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Of Many Things

'Yad," Rabbi Joel Meier explained to an audience of Jewish and Catholic leaders, "means 'hand' in Hebrew." By extension it refers to a pointer lectors use as they read the Torah before a congregation. The occasion for his remark on Nov. 19 was the conclusion of the semi-annual meeting of the National Council of Synagogues, an association of Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist Jewish leaders, with the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs. The rabbi was presenting a "yad" to Cardinal William H. Keeler in gratitude for 20 years of leadership in Catholic-Jewish relations.

It was a quiet, low-key transition, suited to the man it honored. For Cardinal Keeler, the archbishop emeritus of Baltimore, is a soft-spoken, modest gentleman, whose plain words are carefully chosen. It would be easy to mistake him for just another Catholic prelate. But when the history of the Catholic Church in the late 20th century is written, his achievements will stand above those of many. More than anyone else, he has been responsible for the progress of the U.S. church in ecumenical and interfaith affairs, and above all for unique advances in Catholic-Jewish relations that made this special relationship a model for the world.

With calm determination, he has fostered those relations, earning the respect and affection of the Jewish community. Whether the climate was stormy or sunny, he was tireless in meeting with local Jewish groups around the country. With sureness of purpose, he worked with American Jewish leaders through crises, like the controversy over the Carmelite convent at Auschwitz in the mid-90s. When Jewish defense groups complained about Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah's defense of Palestinian rights, he would calmly urge them to meet the patriarch in person; and when Patriarch Sabbah planned visits to the United States, the cardinal would quietly offer to arrange meetings for him with his Jewish friends.

In 1983 Cardinal Keeler became chairman of the Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs. After his term as N.C.C.B./U.S.C.C. president concluded, he again became the moderator for Jewish relations; and after a split between the Orthodox Jewish leadership and the Reform and Conservative rabbis and lay leaders, he co-chaired the dialogue with the National Council of Synagogues, the Reform-Conservative umbrella organization. (First the late Cardinal John J. O'Connor and more recently Bishop William F. Murphy of Rockville Centre have chaired the dialogue with Orthodox Judaism.)

When Bishop Keeler of Harrisburg took over as moderator of Catholic-Jewish relations from Bishop Francis Mugavero of Brooklyn in 1987, plans were underway for Pope John Paul II's second visit to the United States. About six weeks before the visit the Austrian president, Kurt Waldheim, a former Nazi officer whose unit had participated in killing Jews, visited the pope at the Vatican. A storm of protest went up from the Jewish community. Bishop Keeler was at the heart of negotiations that put the pope's anticipated meeting with American Jewish leaders during the visit back on track. At the same time, he helped Jewish leaders resolve a dispute among themselves about where in Miami they would meet the pope.

Similarly, as a member of the Dialogue of [Eastern] Orthodox and Catholic Bishops, Cardinal Keeler, even in difficult times, always found ways to sustain relations. In 1997, after Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew had given a provocative address at Georgetown University, the cardinal offered the patriarch an irenic welcome in Baltimore and soon after hosted one of the more contentious meetings of the International Orthodox-Catholic Dialogue at Mount Saint Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Md. Afterward he worked steadily to re-gather the group and re-establish the dialogue. That Catholic-Orthodox relations are now on a steadier, more positive course is due, in large part, to Cardinal Keeler's fidelity to the cause of Christian unity.

Among his other accomplishments were gaining the bishops' approval to fund and staff interreligious dialogue, resulting in solid Islamic relations; interreligious collaboration for peace; and the formation of Christian Churches Coming Together in the USA, a Catholic, Protestant and Evangelical forum on public issues. ***Drew Christiansen, S.J.***

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Articles

This week @ America Connects

William J. O'Malley, S.J., critiques Carl Sagan's "Gospel of Scientism." On our podcast, Leo J. O'Donovan, S.J., reports on "The Age of Rembrandt." Plus, the debut of "In All Things," our new editorial blog. All at www.americamagazine.org.

Identifying Immigrants

The proposal seemed sensible enough: grant driver's licenses to undocumented immigrants to ensure the safety of state roads and provide security officials with a means to track residents who otherwise live in the shadows. Similar laws are already in place in seven other states. Yet New York's Governor Eliot Spitzer's license proposal was quickly scuttled last month after a wave of criticism from both Republicans and Democrats, who argued the plan would provide an opening for terrorists. Hillary Clinton, a presidential hopeful, eventually disavowed the proposal after waffling on the issue at a presidential debate.

