

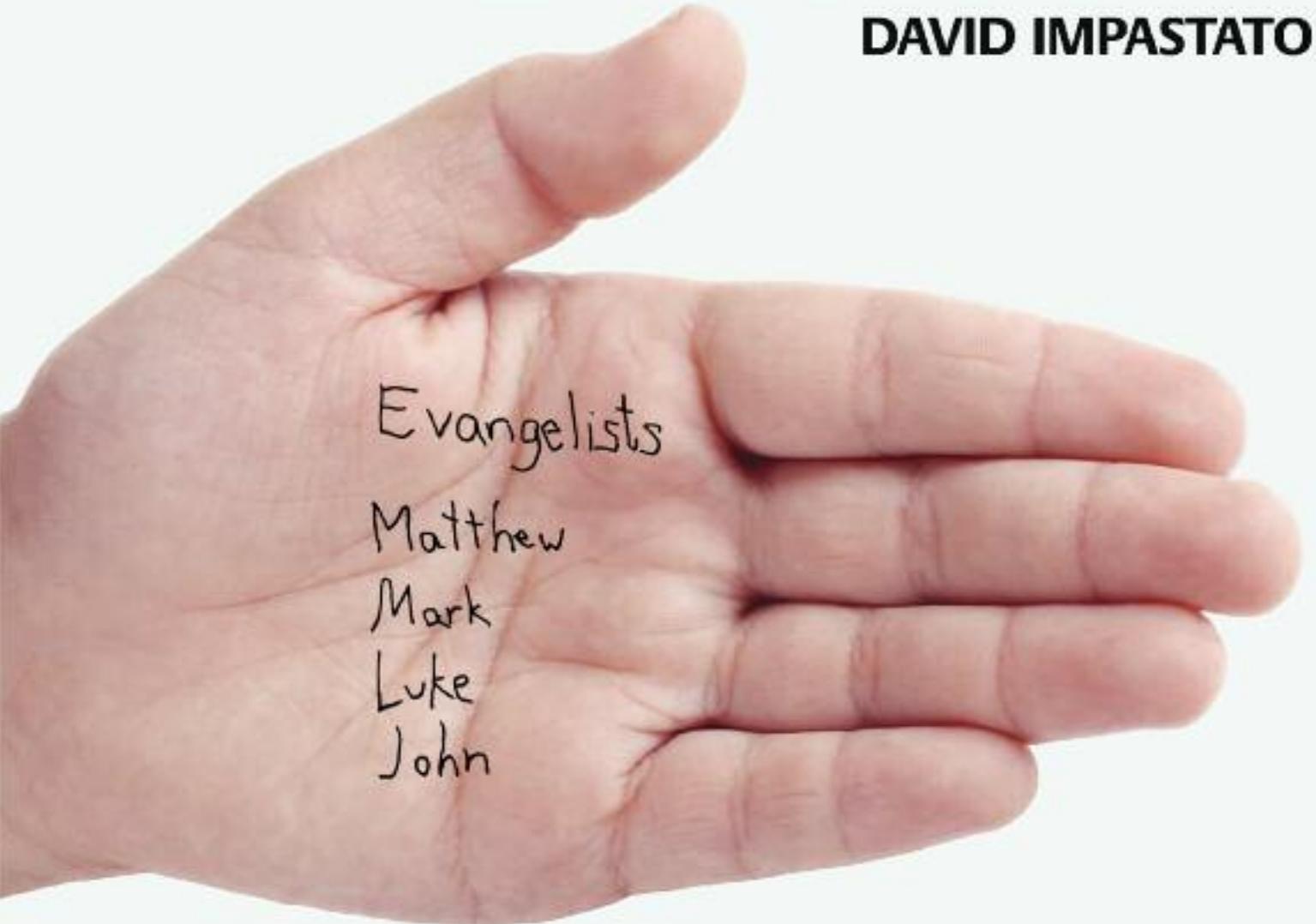
# America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

SEPT. 10-17, 2012 \$3.50

## Back to Basics

DAVID IMPASTATO



Religious Education Issue

MATT EMERSON

EDWARD McCORMACK

# OF MANY THINGS

**W**hen I first read Richard Gaillardetz's article "Conversation Starters" (2/13), which opened our occasional series on the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, I was a bit dismayed that he chose the council's modeling of dialogue as his theme. I was expecting something more concrete, like liturgical reform, the organization of the church for global justice ministry, religious liberty or the formation of episcopal conferences as the council's great achievement.

I confess I had grown wary of articles on "the spirit of Vatican II," finding them too intangible to make a convincing case against the continuity school of conciliar interpretation that made its case with texts, records of debate, diary entries and so on. Rick is one of the outstanding theologians of the postconciliar generation, and now, six months later, I have to admit that in identifying dialogue as the outstanding gift of the council, Rick gave voice to a dynamic in the reception of the council at work in the United States today. Over the intervening months, other articles have come across my desk, some of which we will publish, others not, singling out dialogue as a fruit of the council. There have been numerous letters, phone calls and e-mails expressing the same view.

For great swaths of the church today, dialogue is an undeniable sign of the times. Some in authority may deny the fact, but for a great many laypeople, clergy and religious—and not a few bishops—dialogue remains a gift of the council to which they are deeply committed. It is a gift we will continue to cultivate and, in the 21st century, a practice that is necessary to the credibility and vitality of the Catholic Church. It is achingly ironic that there can be dialogue with schismatic Lefebvrists, with the unchurched and with murderous governments, but not with some faithful Catholics on the internal life of the church.

A few months ago (see "A Yes to Dialogue," *Current Comment*, 6/4) we commended Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi's defense of dialogue with scientists whose research does not conform to Catholic moral norms. He chided critics for weak and ill-formed faith. For those who are afraid of dialogue among Catholics, we need to ask not only whether their faith is robust enough, but also whether their charity is ample enough and their pastoral sensitivities subtle enough to serve the church today following the model of Christ.

American Catholics owe a debt of gratitude to the women of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious for affirming their integrity in dialogue with the Holy See. They are reclaiming our sacramental right as Christians.

All Catholics, by virtue of their baptism and their confirmation, belong fully to the body of Christ; they enjoy richly the gifts of the Spirit in their lives. They are not spiritual children. In the Western Christian tradition, even children and the simple ought to be taken seriously. St. Benedict admonished abbots to hear the opinion of even the youngest monk. St. Paulinus of Nola reminded his contemporaries that the Spirit speaks through even the least of the faithful; and Blessed John Paul II appealed to Paulinus's maxim to urge that dialogue be a mark of the 21st-century church.

The council affirmed the right of the faithful to make their opinions known. It initiated the Synod of Bishops, diocesan pastoral councils and parish councils to promote dialogue in the pastoral life of the church. It promoted ecclesial, interfaith and civic discernment of the signs of the times. But rarely have these institutions worked as forums for genuine dialogue. The 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council should be an occasion to make dialogue, as Pope John Paul II hoped, a mark of the church in the 21st century.

**DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J.**

# America

PUBLISHED BY JESUITS OF THE UNITED STATES

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Customer Service: 1-800-627-9533

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Cover: composite photo by  
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### Global Heat Wave

Massive forest fires, tornados and derechos, enormous glacial calving, extreme drought, melting of the Greenland ice sheet: Just weather? For climate skeptics, 2012 may prove a moment for conversion. This has been the warmest year in the warmest decade on record. Now James Hansen, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration climatologist who first warned about global warming, reports that scientists are convinced that these recent weather events are not a matter of natural variation. “We now know,” he said, “that the chance of these extreme weather events happening naturally is negligible.” The natural changes in weather from day to day, year to year, fail to explain the increasing incidence of extreme weather. Indeed, the extreme weather earth has been experiencing has occurred far faster than he had predicted.

The long-time climate-change skeptic Richard Muller, a physicist at the University of California, Berkeley, agrees. “Global warming is real,” he says, “and humans are almost entirely the cause.” The time has come to have a serious national debate, not about whether global warming is taking place, but rather what we are going to do about it.

The low-key exchanges about the U.S. energy future during the current political campaign, with the Romney camp pushing increased use of carbon fuels and the Obama team supporting greater use of renewables, may supply a starting point. Investing in alternative energy supplies is not only about jobs. It is also about the long-term costs of global warming, preserving a future for ranchers and farmers, preventing higher grocery prices and water rationing, minimizing the costs for re-engineering our coastal cities in the face of rising oceans and curbing the growing expenditures for rebuilding after weather emergencies.

### The New Body Snatchers

In the film “The Body Snatcher” (1945), with Boris Karloff and Bela Lugosi, a 19th-century doctor collects bodies for his scientific experiments. The recent four-part award-winning report “Skin and Bone: The Shadowy Trade in Human Body Parts,” published by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists in a variety of media, documents a horror worse than the film’s.

The humane practice of donating one’s organs for transplantation is admirable. Less admirable is what sometimes happens to the rest of the body without the donor family’s consent. Delivered to the mortician but then passed on to unscrupulous operatives, the corpse is dismembered and

skinned, and the tissue is processed and sold by “corpse wranglers” on a market that involves over 2,500 companies.

In one case Michael Mastromarino, a dental surgeon in Brooklyn, N.Y., who owns a tissue recovery firm in New Jersey, received the corpse of a suicide, whose skin, bones and other parts were used to manufacture medical products. He lied about the manner of death and falsely claimed to have the family’s permission. He has stolen skin, bones and other body parts from grandmothers, factory workers and the notoriously despoiled body of Alistair Cooke. His business was registered on Nasdaq.

The trade in body parts is an out-of-control multimillion dollar industry. It deceives the original donors, who wished to give, not sell their bodies and commodifies the human corpse. New York’s Senator Charles Schumer proposed a law that new tissue banks meet minimum standards and undergo inspection by the Federal Drug Administration. The funeral home and tissue vendor industries killed the bill.

### The Book-Buying Generation

For years the baby boomer generation, those born between 1946 and 1964, has purchased more books than other generations. That is hardly surprising in light of its size, currently 75 million. The boomers’ lead in book buying has now been surpassed, according to the 2012 *U.S. Book Consumer Demographics and Buying Behaviors Annual Review*, a volume that book publishers consult to find out who buys what, where and for what reasons. (Confession: We have not bought a copy, which sells for \$799, and cannot provide detailed figures.) But Publishers Weekly, a co-publisher, has broadcast this tidbit: Generation Y, those born between 1979 and 1989, outspent the baby boomers, who are mostly their parents, in 2011. GenY also surpassed the boomers in size, with a current population of 80 million. Their share of U.S. book purchases in 2011 rose to 30 percent. The boomers, by contrast, bought just a quarter of all books sold in 2011.

Online sales are also increasing, with 43 percent of GenY purchases made online. Whether buyers are seeking new or used books, self-published or traditionally published books, paper or e-books, they increasingly turn to online markets. That could bode ill for the future of real, not virtual bookstores, and it may reduce or markedly change the culture of browsing and socializing over books. Book buying is not the same as book reading, of course, since books are borrowed as well as purchased. The saddest number in the report is this: 51 percent of U.S. consumers neither buy nor borrow books.

# The Education We Deserve

Neither President Obama nor Governor Romney has addressed the precarious state of American higher education during their months of campaigning. Senator Rick Santorum's comment during the Republican primaries that President Obama's ambition that "everyone" go to college made him a "snob" still resonates with those who do not see the intimate relationship between higher education and the overall quality of personal and civic life. Robert J. Samuelson of *The Washington Post*, supporting Mr. Santorum, said it was time to ditch the "college-for-all crusade, which looms as the largest mistake in educational policy since World War II."

Some students may not be ready for college. But for the most part, students in every economic class should have the right to improve their station in life. Mr. Samuelson forgets that the post-World War II generation had the G.I. Bill of Rights. The bill educated several million ordinary servicemen starved for knowledge and remade the American middle class. The snobbery is in imagining a class of people incapable of college. Today, for economic reasons, millions of young people cannot attend a college. Of young people in the bottom economic quartile, only one in five goes on to college.

President Obama's education program aims to improve access and affordability. It includes support for community colleges and tax credits to make college more affordable. Mr. Obama's call for all Americans to enroll in college concerned only one year's attendance at a community college. That would be a starkly minimal goal that would bring Americans only within sight of the level of competence of young Europeans who graduate from high-school-level technical programs.

At the same time, the administration and members of Congress have cracked down on the deceptive tactics of for-profit colleges that dupe men and women coming home from war into taking classes they cannot afford and then fail to equip them with employable skills. Since the average student finishing college owes \$25,000, the president wants colleges and universities to provide more transparency about job prospects and student default rates. Meanwhile, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has introduced an income-based repayment plan whereby payments are reduced for those in low-paying jobs and forgiven after 10 years for graduates in public service occupations, like police, teachers and firefighters.

Governor Romney's plans are not detailed. He would reverse a recent reform by the Obama administration that eliminated banks as middlemen in the distribution of federal student loans and would return to bank-based student lending. He would allow students in credential-granting programs to learn at their own pace rather than require a set amount of classroom time for the degree—an experiment that seems worth trying.

Job-training is only one aim of post-secondary education. Education, as the term implies, should include a deeper appreciation of life and one's obligations to the larger community. If democracy is to thrive, all who qualify should have access to four years of higher education, which would include the liberal arts, the standard core of literature, history, philosophy, mathematics and sciences. To skip over Shakespeare, Beethoven, Chekhov, Rembrandt, Orwell and Dickens will leave an emptiness in our shared cultural life. Ideally, common classrooms, dorms, sports and clubs also build friendships among students of every race and economic background.

