said in 1927, Kansans have been persistently mocked as being, as in the title of Robert Smith Bader's book, *Hayseeds, Moralizers and Methodists:*

The Twentieth Century Image of Kansans.

Yet Lucy Stone telegraphed to her friend Susan B. Anthony in 1867 that " Kansas leads the world" on the issue of suffrage. In fact, Kansas early on granted women limited suffrage, at first, in municipal elections in 1867, and then full suffrage in 1912, one of the first states to do so. It never adopted capital punishment.

Robert Wuthnow, a brilliant sociologist of religion and himself a native of Kansas, gives us a careful sociological history of the intertwining of religion and politics in this quintessential red state. He notes the fierce battles over abortion in Witchita and the murder of the abortionist George Tiller in 2009, as well as battles over evolution and gay marriage. Yet he dispels one-sided stereotypes of Kansas politics as uniformly archconservative. Beginning as a battleground of abolitionism, Kansas moved early on toward Prohibition, initially seen as a progressive enactment to further family stability and a work ethic. Kansas adopted Prohibition by 1880 and kept it on the state law books even after the repeal of the 18th Amendment.

In point of fact, for much of Kansas' history it was split fairly evenly between Methodists and Catholics. Kansas withstood the worse ravages of the Ku Klux Klan, which was attacked by Methodists and William Allen White. Both Methodists and Catholics kept the politics of Kansas from veering toward extremes. Republicans were often, like White or Alf Landon, relatively progressive or at least pragmatic. After the loss of Kansas in 1896 to William Jennings Bryan, pragmatic Republicans bounded back and found ways to support farmers in cooperatives, freeing them from anti-trust laws. Kansas was also the battleground that gave rise to the historic case Brown v. Board of Education, which outlawed segregation in public schools.

After the 1960s, many new immigrants came to Kansas from Oklahoma and other southern states, tilting the religious balance toward Southern Baptist and other evangelical churches, which were better than the Methodists at organizing large mega-congregations in growing urban enclaves around Kansas City and Witchita. At present, one third of all churchgoers in Kansas belong to conservative Protestant churches (420,000). Catholics are close at 400,000. Methodists, historically the largest congregation, now lag behind at 200,000. Sixty-four percent of Kansans attend church at least once a month.

In 2005 Kansans voted to define marriage as between a man and a woman. Their vote to ban gay marriage, however, was only 4 percent higher than found in national surveys on the question and lower than that found in 20 other states. A careful study of Kansas' myriad and rich associational life in Oskaloosa shows how churches are integrated into small town life. Church memberships overlap into business, governmental and school settings. Vigorous associational life in Kansas compensates for a long sense of estrangement from the federal government. Local civil society flourishes instead.

In Wuthnow's nuanced and careful study, Kansans come across less as hayseeds or off-the-wall moralizers than as pragmatic conservatives, committed to traditional families and fiscal conservativism. They are skeptical of big government and dedicated to preserving simple and vital virtues. Wuthnow has penned a "must read" book for those who would understand—and not just caricature—red state religion and how it intertwines with politics.

JOHN A. COLEMAN S.J., *is associate pastor at St. Ignatius Church at the University of San Francisco in California.*

ROBERT E. SCULLY

FALL FROM GRACE

SAVONAROLA
The Rise and Fall Of a Renaissance Prophet
By Donald Weinstein
Yale University Press. 400p $38

Girolamo Savonarola's life spanned the latter half of the 15th century, at a time when Italy was simultaneously emerging from the late Middle Ages and launching the transforming cultural, intellectual and spiritual movement that came to be known as the Renaissance. This was a world filled with paradox as great sensitivity and creativity intermixed with widespread violence and power struggles. In the political realm, various republican city-states vied with oligarchic and monarchic polities and increasingly gave way to them. In the midst of this whirlwind of conflict and change, one of the greatest paradoxes of all was the friar from Ferrara, who had such a dramatic and in many ways surprising impact on the Queen City of the Renaissance itself: Florence.