"The idea was right, the timing was wrong," said Charles B. Rangel of New York. Perhaps he is right: the still-raw memory of Sept. 11, coupled with the country's polarization over immigration, may have doomed the plan from the start. Yet there seemed to be another dynamic at work as well, one that taps into the fundamental problem at the root of our immigration crisis. There are reportedly 12 million undocumented immigrants in this country. They clean our offices, pick our produce and care for our children. Yet for many people they remain merely statistics. By granting them licenses, we would be offering them recognition, literally giving them faces and names. Critics argue that "illegal immigrants" deserve no such legal validation, but they offer no practical alternative for dealing with the millions of undocumented workers in our midst. The demise of Governor Spitzer's proposal makes it highly unlikely that another lawmaker will take up the issue, especially in an election year. So millions of immigrants will remain anonymous, making it that much easier for us to ignore their existence.

Violence Against Women

Violence against women has reached crisis proportions. The U.N. Development Fund for Women estimates that at least one in three women will be beaten, raped or otherwise abused during her lifetime. Seeking to address the issue, a bipartisan coalition in Congress is working for passage of the International Violence Against Women Act, which would authorize $1 billion over five years. Aimed not only at preventing violence, but also at supporting health care, survivors' services and changing negative social attitudes toward women, the legislation is especially needed now, when rape is used as a weapon of war by both government and rebel forces in developing countries. Fearful of being shunned by their families and communities, victims rarely report the crime to police.

The legislation deals with all forms of gender-based violence, not only rape but also domestic violence, honor killings and genital mutilation. It creates the first State Department office working explicitly on this issue. Moreover, it aims to decrease the risk of sexual exploitation by military personnel, humanitarian workers and police involved in foreign peacekeeping operations by creating training programs for them and mechanisms for reporting abuse. Rita Sharma Fox, president of the Women's Edge Coalition, has said that the legislation offers hope that violence will not continue to prevent women from going to work, getting an education and supporting their families. Given the widespread violence, Congress should not delay its consideration of this important measure.

'Shut Up,' He Explained

The usually unflappable King Juan Carlos of Spain broke character last month at a gathering of Spanish and Portuguese-speaking nations in Chile, when he told President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela to "shut up" after Chávez launched a tirade against perceived "fascists" at the meeting. It was the latest in a series of dramatic public appearances for Chávez, who recently visited Iran and announced the two nations "are united like a single fist" against the United States. Chávez has also cozied up to President Vladimir Putin of Russia and suggested they form a "strategic alliance," surely setting off alarm bells in Washington.

It can be tempting to view Chávez as little more than diet Castro, a stuffed-shirt demagogue whose international popularity stems almost entirely from his anti-gringo performances. Why does Chávez matter? The real foreign relations story is oil, because Venezuela has it and everyone else wants it. But on the domestic front, Chávez has shown disturbing signs that he aims to create a police state. In August he suggested changes to the Venezuelan constitution to keep him in power beyond 2012, and his repeated threats to declare a state of emergency are widely interpreted as a power grab that would result in severely curtailed human rights. When Cardinal Rosalio Castillo Lara of Venezuela, who died last month, lamented a year ago that Chávez's machinations have come "at the cost of so many human lives and the progress of his nation," Chávez denounced him as a "devil in a cassock." With oil prices reaching all-time highs, Chávez is in a position of geopolitical strength. Will the consequences include domestic tyranny?

Following Conscience

"IN THE OLD AUSTRO-HUNGARIAN EMPIRE," reports the *Army Officer's Guide*, "the emperor or empress had a medal that was awarded to officers who, by disobeying orders, turned the tide and won important battles. In the U.S. Army," it continues, "of course, there is no such medal: this sort of judgment, wrapped within a full, disciplined understanding of the legal and moral impact of decisions, is expected."

Elizabeth D. Samet reflects on this passage in her recently published account of teaching literature at West Point, *Soldier's Heart* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). Principled disobedience to orders has always been difficult, even when it is not just permitted, but required by law. The logic of battle, and so of military discipline, weighs heavily in favor of obedience to command. After the Vietnam War and atrocities like My Lai, the Army and Marine Corps took pains to train their personnel in responsible obedience. By the early 1990s, however, senior officers were already troubled that a new generation did not share their commitment to "military honor." The so-called war on terror, shaped by the belief that terrorism changed all the rules, and then the protracted war in Iraq, with the uncertainties of counterinsurgency warfare along with the battle fatigue that comes with repeated rotations of the same people into combat, have made conscientious objection even more difficult. In our day, judgment "within a full, disciplined understanding of the legal and moral impact of decisions" has become more difficult to realize and still harder to implement.