To promise higher education to every citizen is an investment in our common future. While the United States needs an expansion of educational possibilities for veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, every young American should have access to affordable higher education. Both political parties would be well advised, therefore, to restore the cuts they contemplate in Pell Grants for low-income college students. For while personal responsibility is the American way, without government support for students and higher education, the United States will fall behind the rest of the industrial world in the skills of its workers and their participation in our civic culture.

A recent College Board study reports that 67 percent of those polled see education as an extremely important issue; the majority in every political grouping are willing to pay \$200 more in taxes each year to support education. Democrats say that for reasons of equity and available resources, the federal government has the responsibility; Republicans believe the states should lead. Over three quarters of those polled agree that the United States should lead the world in granting postsecondary degrees. The American Dream has its cost, but to fail this challenge is to accelerate the drift into two societies of the haves and the have-nots.



ELECTION 2012

## Catholic Identity at Issue As Ryan Joins Romney

**M**itt Romney, in a bold redirection of his campaign and in an apparent appeal to waffling Catholic swing voters, named Wisconsin Republican Paul Ryan his running mate on Aug. 11. While Ryan's pro-life views and his stance against same-sex marriage have been praised by some Catholics, his budget and tax proposals have drawn criticism from others, including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

What Ryan's elevation will mean to Catholic voters across the United States remains to be seen. Once considered to be a united front, today's Catholic voters can be divided into three distinct groups, says Steve Schneck, director of the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies at the Catholic University of America and a national co-chair of Catholics for Obama: (1) Latino Catholics, about 70 percent of whom favor Obama; (2) "intentional" Catholics, who tend to be more traditional and who favor Romney; and (3) cultural Catholics. This last group, Schneck says, are the Catholics for whom the two candidates will be competing.

Ryan makes a "fascinating selection," said Schneck. He said Ryan's fiscal proposals raise concerns about the well-being of the elderly, the poor and

those in need of housing and education. "The long-term debt problem is scary, but the way we address it isn't by shredding the minimal safety net,"



Schneck argues. "It's finding other sources of revenue. It's asking the wealthy to pay their fair share of taxes."

Dan Finn, a professor of economics

U.S. BISHOPS

## Politicians Silent on Poverty

**T**he U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops called the nation's persistently high numbers of unemployed, just under 13 million in July, a "moral failure" in its annual Labor Day statement. Noting the millions out of work or underemployed and the millions more who have relinquished hope of finding a job, the bishops wrote, "The sad fact is that over 46 million people live in poverty, and, most disturbingly, over 16 million children grow up poor in our nation."

Released on Aug. 13, the statement, "Placing Work and Workers at the Center of Economic Life," scolded polit-

ical candidates and elected officials, noting that their "relative silence...on the moral imperative to resist and overcome poverty is both ominous and disheartening."

"The depth of poverty in the U.S. is really shocking and probably the worst it has been in my adult life," said Sharon Daly, former director of the Domestic Social Development Office at the U.S.C.C.B. "I think it's wonderful that the bishops' statement calls attention to this and links it to lack of jobs—decent jobs with wages that can support a family and offer benefits—because that is the single most important factor. It

points out that the economy should be designed and judged by its impact on working and poor people, as well as the common good."

The bishops singled out the "unique and essential responsibility" of labor unions in economic renewal and noted their indispensable role as agents of solidarity and subsidiarity, but warned that "some union actions can contribute to excessive polarization and intense partisanship, can pursue positions that conflict with the common good, or can focus on just narrow self-interests."

Daly said she was surprised that labor unions were the only social institution called to account by the bishops. "It's not the teachers' union or the firefighter or police unions that have caused this incredible economic crash world-



**Paul Ryan and Mitt Romney after the announcement of Ryan's selection as running mate.**

and theology at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minn., said that Ryan's "individualistic economic analysis" leads the candidate to believe that

reducing payments for welfare is actually good for people in poverty because welfare makes them dependent. This view, however, fails to see the larger framework necessary for an accurate analysis. "There are many causes of poverty. Dependency is certainly a problem for some, but for many it is not," Finn said. "They're working trying to make ends meet. What's missing is the debate about the social and scientific analysis that undergird anyone's position on this matter."

The question of Catholic identity also has gained prominence because of the Ryan pick. Despite a shared faith, Ryan and Vice President Joe Biden hold opposing views on the legality of abortion, same-sex marriage and government assistance to the poor. The debate surrounding these issues has caused some voters to make judgments not just about who is a better candidate, but who is a better Catholic.

The divisions represent a "moment of truth" for the church, said the Rev.

Bryan Massingale, a professor of systematic theology and ethics at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wis. "Is there more to Catholic public identity than opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage?" he asked. "Everyone on the right and left would say, 'Of course.'" But he argues that the question must be extended: Is there more to Catholic identity in reality than in rhetoric?

"Paul Ryan represents a group of Catholics who believe that as long as they're with the church on abortion, then they get a pass on the rest of Catholic identity," he said. "And I think there are some statements of our bishops that have fed into that. But we need to ask: How does our commitment to the poor and vulnerable factor into Catholic public identity and witness? The question goes deeper than Paul Ryan. He becomes a symbol of something that has been an ongoing conversation in the church and that we need to engage more forthrightly."

wide," she said. "If the bishops' statement is going to single out unions as contributing to the problem, it's very unfair if they don't also mention mortgage companies, investment bankers and broker-dealers." These groups, Daly pointed out, committed fraud and abuse and contributed to the bankruptcy of cities and towns that invested pension plans with such firms. "The bishops complain of unions pursuing narrow self interest and ignoring the common good," she said, "but none of these other major organizations are working toward" the common good.

Daly said that the church ought to reach out to the labor movements and ask them what they think could be done for workers. "In some places the church has resisted union efforts, so sometimes

the relationship is strained," she said. "But what Catholic teaching says we should do is reach out to those who are struggling and see what we can do together."

Alex Mikulich, a research fellow at the Jesuit Social Research Institute at Loyola University, New Orleans, agreed that the bishops' statement is, at its core, a positive document. "It rightly calls for the establishment of economic justice and ending barriers to employment and a living wage," he said. "It rightly calls

both dominant national political parties to address workers' rights, joblessness and poverty."

But "the document largely lacks significant practical challenge to lay Catholics to pay a price for economic and racial justice," he said.



**People wait in line to meet with recruiters during a job fair in Melville, N.Y., on July 19.**

## Fierce Competition

A new poll of 1,200 white Catholic voters in the Midwestern battleground states of Ohio, Michigan, Iowa, Missouri and Wisconsin and in Pennsylvania finds that Catholics respond negatively to the Romney-Ryan economic plan and believe President Obama respects religious freedom and people of faith. Nonetheless, Romney leads with most of these voters, though 12 percent of them, according to the poll, remain up for grabs. Sixty percent described themselves as likely to support a candidate who believed cutting Medicare, education and services for the poor was wrong. “The competition for Catholic votes will be fierce,” said John Gehring, Catholic program director at the Faith in Public Life Action Fund, which commissioned the poll, “but there are clear signs that [Vice Presidential candidate Paul Ryan’s] draconian economic plan could hurt the G.O.P. ticket.”

## Holy See Not the Boss

A federal judge in Oregon ruled on Aug. 20 that the Vatican was not the employer of a priest accused of molestation and dismissed a 10-year effort to hold the Holy See liable for sexual abuse. A lawsuit filed by a Portland area man argued the Vatican was partly responsible for his molestation in the 1960s. But U.S. District Court Judge Michael Mosman said he could not find an employment link in the facts and therefore, under the sovereign immunity law, the U.S. court had no jurisdiction. Jeff Anderson, attorney for the plaintiff, said in a press release that his client would appeal. “The judge’s thoughtful remarks from the bench clearly expressed his difficulty in deciding the case,” Anderson said. But an attorney representing the

## NEWS BRIEFS

The Rev. Rafic Grieche, a spokesperson for the Egyptian bishops, cautiously welcomed President **Mohammed Morsi’s** efforts to wrest presidential powers back from the Egyptian military but noted on Aug. 16 that Morsi so far has failed to “implement any law that would please Christians.” • **Margaret O’Gara**, a past president of both the North American Academy of Ecumenists and the Catholic Theological Society of America, died on Aug. 16 at the age of 65 after a two-year battle with cancer. • Church sources report that government authorities in Vietnam’s Central Highlands on Aug. 12 forced ethnic villagers in the hamlet of Kon Thuc to remove Catholic pictures and items from their chapel and replaced them with images of the late communist leader **Ho Chi Minh**. • Six Catholic schools made it into the top 100 in Forbes magazine’s annual **U.S. college and university rankings**: University of Notre Dame, 12; Boston College, 26; Georgetown University, 38; College of the Holy Cross, 41; Santa Clara University, 72; and Villanova University, 83. • **Joseph Cunneen**, co-founder and co-editor with his late wife Sally of the Catholic journal *CrossCurrents*, died on July 29 at age 89.



**Mohammed Morsi**

Vatican called Anderson’s statement misleading: “[Judge Mosman] did not say it was a close call on whether Ronan was an employee.” On this central point, “he said the plaintiffs had not really produced any solid facts to support their theory.”

## Phoenix Hospital Controversy Continues

Rowen K. Zetterman, M.D., dean of Creighton University School of Medicine, in Omaha, responded to criticism of the university’s expanding affiliation with a Phoenix hospital whose Catholic identity was revoked by the local bishop. Zetterman said that Creighton’s School of Medicine remains “confident it can maintain the Catholic and Jesuit values” among students training in Phoenix. In late 2010

Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted of Phoenix revoked the Catholic affiliation of St. Joseph’s Hospital after hospital officials acknowledged that in 2009, in response to an imminent medical threat, a woman’s placenta was removed and her child died as a result. After the Creighton students arrived, Bishop Olmsted reiterated on July 23 that St. Joseph’s “is not a Catholic institution,” advising that at St. Joseph’s “Catholics, and all people of good will...cannot be guaranteed authentic Catholic health care.” Zetterman said St. Joseph’s officials have assured him that they “continue to operate the hospital in the Catholic tradition.” He also pointed out that medical students frequently train at institutions without any Catholic connections.

From CNS and other sources.



# The Medicaid Gap

In June, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act. In its decision, however, the court invited a major new political battle over the act's requirement that Medicaid be expanded to cover up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level. The poverty level is adjusted annually for individuals and families of different sizes. For example, the 138 percent level in 2012 is \$2,195 per month for a family of three. The court decided that the federal government could not make the Medicaid expansion mandatory, thus leaving it for state determination.

Shortly thereafter, a number of governors indicated that their states would not expand Medicaid, blaming increased costs. Many had long opposed the health care act. Because of the potential impact on the health of millions of Americans, this decision should be examined carefully.

To begin, it is important to understand the scope of this Medicaid expansion. Under current law, states can adjust the level of Medicaid eligibility according to family income, which is often far below the federal poverty level, and can change it for different groups.

The Affordable Care Act, however, proposes to raise the eligibility for everyone to 138 percent of the federal poverty level. The Urban Institute reports that 22.3 million uninsured people with income below 138 percent are potentially eligible for Medicaid if all states implement the expansion.

Fifteen million (67 percent) are adults not currently eligible for Medicaid; 2.9 million (13 percent) are children who are currently eligible for Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program but not enrolled; and 4.3 million (13 percent) are eligible but unenrolled adults.

Under the A.C.A., the federal government assumes 100 percent of the Medicaid expansion costs in the first three years (2014-16) and then a declining percentage until it reaches a permanent floor of 90 percent in the year 2020. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that the costs over its first nine years (2014-22) will involve 93 percent federal funding (\$931 billion) and 7 percent state funding (\$73 billion).

Even if fully implemented, it is estimated that the increased payments will represent only 2.8 percent in overall Medicaid spending by states. Estimates of individual state costs vary, depending on how many eligible people already are insured, how many already and newly eligible people will actually enroll, how much current state health care expenses for uninsured people will be reduced when they are covered by Medicaid and so on.

Before states opt out of the expansion, a number of ethical, fiscal and political factors should be considered. The first is that this Medicaid expansion, by providing health care coverage for millions of our nation's poorest people, greatly advances the basic right to health care that is integral to the common good in developed societies.

Not to do so, when the A.C.A. provides subsidies for those above the poverty line to purchase health insurance, would widen U.S. economic divides and further threaten the fabric of civil society.

Second, recent research reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine* comparing three states that substantially expanded Medicaid with neighboring states without expansions found that expansions to cover low-income adults were significantly associated with longer life expectancy and improved coverage, access to care and self-reported health.