Donald Weinstein, a leading authority on the Italian Renaissance, has written an insightful and scholarly study of Florence's improbable prophet within the context of Quattrocento Italy. With regard to historical and especially religious developments, it is important to remember that Savonarola died some two decades before Martin Luther, many of whose ideas galvanized what proved to be a religious revolution. But in examining Savonarola's life and impact, it is intriguing to see that so many of the issues often assumed to have originated with the Protestant Reformation had, in fact, been part of the religious culture and conversation for quite some time.

Savonarola's voice was perhaps louder and more insistent than most of his contemporaries, though by no means unique, in calling for a faith-centered piety that was Scripture-centered as well as Christocentric. So, too, an increasing chorus of voices was calling for reform and renewal—in the church, to be sure, but in civic society as well. Moreover, as crucial as preaching became in both Protestant and Catholic circles in the 16th century, Savonarola was just one of a number of late medieval figures who employed the art and power of preaching—often to remarkable effect.

Although Savonarola was in various ways a man of his time, he also stood apart. His preaching, which combined the ascetic with the increasingly triumphalistic, shifted at times from the spiritual to the political, fracturing support among his listeners, not to mention within Florentine society as a whole.

Of particular interest, Savonarola, despite considerable support among segments of the laity, faced growing clerical opposition—a harbinger of trouble. This was especially true among an array of religious orders as well as among those at the papal

court, not least of all that of the shrewd but corrupt Pope Alexander VI. Even among contemporaries with purported prophetic gifts, Suor Maddalena, a nun from Santa Maria di Casignano, castigated Savonarola as a fraud and challenged him to a prophetic duel of sorts. He dismissed her as a naïve woman who was being manipulated by his enemies.

Savonarola is perhaps most famous—and infamous—for his Bonfires of the Vanities, in which throngs of repentant and zealous Florentines gathered up all manner of supposed pagan, sinful or vane items and cast them into the consuming flames. Whatever benefit these conflagrations may have been to the consciences of contemporaries, untold precious works of art were forever lost in this shortsighted attempt to stem the purportedly paganizing tide of the Renaissance as well as the perennial effects of the Fall.

In addition, the author places Savonarola's preaching within the context of the struggle for control in Italy among the various Italian states and the ambitions of the kings of France and Spain. In particular, the friar viewed the invasion of Italy by Charles VIII of France in 1494 as a vindication of his warning about the wrath to come if the people of Florence and Italy did not repent of their sins and reform their lives. Over several years, however, the political and religious situations shifted as Florence and most especially its prophet were increasingly isolated and called to task. Savonarola's excommunication by the pope in 1497 and the abortive trial by fire with the Franciscans led to his final undoing: arrest, torture, confession and execution.

Weinstein's nuanced discussion of Savonarola's confession is a highlight of the book, arguing that physical torture probably intensified the pressures of a partially guilty conscience. While

he conceded he had deceived people as to his prophetic inspiration, he insisted on the validity of much of his message. The author's summing up of Savonarola's divergent "afterlife" is also quite useful. Condemned by many as deserving of his dramatic fall from grace, he has been lauded by others, including some voices who have called for his canonization as well as those who have seen him as a hero of civic virtue and social justice. In sum, while Weinstein's *Savonarola* is not always a page-turner, it is a balanced and often intriguing portrait of a gifted but troubled soul.

ROBERT E. SCULLY, S.J., *is a professor of history and law at Le Moyne College, Syracuse, N.Y.*

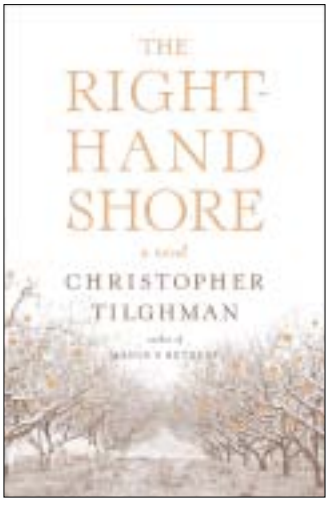
RICHARD METZGER

NO MORE EDENS

THE RIGHT-HAND SHORE

By Christopher Tilghman
Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 368p $27