Much of the difficulty has been created by civilians at the top of the chain of command. Assertions that the Geneva Conventions do not apply to the war on terror paved the way for atrocities like Abu Ghraib. Talk that asymmetrical warfare demands relaxing established constraints on what might be done in combat and that new forms of unconventional warfare require "new," undefined responses contributed to a climate of permissiveness. Some in the military, especially military lawyers, to their credit, did their best to hold the line for observance of the laws of armed conflict. But against the White House, the Justice Department and the office of the Secretary of Defense, it was an uphill battle. It fell, as it inevitably does in all wars, to conscientious officers and enlistees to stand up for the rules of war. With a volunteer military in need of men and women to fight in Iraq, however, the military has grown increasingly resistant to granting conscientious objector status to soldiers and marines. (See "A Soldier's Decision," **America,** 1/29.)

Pleas for C.O. status, dissenting from all war, often emerge from repugnance at the repeated horrors of battle. It is understandable that the experience might turn some individuals against war altogether. For Catholics, however, the issues are more complex. Catholic teaching requires disobedience to immoral orders. In their recent statement, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the U.S. bishops not only affirmed the duty of Catholics "to oppose torture [and] unjust war"; they went further, affirming the right of citizens not just to reject participation in all war, but also to resist serving in "a particular war, or a military procedure" by what is known as selective conscientious objection. While the law and military regulation make allowance for conscientious objection, neither law nor judicial decision permit it to be selective. Over the years, the U.S. bishops have repeatedly urged legalization of selective conscientious objection.

THE MORAL CONFUSION AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS brought on by the U.S. war in Iraq point to the need for legalization of S.C.O. For as the Catholic Peace Fellowship advises potential objectors already serving in the military, "Somebody might refuse to fight in Iraq, believing it to be an unjust or immoral war, but would not be opposed to fighting in a war of defense. [Such selective] conscientious objection is NOT legal, and an S.C.O. would face jail time."

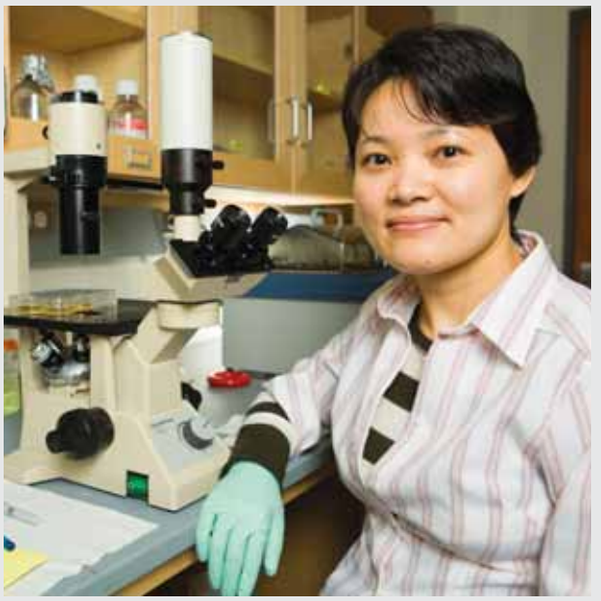
Logically, the case for S.C.O. should be stronger than the argument on behalf of a dispensation for consistent pacifists, since S.C.O. is a corollary of the just war tradition. If it is permissible to wage a just war, then it is forbidden to wage an unjust war or execute an immoral order. S.C.O. can be said, in fact, to uphold the system; it guarantees the integrity of the military. And the claim that S.C.O. endangers the national defense and the good order of the military is obviously fallacious, for it argues in effect that to support just wars, one must support unjust wars and immoral uses of force as well. Indeed, legalization of selective conscientious objection may add to the pressures that prevent political and military leaders from prosecuting unjust wars of choice, such as the Iraq war was at its inception.

Nuncio: Religions Must Speak Out Against Violence

Religious leaders must speak out "loud and clear" against those who try to use sacred texts like the Koran or the Bible to justify violence or human rights violations, the Vatican's nuncio to the United Nations said in a lecture at the University of Notre Dame. Archbishop Celestino Migliore spoke Nov. 15 on "Catholicism and Islam: Points of Convergence and Divergence, Encounter and Cooperation." He said the spread of terrorism has "triggered a renewed interest in Christian-Islamic dialogue. It's not enough for any religion to say: We have nothing to do with extremists, with fundamentalists; or, extremists do not speak for our respective religions," Archbishop Migliore said. "Indeed extremists and fundamentalists do make reference to the same sacred texts; they even dare to portray themselves as the faithful interpreters and keepers of those sacred texts.

"Rather, we have to engage those who try to justify their unjustifiable acts of violence and multiform violations of human rights using those same texts and proclaim it loud and clear that those texts do not lend themselves to a reading which leads to violence," he added.