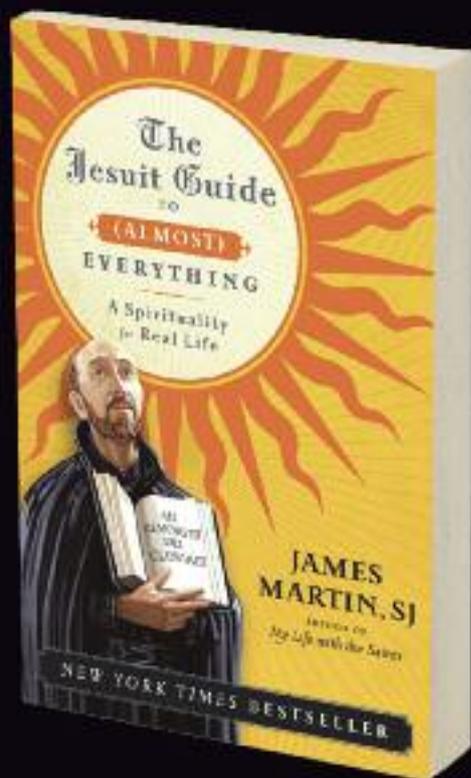
Third, the federal share of expansion costs is far better than the federal-state split in traditional Medicaid. Even projected state costs are likely to be much less, offset by a number of factors: a substantial reduction in the costs of "uncompensated care"; improved preventive and regular health care to prevent more expensive treatments, which lowers overall costs; and a significant reduction in state costs for mental health services to the uninsured.

Fourth, Medicaid expansion makes economic sense. States spend billions of dollars in tax credits and other incentives to attract business and jobs, often without documented evidence of success. With the Medicaid expansion, a state can make an investment of millions that will bring in billions of dollars of new health care business, thereby increasing demand, services and good jobs.

Before states opt out of expansion, a number of factors should be considered.

FRED KAMMER, S.J., is the director of the Jesuit Social Research Institute of Loyola University New Orleans. John F. Kavanaugh, S.J., will return on Oct. 29.

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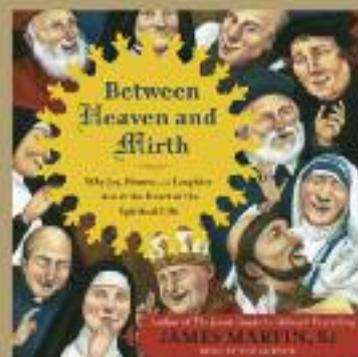
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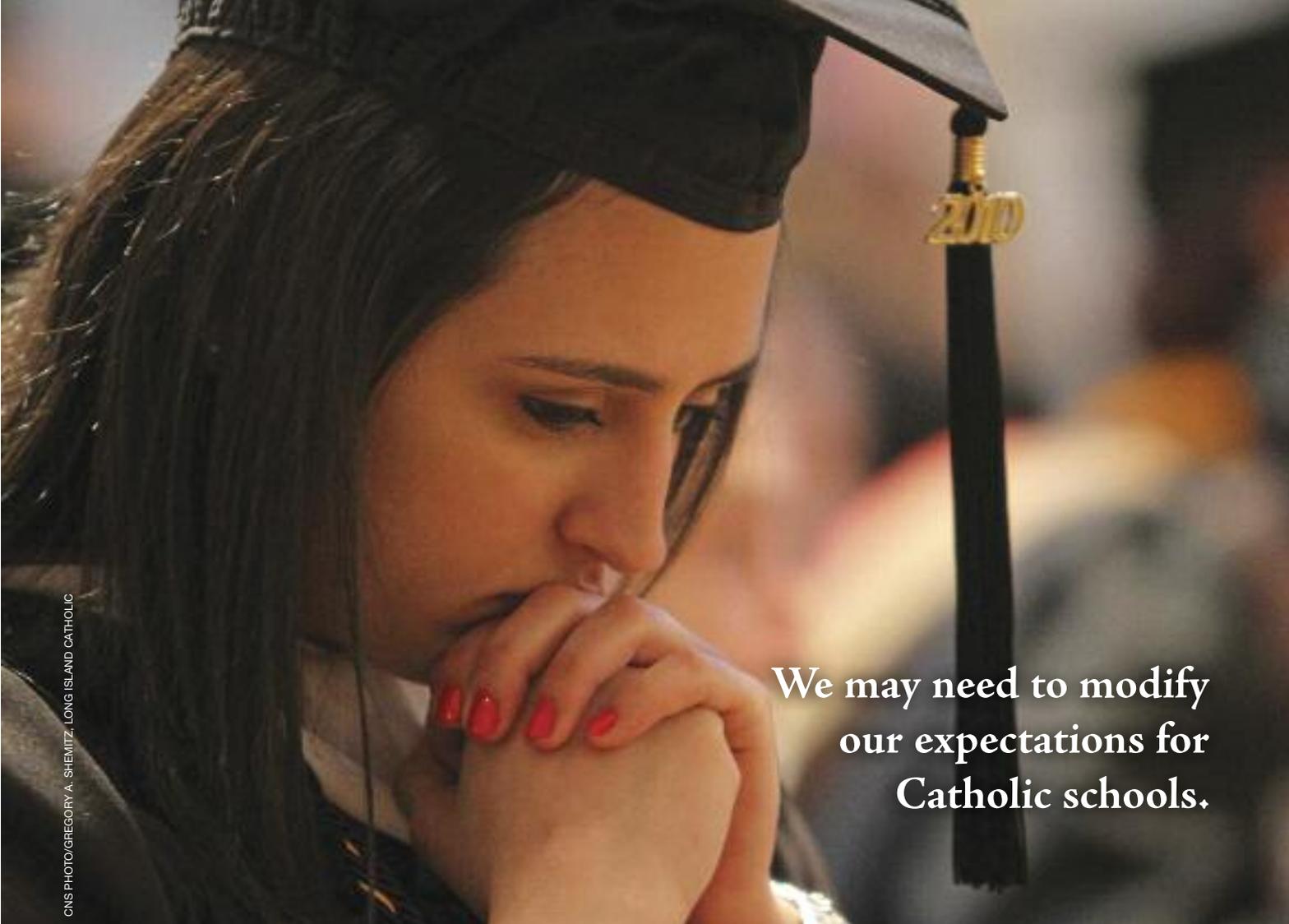
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CNS PHOTO/GREGORY A. SHEWITZ, LONG ISLAND CATHOLIC

We may need to modify  
our expectations for  
Catholic schools.

# Help Their Unbelief

BY MATT EMERSON

**I** am the Xavier success story," she said. "I used to be a total atheist downer, and now I'm reading *The Seven Storey Mountain*."

The speaker was a senior, one of several with whom I was chatting as we returned to Palm Desert, Calif., from Riverside, where nine Xavier College Preparatory students had argued and objected their way to victory in a mock trial. As Interstate 10 curved past a chain of outlet stores and a casino hotel, our conversation moved from the night's competition to God. Recalling a column about Catholic education, I asked my students about Xavier's influence on their faith and about their view of Catholicism. It was the question that led to my student's response, and then to Thomas Merton's book.

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**MATT EMERSON** is the director of admissions and an instructor of theology at Xavier College Preparatory in Palm Desert, Calif. He is a graduate of Saint Louis University and Notre Dame Law School.

The column I remembered was written by Charles J. Chaput, the archbishop of Philadelphia. Published on Jan. 21, 2012, in *The Philadelphia Tribune*, the archbishop wrote, “Catholic schools exist, first and foremost, to form believing Catholic Christians; people of the Gospel; people of justice, mercy and charity. If they produce something less, then we need to ask ourselves whether they *deserve* to survive.”

Initially, the archbishop’s statements struck me as truisms, no more provocative than saying a U.S. history course should be about U.S. history. But on second thought, his comments raise serious questions for educators. If Catholic schools produce something less than believing Catholic Christians, then shouldn’t we try to figure out why? And what might be changed? Some basic terms would also need to be defined: What is a “believing Catholic Christian”? And how does a Catholic school know it has formed one?

The answers to these questions are not obvious, and a failure to attend to their nuances could lead people to determine that Catholic schools are failing in their mission and therefore do not deserve to survive.

### **What Is a ‘Believing Catholic Christian’?**

Consider again Archbishop Chaput’s remark that the purpose of a Catholic school is to “form believing Catholic Christians.” In light of that, imagine a hypothetical senior at a Catholic high school, whom we will call Sarah.

Imagine that Sarah wants to help the poor and offers a compassionate heart to both stranger and friend. Though Sarah comes from a conventionally secular home and began high school without interest in a creator, she has developed a nascent belief in a loving God. She has attended retreats and led immersion trips, including a week of service and solidarity in Latin America. During her senior year, she continues to tutor children in a poor immigrant community even though she has already completed her school’s required hours of service. As a direct result of her time at the Catholic high school, she is now applying to colleges that combine faith and service, something that would have been unthinkable to her four years prior.

But imagine also that Sarah is unsure about Jesus’ identity as the incarnate God and doubts the exclusive claims of the Catholic Church. She disagrees with the church’s positions on major social issues, especially on contraception and

homosexuality. She attends Mass only when the school requires it.

Is Sarah a “believing Catholic Christian”?

Much can be said on her behalf. Though Sarah cannot (at least not yet) affirm essential Catholic dogmas, she serves her school and community in ways that are Jesus-like. Her warm heart and service to the marginalized call to mind the self-sacrificing love revealed in the Gospels, an

admirable commitment to the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Sarah is not explicitly or formally Catholic, however, and she does not believe in central Catholic claims about God and reality.

Can a Catholic high school be said to have failed if it produces people like Sarah, or if the majority of students are like

her? Is the threshold for Catholic success someone like another student, call her Maria, who knows and understands the doctrines of the faith, commits to the church’s moral and social positions and also lives out these teachings consistently and concretely? Is anything short of Maria a disappointment? A failure?

I do not think so. A Catholic school can remain true to its mission and identity and fairly be labeled Catholic, not only when it forms students like Sarah but precisely because it forms students like her.

### **Schools of Today**

To understand why that is the case, note the context in which today’s Catholic high school finds itself.

In his collection of lectures titled *Faith Seeking*, the great philosopher-theologian Denys Turner of Yale University, speaking of the question of God’s existence, writes that “for very large sectors of the populations of Western countries, life is lived broadly in a mental and emotional condition of indifference to the question.” Professor Turner’s statement is not simply a sociological description; its meaning and effects are embodied in individual lives—the lives that produce music, make movies, write books, lead schools, coach teams, tuck in children at night and send in applications to Catholic schools. Anyone interested in Catholic education must acknowledge that today’s students emerge from a culture indifferent to the existence of God. And to the extent they do consider the matter, students typically doubt that God exists. They are skeptical about religious belief and sometimes hostile to it, and they are convinced that there is no objective truth.

**We forget that faith is a  
mystery and a gift, something  
outside human control and not  
the result of even the  
best-designed curriculum.**

What might account for this outlook?

In addition to the influences of culture, religious belief rarely receives support in the crucible of faith formation, the home. If religion receives any attention, it is often one item on a menu of activities that compete for the family's time. A surprising percentage of students are also wounded. Every week, as a teacher of sophomores and seniors, I learn something that stuns me, something of the powerful aftershocks of divorce, alcoholism or depression. Many young people have no consistent, loving authority figure, no reliable model of virtue and no stable community. They often have no one to trust.

We educators cannot simply blame the media or parents and assume that Catholic schools and the church will produce disciples simply by modifying outside forces. Even students from stable and devoutly Catholic homes reject or resist formation in Catholic faith. Why?

### Not Simply Catechesis

We have to be honest; part of the reason for this inertia lies within Catholicism itself. The deposit of Judeo-Christian faith confronts students as both rational and mysterious; even, at times, disturbing and strange. It involves doctrines and dispositions, liturgies and practices and a way of life that threatens what teenagers (and adults) usually presume to be necessary for happiness. It intersects with history, with politics, with anthropology, with archaeology, with etymology, with philosophy and with literature. While this is fascinating, it means there are snares along the way.

If you doubt it, spend a week teaching high school religion. Imagine a 15-year-old who emerges from the setting I described above. Imagine that one of the first things he learns in freshman religion class is that God has not only entered the world through a virgin, but that now Jesus wants us to eat and drink his blood. How do you think the student will react? His incomprehension will usually mirror that of Jesus' listeners in John 6. (One sophomore, after hearing my explanation of the real presence, said, "Ugh, that's disgusting.") But the snags are not just the teaching of the real presence or the more shocking assertions of faith. Engage a group of teenagers on how suffering can be reconciled with a loving God, or how Scripture is inspired, or on the allegorical nature of the first 11 chapters of Genesis. Try talking to teenagers about the church's position on homosexuality and contraception or the reasons for a male-only, celibate priesthood.

Sometimes there is progress. Most of the time, however, you will find resistance and argument; you may not even be taken seriously.

It is not the case, as many tend to believe (and I once did), that more or better catechesis will solve the problem. Ultimately, formation in the Catholic faith is not simply a

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matter of reading or memorizing, or knowing a “bunch of stuff.” I have had students who could list the seven sacraments, expound on the real presence and discourse beautifully on the meaning of Jesus—but who did not believe in any of it. Belief, as Pope Benedict XVI told Peter Seewald in an interview (published in *God and the World*), “is something living, which is inclusive of the whole person in all his dimensions—understanding, will and feelings.”

Those who have studied the Catholic intellectual tradition sometimes think that if one reads enough and if one thinks enough, one will gradually accept the truths of Catholicism. We forget that brilliant minds—minds well acquainted with history, philosophy and theology—have rejected Christianity; others have taken years to accept it. We forget that faith is a mystery and a gift, something outside human control and not the result of even the best-designed curriculum.