In the opening frame of Christopher Tilghman's novel *The Right Hand Shore*, Mary Bayly is interviewing her distant cousin, Edward Mason, to see if he is a suitable heir for Mason's Retreat, the ancestral farm established in 1657 by the emigrant who retreated to Maryland's eastern shore after the failed Catholic uprising in England. It is 1920; Mary is 55, childless and dying of cancer. When Edward tells her he is certain he can handle the burdens that Mary tells him come with the Retreat, she thinks him a fool, for she knows that he is thinking only of the financial responsibilities. She knows that the Retreat carries with it the curse of slavery, failed race relations and human pride.



The Right Hand Shore, the story of Mason's Retreat from 1857 to 1920, illustrates that the world, by its nature, is cursed; any belief that we can control our world is doomed. Through the struggle of two generations of the Bayly/Mason family to remake the Retreat after slavery, a struggle that incorporates a tension between the Catholic faith and science, Tilghman dramatizes the theme that there are no more Edens.

The inside story of Tilghman's novel begins with the cold-hearted sale by Boss Mason, Mary's grandfather, of his slaves just before the Civil War. It is this sale, according to Ophelia, Boss's daughter and Mary's mother, that brings a curse on the Retreat. Wyatt Bayly, Ophelia's husband, does not share Ophelia's beliefs. He is a Northerner, not touched by the heritage of slavery; and as a Catholic by marriage, he is not touched by Ophelia's sense of inherited evil.

Wyatt believes that with the proper scientific approach he can turn the estate into orchards of peach trees and that these trees can draw "the poisons from the soil and, in their magic, transform them into sweetness." Though Ophelia can understand Wyatt's efforts, she sees his plan as "deeply ambitious," and with each orchard planted, she becomes more separated from Wyatt and the Retreat. This separation culminates in Ophelia's enrolling of Mary, then a young teenager, in Catholic schools in France and Baltimore, cities where she then lives herself.

Mary's Catholic education highlights a tension between faith and science. She discovers that her desire to be recognized for her scholarship is prideful. Opposed to her father's belief in the certainty of scientific inquiry, she is told that the Catholic faith is filled with paradox and contradiction. A teacher, Mother Barat, tells her, "When faith and reason cannot be reconciled, a saint chooses faith." Although Mary turns the farm into a dairy, she resists pasteurizing the milk on religious grounds.

Her father's attempt to remake the Retreat includes his belief that by offering good wages for good work, he can improve the relations between blacks and whites as well. It is this aspect of his plan that leads to perhaps the most dynamic thread in the novel—the relationship between Mary's younger brother, Thomas, and Randall, the son of Abel Terrell, Wyatt's black field manager. Thomas and Randall grow up together, almost inseparable. Nearly everyone on the estate views them as brothers. Wyatt recognizes early the potential of Randall's intellect and decides to educate both boys. Randall's superiority becomes immediately apparent. Thomas, unlike his sister, Mary, does not have Wyatt's mind; he is much more dreamer than scientist.

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As the boys mature their relationship changes. Thomas is drawn in friendship toward Randall's younger sister Beal, and Randall refuses to

allow it to go on. He tells Thomas, who sees himself and Beal as some modern version of a classic tale of forbidden love, that even if Thomas's intentions are noble, there is no chance that Beal can be the lady of Mason's Retreat; she will be perceived as nothing more than Thomas's whore, whether she is or not. Tragedy strikes in a variety of forms. Are the disastrous events the result of the family's attempts to "rearrange Creation"?

Ironically, it is Thomas's future that appears brightest. His faith in the love shared by him and Beal eventually brings them together. And it is the Catholic Church, solicited by Mary, that assists in the secret marriage of Thomas and Beal and their move to France. In their union Tilghman seems to say joy is possible in our cursed world. And yet we have Mary's words the night before the wedding: she tells Thomas the marriage "cost us all much."