## Accepting Sarahs

Given these factors, we have to be realistic when we talk about a Catholic school creating “believing Catholic Christians.” We must be mindful of the milieu that shapes the students we teach, the challenges Catholicism itself pre-

sents and the mystery of belief. When our students enter into formal study of the Catholic faith, they can find it off-putting in complexity or strangeness, or in its apparent unverifiability. Combine this with the students’ widespread relativism, throw in parental agnosticism, and you have a high percentage of students entering Catholic school primed to reject or resist formation. In some sense, this is a clash of civilizations.

What is a Catholic school to do? Are we to despair and conclude that Catholic schools should abandon their mission to form believing Catholics? Absolutely not. Outstanding young men and women enroll in Catholic schools, and we educators are privileged to be among their guides as they begin their journey toward faith. Yet we may have to modify expectations and sacrifice a surface Catholicism for a deeper receptivity to foundational principles of faith.

What would it mean to refashion our expectations in this way? In Catholic schools there is a necessary and graced place for someone like the hypothetical Sarah and many others like her. A student like Sarah will leave her Catholic school having made significant strides in the spiritual life. She will have grown from a position of skepticism to a position of belief; the seed of faith—no minor matter given the widespread indifference to the question of God—will have sprouted. She will have moved from praying not at all to praying frequently. She will have developed a genuine sympathy for the poor, the homeless and the immigrant. She will have undergone a transformation in self-perception and priorities hinting at the *metanoia* called for by Christ (Mk 1:15).

In other words, Sarah’s personal exodus has begun. Maybe that can be the role of a Catholic high school today: to liberate students from slavery and to point them in the right direction, toward the desert, knowing that confusions and idolatries will persist but having faith that these students will continue their transformation.

I am not suggesting that Catholic schools should give up on a fuller formation in Catholic Christianity. These “preambles” to faith (to borrow from Aquinas), which a Catholic school can instill in Sarah, are not ends in themselves. Ultimately, a Catholic school seeks to develop Sarah’s belief in Jesus as Lord, her desire for the sacraments and her commitment to Catholic moral and social principles. But a failure to develop all those, especially in today’s culture, cannot obscure the tremendous progress in the spiritual life that Catholic schools can and do provide.

A student like Sarah is a success story, a great example of the need for Catholic schools and of their salutary effect in the modern world. **A**

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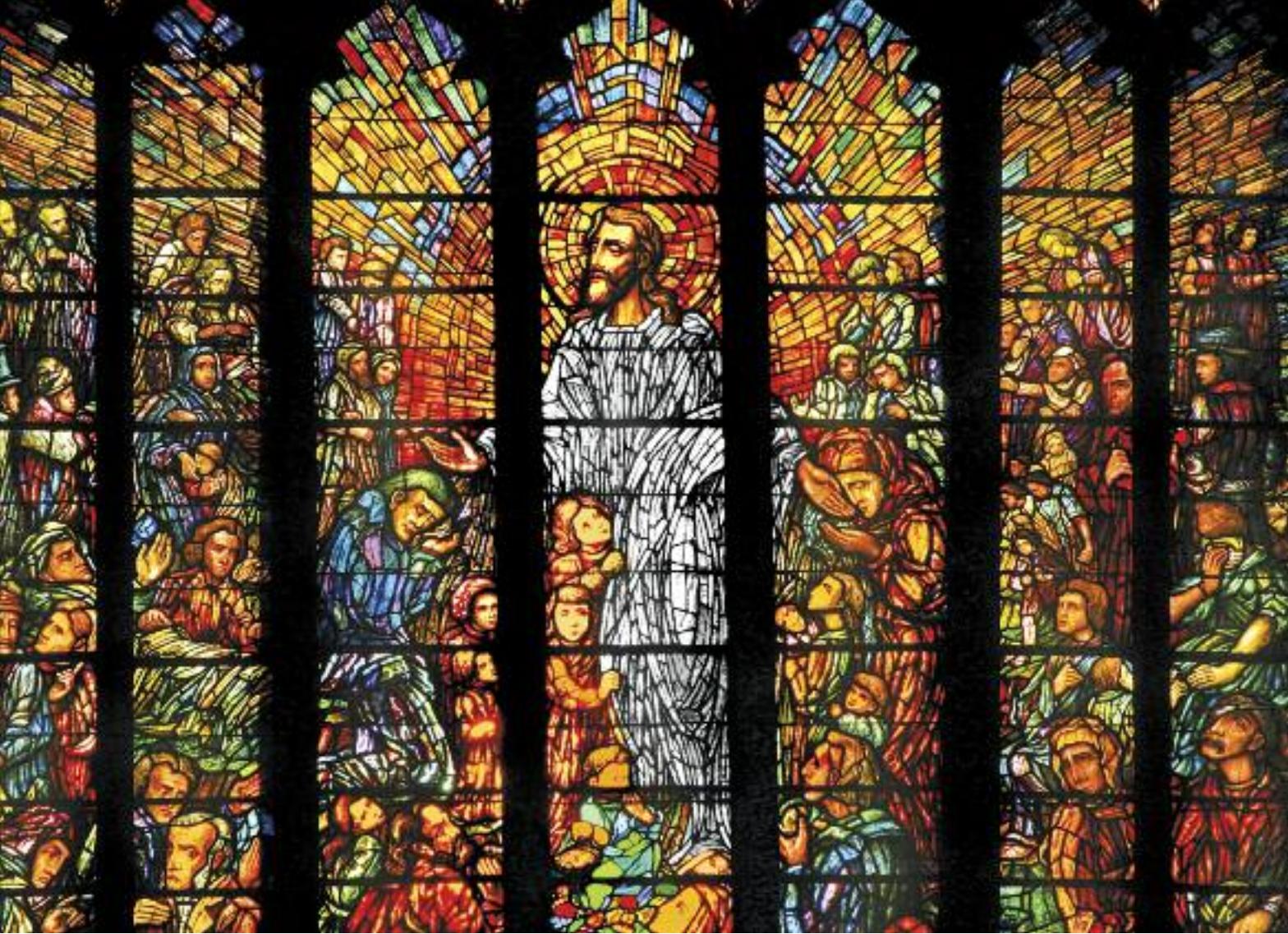


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# As It Is in Heaven

Can re-imagining the Gospel revitalize the church?

BY EDWARD McCORMACK

**T**he New Testament writers tell the story of God creating a new heaven and a new earth. In this story, the risen Jesus is the source of God's new creation, and the Holy Spirit is the energy bringing the new world to birth. The story is one of hope in the power of God, who comes from the future into our present world to bring justice, peace and reconciliation. Modeled on the freedom and life of Jesus Christ, the story concerns the transformation of human hearts, human relationships, soci-

etal institutions, culture and, eventually, the transformation of all creation. Popular Christian piety, however, has prevented us from reading the New Testament as the story of God's new creation coming to birth in our world.

Instead of proclaiming the good news, we often proclaim the bad news or the dull news.

In popular Christian piety, the Gospel is presented in the following manner: the Son of God came to earth, died and rose to forgive our sins. He opened the gates of heaven so that if we live a good life, our souls will go to heaven when we die (and the souls of those who do not will go to hell). In this version of the Gospel, Christian hope is reduced to life in heaven when we die. Homilies, especially funeral homi-

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EDWARD McCORMACK is an associate professor of Christian spirituality and chair of the Christian spirituality department at Washington Theological Union, where he specializes in Ignatian spirituality.

lies, hymns, catechetical lessons and books on popular piety have embedded this story deep within the Christian imagination.

Yet there are many problems with this understanding of the Gospel. It neglects important aspects of the New Testament, such as Jesus' kingdom ministry, the centrality of Jesus' crucifixion and bodily resurrection, life in the Spirit, discipleship, the mission of the church and God's creative renewal of the whole of creation. This telling also assumes that the Gospel story moves from earth to heaven, which orients the Christian imagination toward life after death. As a consequence, Christians do not expect to encounter Christ at work in their daily lives. Directing our energies and desires toward heaven makes earning a place there the focus of the Christian life, rather than knowing and serving Christ in this world.

This popular version of the Gospel gives Christians no reason to transform society, and its otherworldly nature has little chance of re-energizing the Christian imagination. Perhaps Catholics are reluctant to share their faith because it seems to have little to offer those who struggle with everyday life.

## Good News for This Age

In a world filled with bad news and shallow entertainments, people long for good news that means something. This good news is found in the story told by the New Testament writers. If the new evangelization is to succeed, the church must recover this story and share it with the world.

To read it correctly, we must reorient our imaginations regarding the direction of the Gospel story. This story moves from heaven to earth instead of from earth to heaven. It moves from God's future world into the current world. This is why we pray that God's will "be done on earth as it is in heaven."

This change in direction transforms our understanding

of Jesus' ministry. He was not working to get us into heaven, but brought the life of heaven to earth. He is the one through whom God's future world enters our world. Read this way, Jesus' healing and exorcisms, his offer of forgiveness and his confrontation with evil are all instances of God's new creation breaking into our world. Jesus understood his ministry in these terms: "If through the finger of God I drive out devils, then the kingdom of God is among you" (Lk 11:20). The resurrection of Jesus does not mean we will go to heaven when we die; rather it signals the definitive inbreaking of God's new creation. St. Paul indicates that he also saw the Gospel story moving from heaven to earth; he prayed, "Blessed be God...who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ" (Eph 1:1). Jesus opened the "pearly gates," not so we could get into heaven, but so that the future life of God could flood our world.

The reorienting of our imaginations in this way takes work. But the more Catholics locate the Gospel within the hopes of first-century Jews, the easier it becomes and the more clearly we can see that our faith is about God's new creation in Christ. Many first-century Jews believed the age in which they lived was evil. Their world was dominated by suffering, injustice, sickness, death and brutal pagan tyrants. They hoped God would act one day, as after Noah and at the Exodus, to rescue the world from evil and create it anew. On that day God would rule the world as king from Jerusalem, God's people would be restored, evil would be defeated and humanity along with all creation would be renewed.

What the Jews believed God would do in the future, the early Christians believed God was already doing through Jesus' resurrection. God's kingdom had dawned among them. God's new creation was coming to birth in and through the Christian community. This is why St. Paul can tell the Corinthians, "All God's promises, you see, find their yes in him" (2 Cor 1:20). He also reminds them, "If anyone is in Christ there is a new cre-

### PAPAL PRINCIPLES

Catholics rarely use the term *evangelization* to speak about passing on the faith, but since the Second Vatican Council the magisterium has used the term, as have three modern popes.

Pope Paul VI introduced the idea with the publication of "Evangelii Nuntiandi" (1974), arguing that evangelization is essential to the nature and mission of the church. Vatican II, he said, took evangelization as its theme, seeking to prepare the 20th-century church to proclaim the Gospel.

Pope John Paul II devoted his entire pontificate to evangelization and coined the term "new evangelization." In "Redemptoris Missio," he called for new methods of evangelization grounded in the universal call to holiness.

Pope Benedict XVI has emphasized evangelization by establishing the Pontifical Council on the New Evangelization. He has called the Synod of Bishops to consider the subject at their meeting in Rome in October, with the theme "the new evangelization for the transmission of the Christian faith."

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was coming to birth in and through the Christian community. This is why St. Paul can tell the Corinthians, "All God's promises, you see, find their yes in him" (2 Cor 1:20). He also reminds them, "If anyone is in Christ there is a new cre-

ation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new" (2 Cor 5:17).

This is the story told throughout the New Testament. Paul tells the Galatians, "It is not being circumcised or uncircumcised that matters, but what matters is a new creation" (Gal 6:15). In the Second Letter of Peter, we read, "What we are waiting for, relying on his promises, is a new heaven and new earth" (3:13). The Book of Revelation concludes with the author's vision of a new heaven and new earth: "I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride dressed for her husband" (21:2). Each of these texts describes a movement from heaven to earth. Each celebrates the dawning of God's new world in the midst of the old one. This really is good news worth sharing.

This way of reading the Gospel also has profound impli-

cations for the way we understand our lives as Christians. It presents the Christian life as an event of God's new creation, emerging out of the resurrection of Jesus. Cast in these terms, Christianity is a way of life coming from the future into the present, energized by the Holy Spirit and informed by the values of God's new creation. It is a new kind of existence made possible by the risen Christ, who stands in the midst of our church communities and at the center of our lives. Christ fills us with God's life and with all we value most—life, justice, peace, freedom and love. This new kind of existence motivates us to resist all that is opposed to God's new creation. It compels us to share the good news with others.

### CATHOLICS TAKE LEAVE

Recent research confirms that re-energizing the faithful is the urgent task of the church today, for people young and old are leaving the church. The Pew Research Forum reported in 2009 that one in every 10 Americans is a former Catholic. And for every one person who enters the church through the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, four are leaving. One of the chief reasons Catholics give for leaving the church is the poor state of preaching.

According to a Pew study in 2011, 71 percent of people who left Catholicism for a Protestant denomination said their spiritual needs were not being met. Large numbers also reported leaving because the church focused too much on rules, money and power rather than spirituality.

### The Essential Role of Preaching

This entire discussion, however, depends on good preaching. Without an all-out effort to renew preaching, the new evangelization will be dead on arrival. Catholics are often "homily hostages," as a friend of mine puts it, forced to hear priests retell the Sunday readings or rant about the one moral issue they are concerned about. This approach snuffs out the embers of faith instead of re-energizing it.

When preaching is done well, the Christian faith becomes infectious. If the church is serious about the new evangelization, it must engage in a massive overhaul of the practice of preaching. Until there is a revolution in the way priests and deacons proclaim the word, the faith of the baptized will not be energized, and few will want to share it with others. Instead, people will continue to walk out the door.

We need well-trained preachers who can proclaim the good news that God is liberating us and creating all things anew in Christ. Of course, preachers must learn the story of God's new creation as told by the New Testament writers. They will have to know this story from the inside by experiencing the freedom and new life God offers us in Christ. When preachers speak from their experience of God's new creation and read the New Testament as the story of their experience, their hearts will be set on fire. They will once again be able to reignite the dying embers within the church, and perhaps young and old will return to church to hear a meaningful word from God. **A**



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# Faith by Heart

Memorization can nurture spiritual growth.

BY DAVID IMPASTATO

**F**or a long time Catholic parents, grandparents and other adults in the pews have observed that many parish religious education programs have failed to teach youngsters in public schools the elementary facts of our religion. Whole classrooms-full of our children cannot name the four Evangelists, cannot describe what a sacrament is or think “dislike of gay people” is an official teaching of the church. The good news is that “the elephant in the classroom” has grown so large that the bishops have taken public note of it.

Earlier this year I wrote to several bishops regarding the status of religious education programs in the church. Cardinal Timothy Dolan replied that he felt “the

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(arch)dioceses of the nation” must do “what needs to be done to improve and strengthen” religious education. Bishop Richard Malone of Portland agreed, lamenting that two generations have been lost to poor catechesis and warning that we must not let the same “be said of the next generation.” Bishop David Ricken, the current chairman of the bishops’ Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, in a pastoral letter to the Diocese of Green Bay, called specifically for catechesis that would provide “a basic standard of knowledge of Christ and of the teachings of the Church.”

Meanwhile, Pope Benedict has convoked a Synod of Bishops, which is to meet in Rome in October, to focus entirely on catechesis and evangelization. In declaring an “educational emergency,” the pope reveals how far the church has come in just a few years from a refusal to question its faith-formation methodologies. Why has the turn-about taken so long?



One reason is that appearances are at odds with reality. The catechetical community is one of the most impressive organizations under the umbrella of the U.S. church. It is staffed by tens of thousands of dedicated volunteers as well as salaried directors of religious education; it is served by a textbook industry that competes nationwide for parish business. The whole vast enterprise bristles with an air of success. Equally impressive is the jubilant atmosphere at religious education conferences. And in parishes youth groups abound; first Communion and confirmation programs teem with candidates. Last year's World Youth Day in Madrid boasted a million more young people than assembled at Woodstock.

But such polling organizations as Gallup, the Pew Research Center, Georgetown University's Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate and Cardus, at the University of Notre Dame, focus on a very different set of numbers. From these we learn that four out of five Catholic youngsters fall away, defect to other denominations, embrace New Age cults or succumb to unbelief. The same sources rank Catholic students lower in religious knowledge than any other group, including Protestants, Jews and nonbelievers. There are sterling exceptions among young Catholics, of course, but we ignore the countervailing data at our peril.

## Back to the Basics

Bishop Ricken's insistence on a baseline of religious literacy—a "true north" in his words—takes us back to 1979, when Pope John Paul II spoke against the "memoryless catechesis" that was depriving young Christians of a spiritual compass, giving them neither guidance nor a place to call home. This theme becomes central in the Vatican Congregation for the Clergy's *General Directory for Catechesis* of 1997. Importing Pope John Paul's frame of reference, it advocates the "use of memory" as a historically sanctioned "constitutive aspect of the pedagogy of the faith."

In "Learning by Heart," a chapter in the *National Directory for Catechesis* (2005), the U.S. bishops concur, proposing the memorization of "the principal formulations of the faith; basic prayers; key biblical themes, personalities and expressions; and factual information regarding worship

and Christian life." The function of such knowledge, they emphasize, is not to promote "rote religion" on the model of the Baltimore Catechism. Rather, the purpose is to nurture Christian identity and unity, providing an "accurate exposition of the faith" for the developing Christian and a "common language" with which to express, share and celebrate it.

A discipleship and spirituality sustained by knowledge create the triad of "mind, heart and will" that the bishops establish as the goal of a "comprehensive and substantive" catechesis in their 1997 pastoral letter "Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry."

The church documents are at pains to clarify that "mnemonic learning" does not replace "other functions of learning" but should be "harmoniously inserted" into a holistic faith-formation process. Nor can youth religious education be considered apart from a concurrent educational outreach to adults and families, as the bishops counseled in 2000 with the publication of "Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us." But the bishops' vision of an integrated catechesis, one that

values memory as an essential component of spiritual development, has not been taken seriously. Indeed it was not until late last year that their *National Directory for Catechesis*, in print for over five years, was granted shelf space in the library of The Catholic University of America, a bastion of religious education only two blocks from the bishops' national headquarters in Washington, D.C.

## A List of Essentials

The New Evangelization calls for "the new," not more of the same. Ironically, the new in this case is what the bishops have been calling for all along. In urging the use of memory, they directly and concretely seek to overcome the scandal of religious illiteracy. Implementation is straightforward and hands-on. The bishop in each diocese, consulting with his priests and educators, drafts a few lists of questions and answers

to be "learned by heart," based on items for memorization specified in the directory. Use of the Internet and social networking technologies would free the process from burdensome infrastructure and expense and quickly make it classroom-ready.

### A WHAT-TO-KNOW LIST

- The Ten Commandments
- The Beatitudes
- The Nicene Creed
- The seven sacraments
- The parts of the Mass
- The fruits of the Spirit
- The corporal and spiritual works of mercy
- The key themes and personages of the Bible
- The doctrine of the communion of saints
- The precepts of the church
- The mysteries of the rosary
- The Our Father and the Hail Mary

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Lists would be different for each grade level of the parish program and would conform to existing lesson plans. A small portion of class time could be set aside during which questions and answers would be practiced out loud, always followed by discussion. Going forward, all students in the bishop's jurisdiction, empowered by the use of memory, could at least be counted on to articulate the listed items of the faith—perhaps 10 to 15 in all—as each phase of their formation concludes. Written or oral tests would hold students accountable, as testing does in any respected educational setting. The list for students “graduating” from parish religious education programs, usually after confirmation, would reflect their cumulative knowledge and correspond to a norm of basic Catholic literacy (see sidebar, p. 20).

A dozen or so facts and concepts retained in memory might seem to set a very low standard, but the need for the suggestion itself reflects the extent to which our current standards of religious knowledge have otherwise collapsed. It is absurd to expect that youngsters who know virtually nothing about their religious practice or belief will continue for very long to practice or believe. We do not need statistics to tell us this. We should urge the bishops, our primary teachers, to restore knowledge to its role in religious education as they themselves have urged us to do—a proposal we have ignored, but one that can deliver us from the consequences of a memoryless catechesis by sure and simple steps. **A**

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## WOVEN FROM LIGHT

*The special effects of Oakland's cathedral*

Compared with the skyscrapers in downtown Oakland, the Cathedral of Christ the Light is modest in height. Ephemeral and reflective of every passing cloud, its seeming lack of structural solidity is startling. Unlike many ecclesiastical fortresses, this cathedral exudes a sense of permeability, appearing to allow in as much as it keeps out. Since its dedication in 2008, it has been compared to a nest, a tent, a basket and

other forms that are rooted in the natural world and vulnerable to its forces.

The architect Craig Hartman of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, L.L.P., a firm known for large commercial structures, intended to design an inspiring space made from light and humble materials. In all important ways, he has succeeded.

This cathedral is “not meant to impress through its consumption of resources and display of spectacle, but to achieve a generosity of spirit with modest means,” Hartman said. He emphasized wood, concrete and glass, three materials used since antiquity.

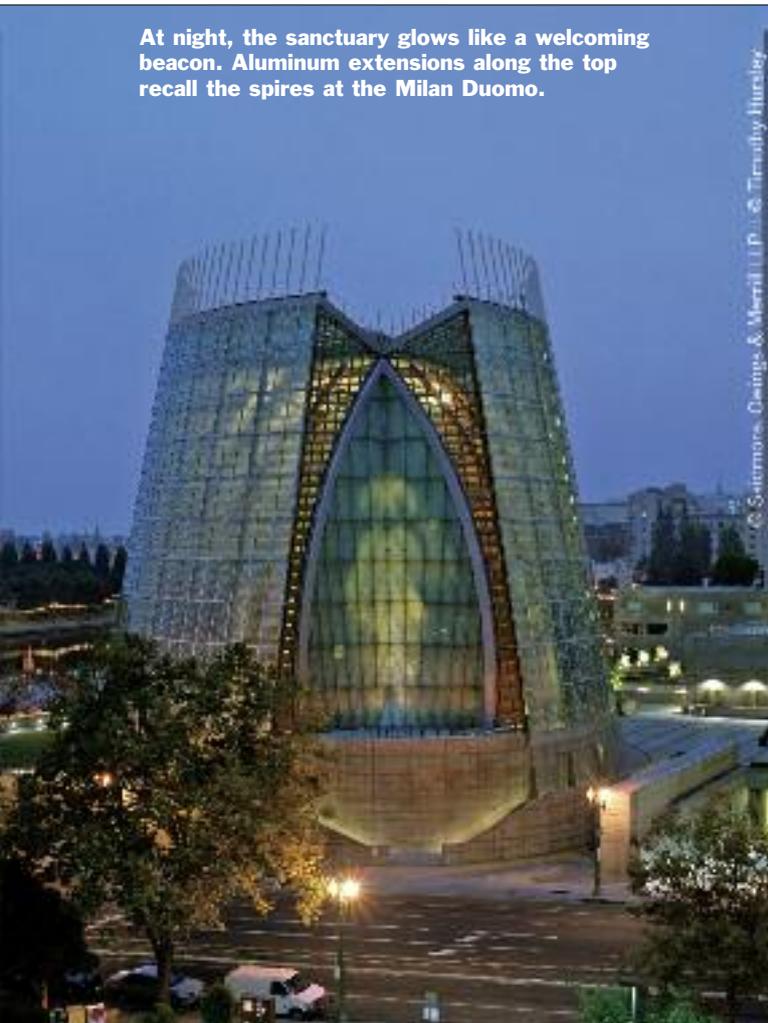
Rendered to reveal their essence and intrinsic beauty, they cause us to reconsider in the face of stressed natural resources what

is truly precious and rare. If church builders once expressed reverence by using the costliest materials, then

### ON THE WEB

Additional photos of the Cathedral of Christ the Light. [americamagazine.org/slideshow](http://americamagazine.org/slideshow)

At night, the sanctuary glows like a welcoming beacon. Aluminum extensions along the top recall the spires at the Milan Duomo.



The cathedral's 2.5-acre campus, located on Lake Merritt, is nestled within Oakland's commercial district.

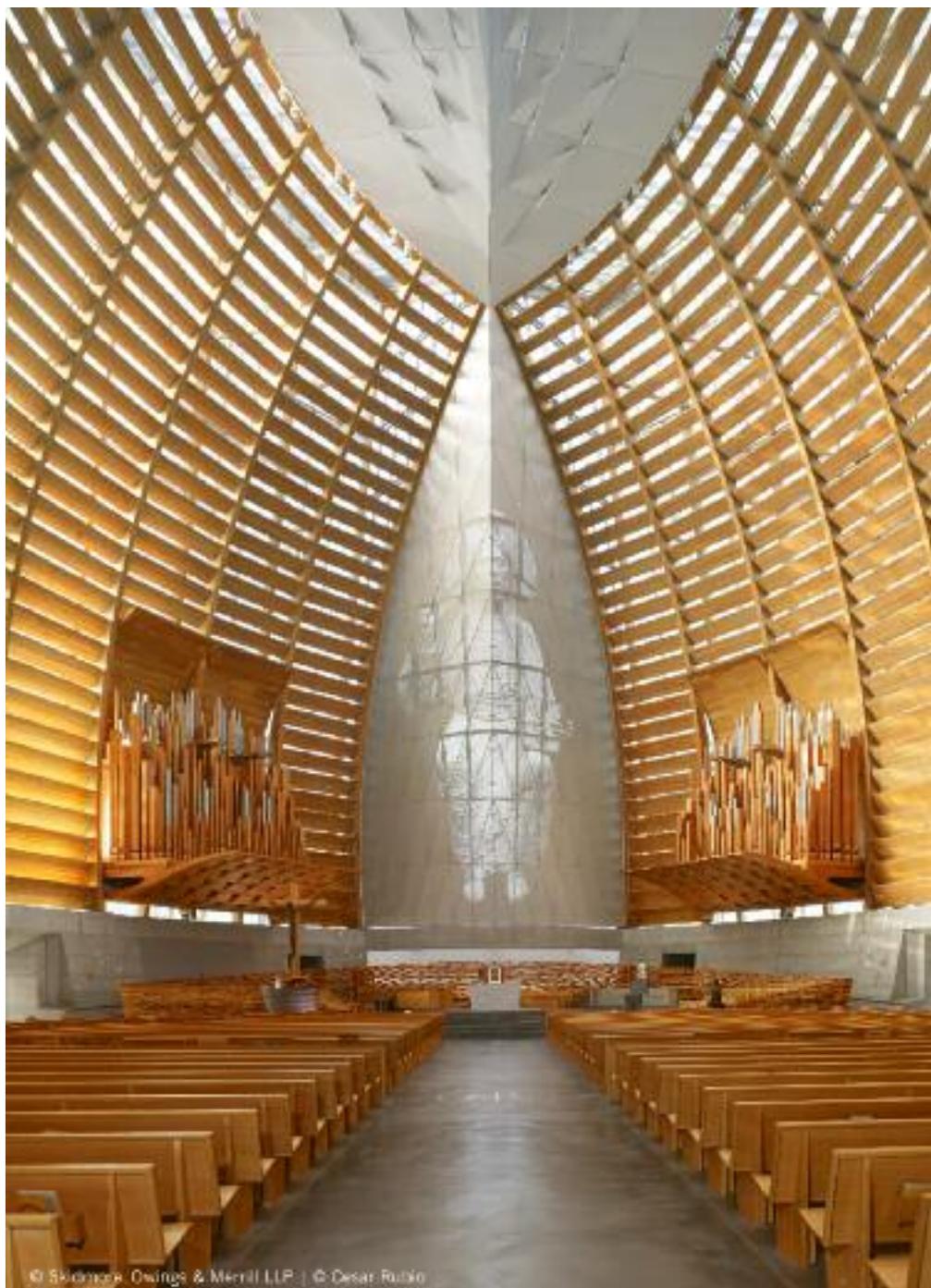


Oakland's cathedral offers prescient commentary on how luxury will soon be defined.