Tilghman's story-within-a-story format is a good fit for *The Right Hand Shore*. It helps to generate interest by introducing us, before the story begins, to Mary as she will be at the end of it. This allows us to see how its many characters are transformed in this struggle with the earth. Finally, Mary sums it up: "My belief that I could influence the future, bend God's will," is a sin as old as Adam and Eve.

The Right Hand Shore is a story of failed human aspirations in an imperfect world. Tilghman makes clear that in our world there are factors—the sins of our past, the flaws in nature, perhaps even love—that we cannot control and that make false any hope to impose our will. As Abel, Randall's father, states, "Much as you gain, you lose more." *The Right Hand Shore* is a very human story, and Tilghman tells it through characters who make us feel their losses.

RICHARD METZGER, *a retired English teacher, lives in Bethlehem, Pa.*

LETTERS

Mumble Mass

Re "Grading the Missal" (5/28): I am a pastor of a large urban parish. Six months after the introduction of the new translation of the Roman Missal, my all-too-common experience is that, rather than more fully engaging the people in the pews in the celebration of Eucharist, the new translation, especially the translation of the proper prayers, leaves many in the assembly struggling to understand what they have just heard. Others have simply stopped listening.

Whatever else the new translation may accomplish, I am unable to see how it contributes to the primary aim of the liturgical restoration of Vatican II: the full, conscious and active participation by all the people in the church's liturgical celebrations.

MARK F. HORAK, S.J.
Washington, D.C.

Missal Failure?

The articles in the 5/28 issue provide many examples of the struggles our priests are having using the new Missal. But what about the laity? Most in church are polite, but so many just are not participating. It's not only our inability to use the strange words, convoluted sentences, disjointed cadence and plainsong chanting; it's the lack of feeling, of spiritual connection, that is missing. I have observed the congregation in my church during parts of the Mass, like the plainsong chanted Gloria, just standing, mouthing the words, letting the choir struggle with the music. People are not inspired and energized in the Lord. They feel beaten down into a compliance they don't understand. When they leave church instead of being joyful, they are subdued. We in the pews continue to wonder why.

ART MAURER
Penfield, N.Y.

Homeward Bound

To the finely balanced and clear view expressed by Sister Patricia Cary, O.Carm. (Letters, 5/28), for the need for our male leaders to connect more to "secular" people in the real world, especially women, I would add a simple idea. In the spirit of taking a sabbatical or making a retreat, our male leaders should immerse themselves for two weeks with a young family with at least two children under 4 years old. A bishop would move in with that family and shoulder responsibility for the young children, with the presence and help of the children's parent(s).

Our bishops rightly emphasize life, authentic teaching and love that goes the full distance, requited or not. My sense is that when the two weeks were over, they would be grateful for being even more in unity with the people they serve. They would have a deeper awareness of the language they choose

and a more certain grasp of what the priorities must be. And we, whom they serve and whom they desire to instruct, would sense the difference. Who knows where that might lead?

ROBERT B. MURRAY
Braintree, Mass.

Public Relations Disaster

Thank you to the Most Rev. Joseph M. Sullivan, former auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Brooklyn, for his letter about the criticism of the L.C.W.R. ("Renewal Service," 5/28). He concludes, "If anyone can rescue the church from this public relations disaster, I believe it is women religious." His message is refreshing, hopeful and even courageous, but sadly he is in the minority. Where are all the other retired members of the clergy? Currently active priests may have too much to risk if they speak out publicly.

Bishop Sullivan calls it a public relations disaster. It is more than a public relations disaster when people are silenced when gender issues are mentioned, let alone questioned. The latest attack to come out of Rome only heightens the level of tension, anxiety and deep sorrow felt by all of us who remain.

KATHLEEN SPREEN CHRISTENSON
Coronado, Calif.

Required Reading

Many thanks to Michael Naughton for leading me to read the Vatican document, "Vocation of the Business Leader." His article, "The Ethical Executive" (5/21) was a delicious appetizer, but the work produced by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace was a complete meal!

This was the analysis and reflection I've been searching to find for a long time—a profound, wide-ranging look into the purpose and practice of business, especially finance. Business is a key dimension of God's plans for human flourishing and the joy of all creation. This article should be required reading for every M.B.A. student at a Catholic college and for every executive who claims a life of faith.