Structurally too the cathedral touches the earth lightly. Its concrete base floats on a series of isolators to protect the building from seismic damage. A louvered wooden structure rises above the base, cupping the sanctuary and revealing snippet views of the sky. Its unusual elliptical plan was inspired by a variety of influences, from the ancient Christian symbol of the fish to the torqued sculptures of Richard Serra. The open-weave structure reflects the diocese's desire to create a "kinetic worship" experience that draws people into the vibrant space to receive Christ's light and sends them into the world to share that light. Yet for all its porosity, the building has been constructed to last 300 years or more.

Much like a basket, the cathedral's structure and many of its furnishings are woven, evoking scriptural imagery, from Moses' infant journey to the miraculous leftovers collected after Jesus fed the multitudes. Its form also recalls the exemplary baskets made by the Pomo and other Californian tribes and those carried by agricultural workers who have powered the state's economy. The reredos and confessionals, made of latticed wood, encourage openness between clergy and laity and underscore the cooperative nature of worship. The exterior glass panels that protect the internal wooden structure are patterned with vertical lines that visually intermingle with the horizontal mullions. Along the top of the cathedral, aluminum extensions reach upward, looking much like the warp ends of a basket before the weaver's work is finished, reminding us that our lives are not completed here on earth.

The weaving motif continues in an outdoor memorial garden, which consists of a circular boulder that has been broken into pieces and placed, almost, back together. A plaque states that the memorial is "dedicated to those inno-



**The Cathedral's internal structure is constructed of wood and concrete and enveloped by a protective glass veil.**

cents sexually abused by members of the clergy. We remember, and we affirm: never again." Oakland is the first cathedral in the nation to acknowledge these victims with a permanent memorial.

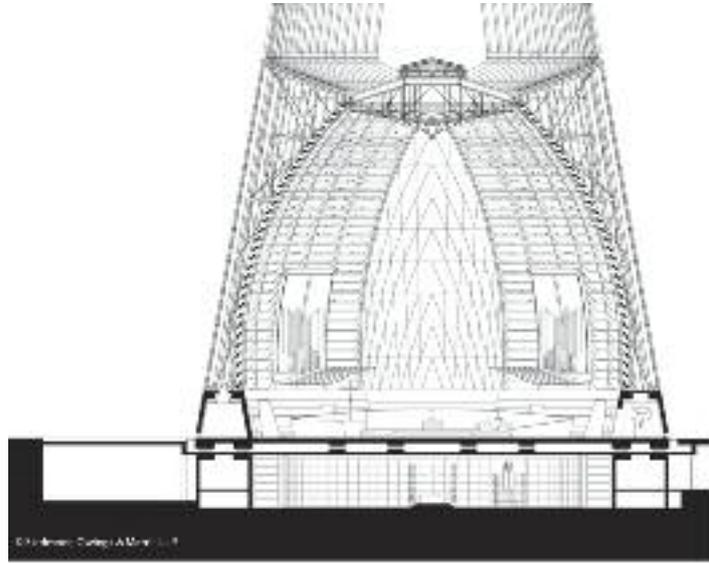
The sanctuary centers on a massive image of Christ. The designer Lonny Israel ingeniously recreated the 12th-

century carving of Christ in Majesty on Chartres Cathedral's western facade by pixelating a photograph of the sculpture. The image was laser-cut into aluminum panels using 94,000 variously sized perforations, calibrated to recreate the Christ figure when light passes through them. In contrast, the Stations of the Cross were made to

human scale and placed at chest height to encourage people to touch them.

In order to welcome all, including those unfamiliar with traditional Catholic iconography, the sanctuary forgoes much of what we have come to expect in cathedrals: statuary, paintings, stained glass and rich fabrics. Instead, the eye delights in abstract, touchable surfaces subtly animated. "We absorb things from our world that may not be evident to us," Hartman said, "but there is a cumulative effect that influences the way we think about the world, about life."

A Gothic cathedral's darkness was cut by light emanating from stained-glass windows, an allusion to humani-



ty's stumbling toward salvation amid ever-present temptation and grace. We, who can instantly access as much human misery as we can bear, know darkness well. Perhaps it is light we need most now.

This cathedral invites light in—dappled, raking, translucent, reflected, soft, sharp and changing. Even the Christ in Majesty is made of light, formed of thousands of voids through which light streams in. Those same holes, molecular wounds, suggest that we stand on Calvary too, spears in hand, just as the soldiers who pierced Christ's physical body once did. Yet in the face of these daily choices, there is

grace, conceived in Oakland's cathedral as light that pours in, surrounding us.

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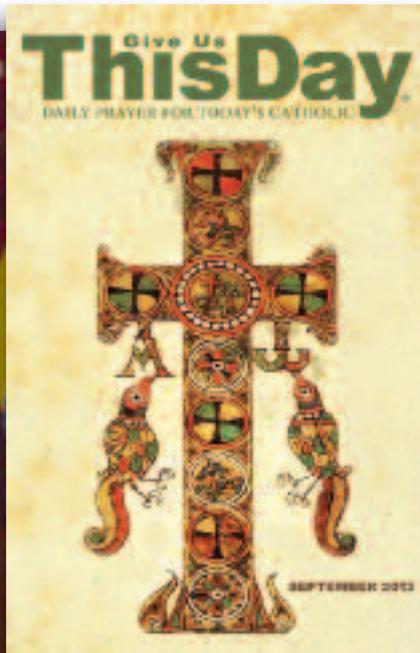
**JUDITH DUPRÉ** is the author of *Churches and other books on architecture*.



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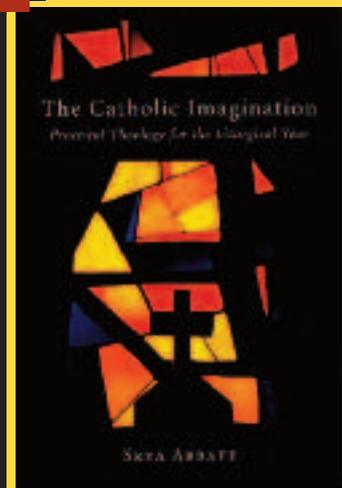
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## BEGIN AFRESH

### THE COMPLETE POEMS

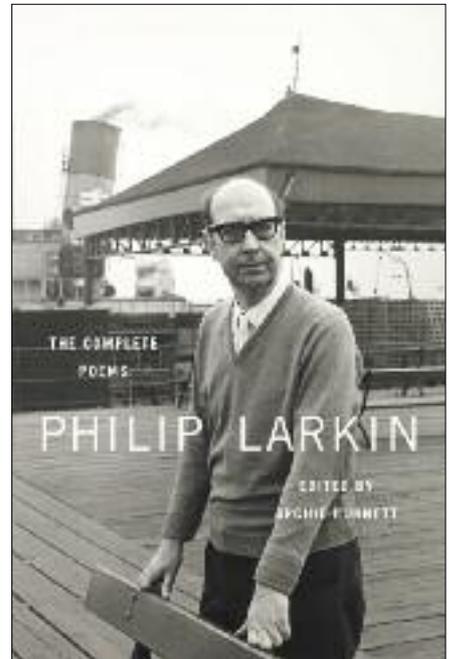
By Philip Larkin  
Edited by Archie Burnett  
Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 729p \$40

I am not sure if the English poet Philip Larkin (1922-85) ever behaved in public as badly as many other poets have done, but he did so privately and plenteously, to judge from his letters, biographies and unpublished poetry. For a while it was the thing to disparage his work from the point of view of political correctness. You could argue he was sexist, racist, anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, etc. He was a poetic Dirty Harry; he hated everyone—except schoolgirls in plaid skirts, about whom he wrote a bit of soft pornography.

And yet the man was more than this. He wrote some of the most beautiful lyric poetry of the 20th century. So you can focus on the life if you want to tear the man down, or you can read his poetry and experience the harrowing beauty of what he wrote, for example this stanza from “High Windows,” which comes after the narrator has been wondering if anyone ever looked at him and wished he or she had been free of God and “sweating in the dark”:

*And immediately  
Rather than words comes the thought  
of high windows:  
The sun-comprehending glass,  
And beyond it, the deep blue air, that  
shows  
Nothing, and is nowhere, and is end  
less.*

Archie Burnett, co-director of the



Editorial Institute and professor of English at Boston University, has produced a tome indispensable for those who love Larkin's poetry and for any aspiring or practicing poet. The four books Larkin published in his lifetime—*The North Ship* (1945), *The Less Deceived* (1955), *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964) and *High Windows* (1974)—are here but also all his uncollected, unpublished and undated poems.

The commentary by Burnett following the poems can be heavy slogging, but only a scholar or poet interested in compositional details would bury himself in the subsections about dates, text and influences. More interesting for the general reader are the many quotations from Larkin's letters, prose and interviews that refer to the poems themselves.

Larkin said, for instance, about “High Windows,” quoted above:

#### ON THE WEB

Matt Weber talks about his new book, *Fearing the Stigmata*.  
[americamagazine.org/podcast](http://americamagazine.org/podcast)

I think the end shows a desire to get away from it all.... I don't think it very good: I called the book after it because I liked the title. It's a true poem. One longs for infinity and absence, the beauty of somewhere you're not. It shows humanity as a series of oppressions, and one wants to be somewhere where there's neither oppressed nor oppressor, just freedom. It may not be very articulate.

This is a frequent refrain; Larkin often disparaged himself and his work. He was hard on the world in general yet honest about this hardness; he was also honest about the light he could see, seldom but exquisitely, through high windows. His work sometimes reminds me of the line from Gerard Manley Hopkins that despite all that we have done to the earth, "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things."

Hopkins was one of the poets whose work Larkin kept "within reach." Echoes of his work can be heard in my favorite Larkin poem, "The Trees" (which Larkin later thought "bloody awful tripe"):

*The trees are coming into leaf  
Like something almost being said;  
The recent buds relax and spread,  
Their greenness is a kind of grief.*

*Is it that they are born again  
And we grow old? No, they die too.  
Their yearly trick of looking new  
Is written down in rings of grain.*

*Yet still the unresting castles thresh  
In fullgrown thickness every May.  
Last year is dead, they seem to say,  
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.*

Besides the poems and commentaries themselves, what makes this volume especially valuable for a working poet is the second appendix, "Dates of Composition," in which is laid out a

## waiting for the father

he waited today  
as he had for years  
for some nod

pass the corn, dad  
which he did without  
looking up from his plate.  
did the wind do any damage?  
his dad grunted.

he remembered  
following his dad into the bathroom  
before his own whiskers appeared—  
watched him shave from the toilet seat.  
never looked his way  
as he patted on mennen aftershave—  
silently headed out to finish dressing.

he knew he'd get the strap  
if he came home late  
if he back-talked  
if he had let the fields flood  
if his gopher traps came up empty  
if his furrows weren't straight  
and grades, the grades, always the grades.

he resigned himself  
he would not ever be good enough

yet, this Christmas  
again, he  
watched him  
as if he were seven.

ELIZABETH CLAVERIE

ELIZABETH CLAVERIE teaches language arts at Our Lady of Loretto School, Novato, in the Archdiocese of San Francisco. This poem was the second runner-up in the Foley Poetry Contest of 2012.

table “designed to give a sense of what Larkin was working on at a given time....” One could go through it year by year, read the poems, then the commentaries and have a complete picture of the poet’s working life.

Larkin was not always an admirable man, but he was certainly a hard-

working poet. He deserves to have his *Complete Poems* presented by such a hard-working scholar as Archie Burnett.

---

**FRANKLIN FREEMAN** is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in *The Boston Review* and *The New Oxford Review*.

In his book, Salazar talks about his life in running and now coaching; but equally important, he discusses how Catholicism guides his life.