DOUG DEMEO
Trenton, N.J.

How to Really Help the Poor

Concerning "What Ryan Missed," by George Beyer (americamagazine.org, 6/4), I personally oppose Rep. Paul Ryan's budget and support more antipoverty spending on the federal level, financed by higher taxes on the middle class and up, but it is simply wrong to imply that Catholic social doctrine requires such policy positions.

It is telling that the author mischaracterizes No. 48 of John Paul II's encyclical "Centesimus Annus." It actually outlines strong limits on government provision for the poor. While this citation is grounds for opposing social spending cuts in the middle of the current deep recession, it is hardly an endorsement of the permanently expanded social service states of Europe. And Pope Benedict has echoed these cautions in his own encyclicals, so there are legitimate Catholic grounds for debate about the proper size of government.

What is beyond debate is that we as a church are failing to live out solidarity with the poor both domestically and globally. Missing from both Ryan's speech and this article is any exhortation that we take responsibility for loving the poor directly. Where are the Peter Maurins and Dorothy Days of today to challenge us to care for the poor "at a personal sacrifice" instead of arguing about what other people should do?

TIM HUEGERICH
Madison, Wis.

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CARTOON BY BOB ECKSTEIN

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Strength in Weakness

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), JULY 8, 2012

Readings: Ez 2:2–5; 2 Cor 12:7–10; Mk 6:1–6

When I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor 12:10)

Failure, impotency and weakness: these are the themes of today's readings. This may tempt pastors to use the homily time to do some fundraising. This would be a great mistake, for amid these themes we find extraordinary spiritual insight.

In the first reading, Ezekiel reports that God has sent him to his fellow exiles in Babylonia: "I am sending you to the Israelites, rebels who have rebelled against me; they and their fathers...hard of face and obstinate of heart are they. The message he will receive is one of "lamentation and mourning" (2:10). Safe to say, Ezekiel will not have an easy prophetic life, and many who hear him will dismiss him. Our reading ends with a great insight: "And whether they heed or resist—for they are a rebellious house—they shall know that a prophet has been among them."

Ezekiel was not commissioned to succeed in purifying his people's hearts, but to speak the truth and let go. This is really liberating: one follows God's lead, one discerns responsibly, one acts in love and then lets go. If an endeavor fails, be assured that you did not, for you were faithful. God demands nothing other than this. What freedom!

The hardness of heart Ezekiel experienced was what Jesus encountered in his hometown of Nazareth. Thus far in the Gospel of Mark we have experienced Jesus' presence as something that overwhelmed those around him. Demons are overcome, people experience the fear of the Lord, and Jesus' power to heal is dramatically on display. In today's reading we find that "he was not able to perform any mighty deed there.... He was amazed at their lack of faith."

It was not that Jesus was literally unable to heal; Mark tells us he did cure a few people. Rather, he was utterly disheartened. Not only did his fellow Nazoreans have no faith, they seemed utterly dismissive. He is just the carpenter, they said to one another, and we know his family. "And they took offense at him." Jesus' miracles only make sense in the context of anticipating the kingdom and in some way already participating in it. Without faith, Jesus' healings would make him more a magician than a messiah. Failing in his hometown, Jesus remained the perfect prophet, making clear that he was not a court jester to amuse or amaze. And in witnessing to the imperative of faith, he reminds us to scrutinize our own relationship with him.

Do we have the proper awe? Do we hang on his word? Do we seek merely the consolations of God; or do we, rather, pursue the God of consolations?

The second reading represents a virtual celebration of weakness. Paul's authority had been challenged in Corinth, and he wanted to defend himself as worthy of their trust. He ended up passionately telling his detractors about what he has suffered for the Gospel, including whippings, beatings, stonings and imprisonments (2 Cor 11:23 ff). Paul was not boasting of his war wounds, but telling the Corinthians that he knows well the cost of discipleship and that his suffering is part of authentic Christian witness.