Salazar’s life is shaped by a number of rather intense, formative events, including an invitation to join the Greater Boston Track Club as a young teen runner. His membership in this group helped advance his running and also introduced him to Bill Rodgers, who eventually became one of America’s top runners after winning the 1975 Boston Marathon. This event too had a great influence on Salazar, as he watched Rodgers, his friend, win the race. In the years that followed, he focused on becoming the world’s best marathoner.

Salazar also discusses his near-death experience at the Falmouth Road Race in 1978, when he essentially blacked out during the race, yet managed to complete the run and collapse at the finish line, as his internal body temperature soared to 108 degrees. At the time, Salazar interpreted his survival as a sign that he was tougher than all other runners and that his body could withstand and survive unfathomable pain levels.

Apart from revealing a great deal about elite men’s marathon running, Salazar also discusses the development and maturation of his faith. Growing up with a strong Catholic presence in his family, Salazar remains devoted to many of the prayers he learned in his youth. With his father’s encouragement, Salazar visited Medjugorje, where six children in 1981 were allegedly visited by the Blessed Virgin Mary. These apparitions continue to be reported today.

RYAN HENDRICKSON

## FAITH AT THE FINISH LINE

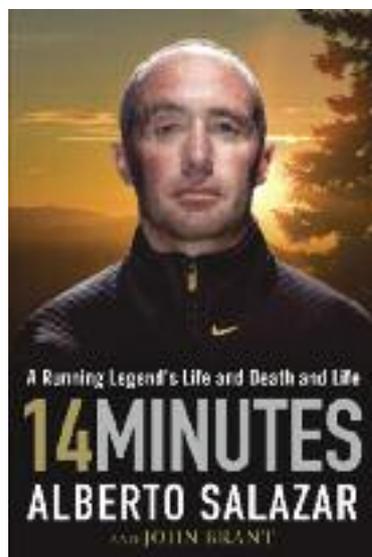
### 14 MINUTES A Running Legend’s Life and Death and Life

By Alberto Salazar and John Brant  
Rodale. 258p \$25.99

As many recent studies point to an increasingly secular world, it is striking to see the open presence and recognition of Christianity among some of the world’s elite men’s marathon runners. Perhaps the most famous current Christian evangelist is Ryan Hall, who placed second at the U.S. Olympic trials in Houston this past January. While Hall is considerably more active in promulgating his faith than others, it is noticeable how willing other elite male runners are to thank God. After finishing ahead of Hall at the Olympic trials, Meb Keflegzhi crossed the finish line and immediately made the Sign of the Cross. Similarly, Wesley Korir, after winning this year’s Boston Marathon in April, also made the Sign

of the Cross. Alberto Salazar’s new memoir, *14 Minutes*, co-authored with John Brant, adds to the record of elite runners who see God playing a central role in their lives and running.

During his prime running years in the early to mid-1980s, Salazar helped advance marathon running to unprecedented levels in the United States. Salazar confidently predicted that he could win his marathon races and then did so convincingly. Among his running accomplishments, he won three New York City Marathons, as well as an epic battle against Dick Beardsley in the 1982 “Duel in the Sun” Boston Marathon.



Chap. 1-3 Catholic decline and its causes

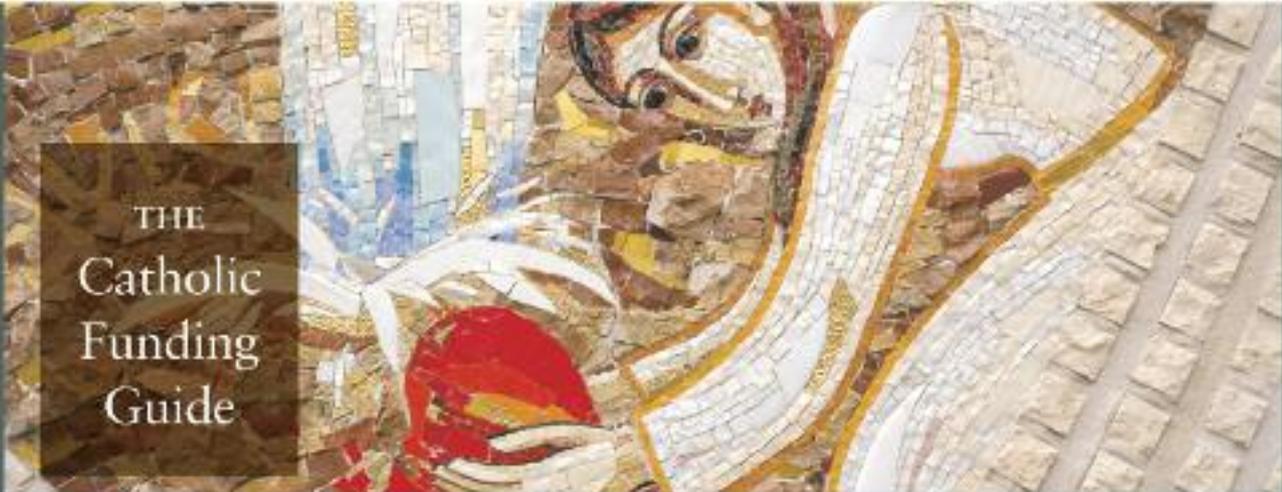
Chap. 4 The Missionary Church of Bayville

Chap. 5 St. Mary's Community of communities

Chap. 6-7 Planned Renewal & Renewal for 2030

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For Salazar, the trip was transforming, and he reports that he personally witnessed a “miracle”—a word he uses frequently. Much of his life after that involved his increased devotion to the Catholic Church and his own surrender to what he feels is God’s will. Salazar finds great value in saying the Rosary and reciting prayer mantras, which he compares to marathon training. As in multiple training runs, the more one prays, the more one benefits from praying.

The final section is devoted to the 14 minutes in 2007 when Salazar’s heart stopped beating and to the medical steps that were taken to revive him. He describes at length his seemingly perfect physical health prior to the cardiac event, his own confusion and despair that followed and the life changes he implemented upon his return home from the hospital. The book concludes with a discussion of his life as a coach of elite men and women distance runners and again how he sees God working in his life.

Salazar’s story is nothing short of captivating. Readers interested in faith development, the challenges of overcoming physical and emotional ailments and, of course, long-distance running will find this book compelling. Many viewed Salazar as brash during his running years; but this book provides much greater insight into his deep insecurities about running, his difficult family and social relationships and his battles with depression. Salazar’s intense life experiences will be difficult for some readers to relate to, yet their dramatic quality still makes for a fascinating story. Readers will also be struck by what appears to be deep sincerity and humility in a man known for destroying his competition.

**RYAN HENDRICKSON** is a professor of political science at Eastern Illinois University and a runner.

## WAY OF FORGIVING

### HOW GOD BECAME KING The Forgotten Story Of the Gospels

By N. T. Wright  
HarperOne. 276p \$26

Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (2002), proposed the addition of five Luminous Mysteries to advance “a revival of the Rosary...as a true doorway to the depths of the Heart of Christ” by filling a biblical-Christological gap within the traditional contemplation of scenes only from the Gospel stories of the incarnation, passion and glorification. Given the popular piety and art that dominate Catholicism to this day, one might think of that gap—the complete absence of Jesus’ public ministry—as the unfortunate heritage of a medieval Christianity focused on nativity and crucifixion (think crèche scenes and stations of the cross or high art portrayals of Christ as the babe in his mother’s arms and the man hanging on the cross at Golgotha).

The Evangelical-Anglican biblical historian N. T. Wright, however, dates Christianity’s loss of the true depth of the Gospel’s message from at least the fourth century, as evidenced in the Nicene Creed’s single bound from “born of the Virgin Mary” to “suffered under Pontius Pilate.” Two-thirds of the way through his book, having diagnosed the historical-theological problem and marshaled Old and New Testament sources to assert the genuine contours of what God has done in Christ, Wright reiterates his thesis with verve: “It is all too possible to ‘believe in the divinity of Jesus’ and to couple this with an escapist view of salvation (‘Jesus is God and came to snatch us away from this world’) in a way that may preserve an outward form of ‘Christian orthodoxy,’ but that has left out the

heart of the matter.” The heart of the New Testament, Wright repeatedly insists, is likewise the heart of the Old Testament pulsing throughout the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ entire mission.

The Gospel message, Wright argues, was framed in terms not of the Greek-philosophical body and soul but of the Jewish-biblical kingdom and cross, whereby God finally returns to an exiled Israel so that Israel might realize its vocation in the world. “The call of Abraham is the answer to the sin of Adam. Israel’s story is thus the microcosm and beating heart of the world’s story, but also its ultimate saving energy.” What the earliest believers in Jesus came to realize through reflection on his life and death, in light of the Psalms and prophets, was that God’s response to Israel’s ongoing failure to recognize their role as the people through whom God would “deal with the problem of evil” was to “become Israel-in-person.” God in Jesus drew evil “onto one place, allowing it to do its worst at that point.”

Christ’s terrible execution reveals God’s way of reigning in the world. We can, however, only rightly perceive the divine activity therein and its empowerment of believers to do likewise by attending to Jesus’ entire public career as “launching that project,” as the revelation of Israel’s God coming in sovereign power.

The argument, then, rests fully on the paradoxical character of the Gospel. Wright entitled one of his earlier his-

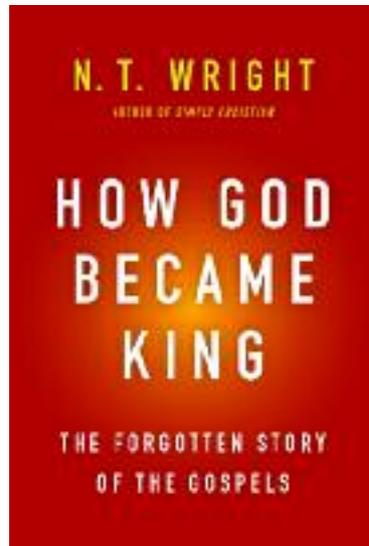
torical-exegetical tomes, *Jesus and the Victory of God*. Wright’s erstwhile sparring partner, John Dominic Crossan, in turn, entitled his review in a major biblical journal “What Victory? What God?” Crossan, given his quest to reconstruct Jesus as an anticolonial revolutionary, found that Wright’s interpretation leaves Jesus and his God devoid of any real historical consequence. In his latest book Wright is sticking to his guns: “Without the

cross, the satanic rule remains in place. ... The point of the resurrection is that it is the immediate result of the fact that the victory has already been won. Sin has been dealt with. The ‘accuser’ has nothing more to say. The creator can now launch his new creation.”

But has the matter of sin been so simply settled? How can one assert this when the evidence of sorrow and

unjust suffering relentlessly perdures? Wright acknowledges the paradox in insisting that although the first believers “hadn’t been expecting it to work out like this ... they would have had no difficulty in recognizing that this was the story that was being told.” The task for Christians today, and the burden of Wright’s entire book, is to retune our ears so as to adequately hear (again) the Evangelists’ story of Jesus as the story of Israel’s God launching a people renewed for an ongoing clash of kingdoms. The soteriological implications are, he pleads, urgent. Old atonement theologies are bankrupt.

Christians must adopt Wright’s reading of kingdom and cross as a call to Scripture’s true political theology: “The Gospels are there, waiting to inform a new generation for holistic mission, to embody, explain, and advocate new ways of ordering communi-



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ties, nations, and the world." It is a call to suffer for speaking truth to power. As this reviewer understands it, this is what Wright finally means by God becoming king.

**BRUCE T. MORRILL, S.J.**, is the Edward A. Malloy professor of Catholic studies at Vanderbilt University. His most recently published book is *Encountering Christ in the Eucharist: The Paschal Mystery in People, Word, and Sacrament*.

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Oct. 8  
50th Anniversary  
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Oct. 15  
Fall Books

Oct. 27  
Fall Books 2

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John Dominic Crossan

Exploring Catholic Culture:  
Vatican II – An Unexpected Revolution  
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## LETTERS

### Protect the Vulnerable

Re "After Aurora" (Editorial, 8/13): The editors' support for gun control ignores the practical benefits of private gun ownership. Research by Dr. John R. Lott Jr. (*More Guns, Less Crime*, 1998) shows that states that allow citizens to carry concealed weapons have substantially lower crime rates.

Also, guns can allow the most vulnerable members of society, like store owners in crime-ridden neighborhoods, taxicab drivers in large cities, victims of domestic violence, the elderly, the disabled, racial minorities and gays, to defend themselves successfully against criminals.

The overwhelming majority of the National Rifle Association's millions of members use their firearms legally, morally, responsibly and with common sense. In my view, the purpose of gun control is not to save lives or reduce crime but to keep citizens vulnerable, in a perpetual state of victimhood and

exclusively dependent upon government for protection.

DIMITRI CAVALLI  
*Bronx, N.Y.*

### Transforming Politics

Re "In This Together," by Bishop Richard E. Pates (8/13): The central problem is that the bishops seem to accept the issues as framed by the politicians. In doing so they willingly participate in wedge politics, which panders to the extremes of both political ideologies, dividing Americans and Catholics in the process.

The health care reform legislation is a perfect example. The bishops rightly opposed the provision to allow public funding for abortion and pressed Catholics to oppose the entire measure on that basis, but they did not press the Republicans to pass health care reform without public funding for abortion. It would have only taken a few pro-life, pro-health reform Republican lawmakers to transform the legislation into something that fully reflected Catholic priorities.