In today's reading Paul describes how God kept his pride in check. "That I might not become too elated, a thorn in the flesh was given to me." So painful was this thorn that Paul pleaded for release: "Three times I begged the Lord about this, that it might leave me, but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.'" The reading ends with Paul's summary: "For when I am weak; then I am strong."

These four things I know: My greatest burden is when I try to control what is out of my control. When I tell God to jump, God never does. My own witness is most compromised when I am most full of myself. And when I look at the experiences that deepen my faith, I quickly see that they tend to unfold in a context of great vulnerability. Failure, impotency and weakness: great themes.

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

What weakness in your life illuminates God's presence?

Consider where you cling most tightly; pray for spiritual freedom here.

ART: TAD DUNNE

PETER FELDMEIER *is the Murray/Bacik Professor of Catholic Studies at the University to Toledo.*

Whose Authority?

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), JULY 15, 2012

Readings: Am 7:12-15; Eph 1:3–14; Ps 85:9–14; Mk 6:7–3

"Off with you, visionary…never again prophecy in Bethel" (Am 7:12–13)

Amaziah was a priest serving in Israel's version of the National Cathedral. While Judah had Solomon's Temple, Israel had Beth-El (House of God). And its priest Amaziah was unfortunately a company man.

Things were acceptable for Amaziah when the prophet Amos showed up and denounced Israel's neighbors, like the residents of Damascus, Tyre and Judah. But then Amos unleashed God's venom on Israel itself. Apparently the sanctuary had been running smoothly in terms of worship and sacrifice. For God, however, such religious activity, if practiced without transformation of heart and commitment to justice, adds to sins. "I despise your festivals, and take no delight in your solemn festivities.... But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Am 5:21–24). Worship without conversion particularly ignites God's ire (Is 1:3–17; Mi 6:6–8).

How could a company man like Amaziah endure this critique? Amos is now talking about us! This situation sets the stage for our first reading: "Amaziah, priest of Bethel, said to Amos, 'Off with you, visionary, flee to the land of Judah…never prophecy in Bethel; for it is the king's sanctuary and a royal temple'" (6:12–13).

There is a shift in Amaziah's words. The temple is called House of God, but Amaziah referred to it as the king's sanctuary and temple (Beth-mamlakah). We should not assume that Amaziah was a corrupt priest. Indeed, the text portrays him as a committed priest, trying to be loyal and faithful. That is why he is outraged. For in challenging the institution and the king, Amos was virtually blaspheming. Conflating God's voice with the voices of the powerful and elite is typical of someone who is ideologically stuck.

Inbred, conformist thinking is deadly to an institution. A widespread and readily conceded critique of the cabinet dynamics during President George W. Bush's first term was that one was considered disloyal (and easily replaceable) if one held a position different from the company line. Here truth and the party line became conflated. A patriot was a company man who agreed. Disasters—moral and political—are certain to follow such practice, as was evidenced by the decision to invade Iraq. This was a catastrophe both the Vatican and U.S. bishops correctly saw coming a mile away.

But the same conflations can happen in the church. It can be tempting to suppose a "good Catholic" is one who accepts without question what the authority teaches, since that authority speaks for God. Thus any question or critique is de facto disloyal, not only to the authorities but also to the integrity of the church, indeed to God himself. A chancery official (not in my current diocese) once told me that any violation of any church law or any questioning of any official teaching of the church *ipso facto* represents bad conscience. This was the spirit of Amaziah speaking, the voice of a stuck, company man.

There is something about the spirit of Amaziah that seeks identity and security in the wrong places. To realize that our ultimate identity is in Christ is to find ourselves submerged in the paschal mystery, to have lost one's old self and found oneself emerging from the mystery of Christ himself. To really know this is to find ourselves secure only in him.

In the Gospel, Jesus sent out the Twelve two by two into towns in order to extend his ministry. Empowered by Christ, they preached repentance, exorcised unclean spirits and cured the sick. Mark tells us as well, "He instructed them to take nothing for the journey but a walking stick—no food, no sack, no money in their belts." The disciples had to rely on human good will and God's grace. They traveled light, with hands open rather than closed, trusting in providence and in no other security. Risky business.

PETER FELDMEIER

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Where does any desire for security trump openness?
- What keeps me from hearing the truth?
- Where can I open my clenched hands?

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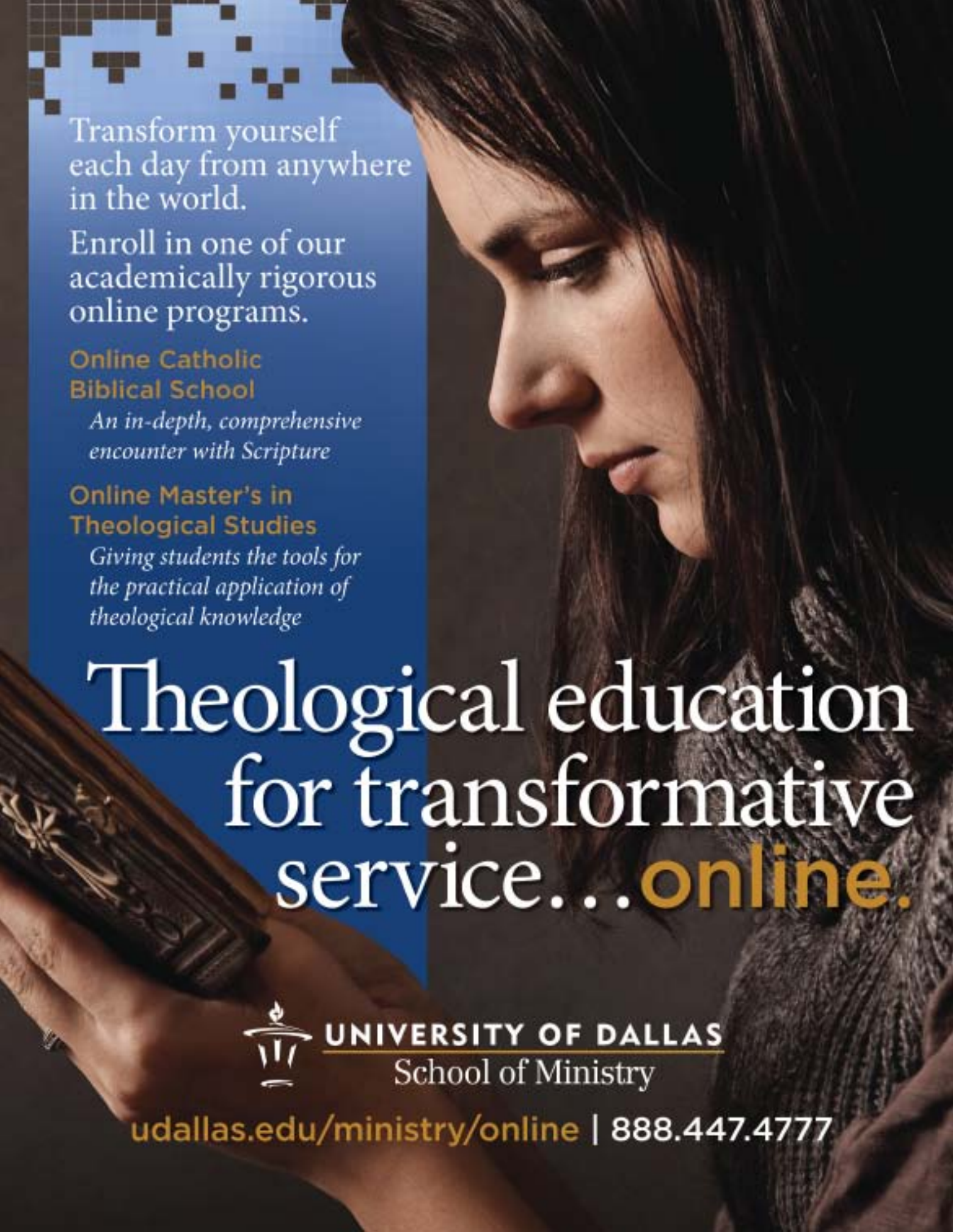
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