It is not just the responsibility of individual Catholics to press for change within both major parties. The bishops have a responsibility to work to transform the political process so that Catholics do not have to compromise any of their principles merely to exercise their right to vote.

FRANK RIELY  
*Floyds Knobs, Ind.*

### Empowered Laity

Thank you for printing "Change the Church?" by David O'Brien (8/13). As a founding member of Voice of the Faithful, I believe it is time for the institutional church to recognize the importance of lay movements that to this day continue to be vilified by some bishops around the country.

We plead for more transparency and accountability in financial dealings, more lay involvement in the running of parishes and dioceses and more local participation in the selection of bishops. As our 10th anniversary convention nears (Sept. 14-15 in Boston), we continue to ask for a place at the table, so that the new church, now enlivened by the beautiful precepts of Second Vatican Council, can finally become a reality.

EDWARD J. THOMPSON SR.  
*Farmingdale, N.Y.*

### Acceptable Lobbying

In reading Nicholas P. Cafardi's article about restrictions on the political and lobbying activities of churches ("Politics and the Pulpit," 7/30), I am struck by the certitude of his analysis.

Professor Cafardi may have jumped too quickly to the conclusion that Bishop Daniel Jenky's homily violated the prohibition on electioneering by tax-exempt entities. As far as I know, Bishop Jenky focused his comments on the objectionable policies of President Obama in making the odious and, in my opinion, unwarranted comparisons to those of Stalin and Hitler. He never advised anyone on how they should vote in the fall elec-

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CARTOON BY TONY MURPHY

tion, scheduled to take place six months later. Timing is a factor in determining whether such an intervention violates the political restrictions.

Mr. Cafardi also questioned whether Archbishop J. Peter Sartain violated lobbying restrictions on tax-exempt organizations because he gathered signatures through parishes in opposition to a state law legalizing same-sex marriage. Cafardi states that churches should not spend one dollar of tax-exempt money to oppose the legally recognized civil rights of others. I view this as an argument stemming from his political views rather than his legal expertise.

FRANK MONAHAN  
Retired Director  
Office of Government Liaison  
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops  
Washington, D.C.

### Leadership and Love

Thanks, Sister Nancy Sylvester, I.H.M. ("Into the Future," Web only 7/16), for using your great gifts of courage to "comfort the afflicted." Because of women like you, I have been transformed by my ministry of 44 years in Tanzania as a Maryknoll sister of more than 50 years. I remember well when we spent weeks debating the height of our habit hems from the floor instead of contemplating the pollution growing in our horizons. It is ironic that this is the very same church that mandated we open our windows and see the horizons.

An invitation was given and you, symbolic of so many women religious, responded with the fullness of your being through leadership and love.

JEAN PRUITT, M.M.  
*Dar es Salaam, Tanzania*

America (ISSN 0002-7049) is published weekly (except for 14 combined issues: Jan. 2-9, 16-23, Jan. 30-Feb. 6, April 16-23, June 4-11, 18-25, July 2-9, 16-23, July 30-Aug. 6, Aug. 13-20, Aug. 27-Sept. 3, Sept. 10-17, Nov. 26-Dec. 3, Dec. 24-31) by America Press, Inc., 106 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019. Periodical postage is paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. Business Manager: Lisa Pope. Circulation: (800) 627-9533. Subscriptions: United States, \$56 per year; add U.S. \$30 postage and GST (#131870719) for Canada; or add U.S. \$56 per year for international priority airmail. Postmaster: Send address changes to: America, P.O. Box 293159, Kettering, OH 45429.



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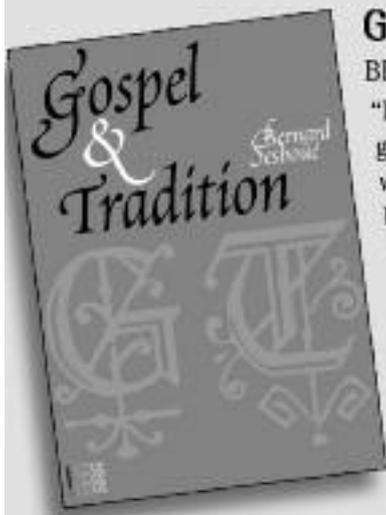
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## Forgiveness and Healing

Patrick Fleming’s insightful article (“Listening to Jerry,” Web only 7/16) speaks to both sides of the issue of sexual abuse—the abused and the abuser. Both have tragic stories that need telling. Forgiveness is vital to healing, and we need to see and understand the story of the person who perpetrates these crimes. It’s what Richard Rohr, O.F.M., means when he teaches that if we don’t transform our own pain, all we are left to do is transmit it to others.

There is little doubt in my mind that Jerry Sandusky was abused as a child. He experienced and learned that behavior from someone. When I was able to forgive my abuser after years of emotional pain and struggle, I could finally see him not as a monster but as a broken human being who needed help but could never seek it for himself.

VICKI SCHMIDT

Springfield, Ill.

## Free the Prisoner

Kerry Weber’s article, “Theology Behind Bars” (7/2), could have easily been written about the Neal Unit in Amarillo, Tex., except we don’t have a Catholic theology program or a Father Williams wondering why not. But we do have a humble deacon who is spread thin between us and other surrounding prisons. We also have several Catholic inmates wondering, where is the wealth of Catholic resources surrounding the Neal Unit.

In Amarillo it is difficult to get local Catholic parishioners to see us period, let alone volunteer and start a program. Many of us Catholics who meet for Mass have entered a new land—a spiritual land—unlike the Egypt of our past. This new land has hills and valleys, even deserts, but this land is cared for by the Lord, our God. So we wait, hoping and praying, believing that he will give our land the seasonal rain, the early rain and the late rain, that we may have our fill.

RICARDO CISNEROS

Amarillo, Tex.

# Finding Your Life

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), SEPT. 16, 2012

Readings: Is 50:5–9; Ps 114:1–9; Jas 2:14–18; Mk 8:27–35

*“Who do you say that I am?” (Mk 8:29)*

Today’s Gospel reading places us at a key transition point in the Gospel according to Mark. Jesus and his disciples begin the long trek from Galilee to Jerusalem, where Jesus will spend his fateful last days. It is here that Jesus chooses to teach them about himself, beginning with two questions: “Who do people say that I am?” and then, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter declares, “You are the Christ.”

From here on Jesus begins to teach them that he has to suffer, be rejected and killed, and then rise. Peter takes Jesus aside and “rebukes” him for saying such things. Jesus responds by rebuking Peter: “Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.” Then Jesus proclaims, even to the crowd: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.”

Taking up one’s cross and denying oneself is tricky business. What it cannot mean is self-denigration, for God is hardly glorified by half-persons. I have seen this problem in lost souls, particularly in abused persons who have such little self-possession that they cannot offer themselves with any real freedom as gift to anyone. For those in such acute distress, the task at hand is to come to understand at a deep level that God loves and values

them utterly and eternally. Nonetheless, I think a fully actualized spiritual life will ultimately call for some kind of paschal donation.

This paschal requirement incorporates two key tasks. One involves decentering ourselves from our own narcissism and recentering our lives in Christ. Paradoxically, such recentering brings true freedom and self-possession. One finds one’s true self and authentic power only in God, who holds all meaning in the universe.

Jesus’ final teaching in today’s Gospel speaks to this point clearly: “For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the Gospel will save it.” The life we lose is the false self, the one that craves and hoards and seeks its own glory. The life we save is the one made in the image and likeness of God, the one that sees its truth in and through God. Renouncing this former, false self and embracing the true self is hardly easy; indeed, it is a lifelong charge and really feels like a kind of death.

The other task in this paschal challenge involves what we make of our own suffering and trials. When I was younger and too often a complainer, I would be told to offer it up, which at the time I imagined to mean “suck it up.” Now I see this imperative as a way to relocate my trials in the Passion of Christ, to participate in Christ’s com-

passionate redemption. Paul emphasizes this insight regularly: “Now I rejoice in my suffering for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church” (Col 1:24). Paul saw his own suffering as a participation in Christ’s ongoing salvation.

Consider it this way: The Father’s plan is to embrace the entire universe in the Son’s paschal love, “to sum up all things in Christ, in heaven and on earth” (Eph 1:10), “so that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). We are part of this enterprise, for we have been incorporated into Christ, into his body and



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Spend some undistracted time reflecting on the crucifix.
- Consider one trial in your life.
- Ask the Lord to help you sanctify it.

into his mission. This means that we are profoundly and mystically united to all people, and our suffering on behalf of the salvation of the world is also our work in Christ. Our suffering, paschally embraced, binds us in love not only to those who are acutely suffering but to all in need of Christ’s salvation.

Jesus asks us the same question he asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Each Christian’s response will be unique. Yet Jesus’ message today tells us that it will have to include this recognition: “You are the crucified one, who commands me to walk the same road.”

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

# Standard Thinking

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), SEPT. 23, 2012

Readings: Wis 2:12, 17–20; Ps 54:3–8; Jas 3:16–4:3; Mk 9:30–37

*“Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me” (Mk 9:37)*

In my class on Christian marriage, when we are discussing choosing a spouse, I always encourage them to consider how a prospective spouse treats those with little social power. How does he treat the server at a restaurant or the cashier at the checkout counter? How respectful is she to a homeless person or a burdened rider on a bus? I explain that not only does such behavior tell you a great deal about the character of a prospective spouse; if the conduct is poor, be assured that in your marriage you will be subject to the same sort of treatment.

Back in the day when I taught at a seminary, I used a similar strategy before voting on candidates for priesthood. I would go to the janitor (call him Jack), who had significant mental challenges, and ask him what he thought of each of these seminarians. Jack did not know anything about theology, but he knew which seminarians were kind and respectful to him and which were dismissive. (He also had spot-on assessments of the faculty.)

In today’s Gospel, Jesus gives his disciples a second prediction of the Passion. They just could not wrap their heads around it and were unnerved by the prospect: “But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him.” And they really did not get it, for along the way they were discussing who among them was the greatest.

Jesus took a child and, embracing him, said, “Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me.”

Children are often used as descriptors and metaphors. To be childish is to be immature, even petty. To be childlike is to be filled with wonder, innocence and openness. Jesus did not mean either of these. In the ancient world a child was a social nonperson, without legal rights or social status. The idea of receiving a child with the dignity and value of the Lord himself is profound. Jesus’ comment says volumes about the inherent worth of every soul. It underscores the truth that we are all children of God and are invited to be sisters and brothers of the Lord. To receive a child as though he or she were Christ is intimately related to the Passion; for treating a social nonperson with respect requires renunciation of the grasping self that views others only with regard to one’s own interests.

Consider the contrast between the grasping self and the child-embracing self as this is reflected in the meditation on the Two Standards in the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola. One is to meditate on the rule of Lucifer and the rule of Christ, what each looks like and the lifestyle each implies. Ignatius describes Lucifer’s standard as coveting riches, seeking empty honors and succumbing to pride. In contrast, the standard

of Christ is nongrasping humility.

In today’s first reading, from the Book of Wisdom, the very presence of the righteous one, the one who lives by the standard of God, upsets those who reject true wisdom. They want to get rid of him. Their standard is announced in the verse just before this reading: “Let our strength be our norm of righteousness, for weakness proves itself useless” (2:11). The second reading from James aligns perfectly here: “Beloved: Where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits.”

The whole Letter of James works like a wisdom document, one that contrasts the contentious spirit of false wisdom with the spirit of the

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Consider three people in your life who have no status.
- Imagine what each one would say about you.
- Ask for the grace to be a true servant.

Lord. James pleads for a church where members scrutinize their passions (1:14-15), are generous (1:17), listen to and are patient with each other (1:19), show no partiality between rich and poor (2:1-9) and see their faith as an engagement in service (2:12-26). This is what true wisdom looks like.

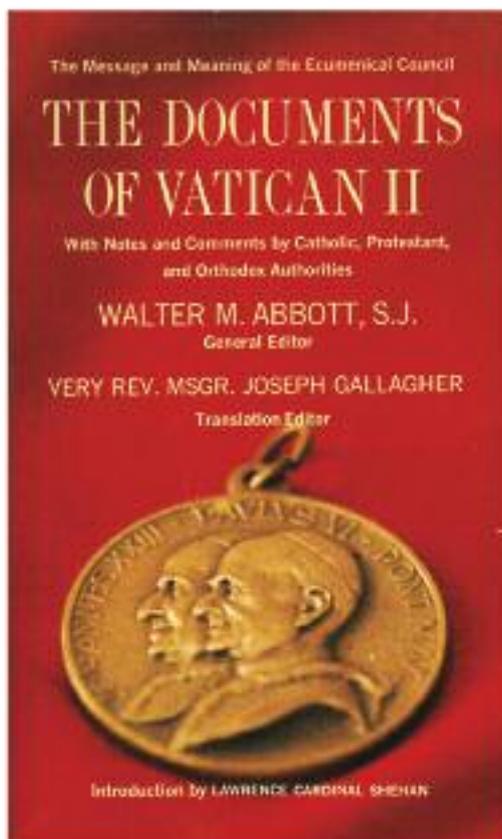
Imagine the Last Judgment as a courtroom trial: We stand before God the judge, who leans over to the humble Jacks of the world and asks, “So Jack, what do you think?”

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