Stem Cell Studies Hailed as Breakthrough



Junying Yu of the Genome Center of Wisconsin in a lab at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Nov. 19. Yu is the lead author of a paper describing a novel method of reprogramming adult stem cells to create cells that are indistinguishable from embryonic stem cells.

Scientists and ethicists alike hailed as a breakthrough two studies showing that human skin cells can be reprogrammed to work as effectively as embryonic stem cells, thus negating the need to destroy embryos in the name of science. Separate studies from teams led by Shinya Yamanaka of Kyoto University in Japan and Junying Yu and James Thomson of the University of Wisconsin-Madison were published online Nov. 20 by the journals Cell and Science, respectively. "The methods outlined in these papers fully conform to what we have hoped to see for some time," said a spokesperson from the National Catholic Bioethics Center in Philadelphia. "Such strategies should continue to be pursued and strongly promoted, as they should help to steer the entire field of stem-cell research in a more explicitly ethical direction by circumventing the moral quagmire associated with destroying human embryos," it added. By adding four genes to the skin cells, the scientists were able to create stem cells that genetically match the donor and have the ability to become any of the 220 types of cells in the human body.

Cardinal Apologizes for Province Leaders' Sins

Cardinal Marc Ouellet of Quebec has apologized and asked forgiveness for the sins of past provincial Catholic Church leaders regarding sexual abuse by clergy, discrimination against women and homosexuals, anti-Semitism and racism. In an open letter to the people of Quebec Province issued Nov. 21, the cardinal, who is primate of the Catholic Church in Canada, acknowledged that before 1960 certain Catholics favored "anti-Semitism, racism, indifference toward the First Nations and discrimination regarding women and homosexuals. The behavior of Catholics and some episcopal authorities relative to the right to vote, access to work and the advancement of women was not always equal to the needs of society nor even in conformity with the social doctrine of the church," he said. "I also acknowledge that abuse of power and counterwitness have tarnished the image of the clergy among many and undermined their moral authority," he said. "Youth have suffered sexual abuse by priests and religious, resulting in serious damage and traumas that have shattered their lives. These scandals have shaken the confidence of the people [in] religious authorities, and we understand."

New Bishops in China Have Vatican Approval

The Catholic Church in China is expecting the ordination of three new government-recognized bishops, all in their 40s and with papal approval. The Guangzhou, Ningxia and Yichang dioceses are preparing for the ordinations, reported the Asian church news agency UCA News. The Rev. Francis Lu Shouwang was set to be ordained Nov. 30 at St. Francis Cathedral in Yichang, a city along the Yangtze River in Hebei province. He became diocesan administrator after Bishop Paul Francis Zhang Mingqian of Yichang died in July 2005; diocesan priests, nuns and laypeople elected the priest as a candidate for bishop last December. Farther north, in Ningxia-Hui Autonomous Region, Bishop John Liu Jingshan of Ningxia told

UCA News Nov. 19 that he will ordain the Rev. Joseph Li Jing, 40, as his coadjutor. He said the ceremony is tentatively set for Dec. 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, at the cathedral in Yinchuan. Media outside mainland China reported that the Rev. Joseph Gan Junqiu may be ordained in early December as bishop of Guangzhou, in southern China's Guangdong province. On Nov. 20, Bishop-elect Gan, 43, and other church officials in China told UCA News that no date had been fixed but preparations for the episcopal ordination were under way.

Madden: U.S. Must Take Lead in Peace Efforts

As key leaders from Israel, the Palestinian territories, Saudi Arabia, Syria and other nations gathered in Annapolis on Nov. 26 to 28 for a peace conference on the Middle East and related meetings, local Catholic leaders said they were hopeful the meetings would trigger further discussions for making a lasting peace in the Holy Land. Peace is attainable, they said, but it will take assertive leadership from the United States to make it a reality. "I'm guardedly optimistic in the sense that I'm always happy when there's some kind of negotiation going on in the Middle East," said Bishop Denis J. Madden, an auxiliary bishop and urban vicar for the Archdiocese of Baltimore, Md. Bishop Madden previously served as associate secretary general of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association and director of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine office in Jerusalem. He said the lack of strong leadership from the United States in recent years has been one reason the peace process has stalled. He was hopeful the U.S.-led Annapolis conference would change that. The conference and related meetings included participants from 50 organizations and countries.

Leadership Roundtable Reports Progress

Leaders of an organization working to bring better financial and management practices to church operations shared their progress with more than three dozen Catholic bishops Nov. 13 at a luncheon reception during the bishops' fall general meeting in Baltimore, Md. The National Leadership Roundtable on Church Management, established in July 2005, has published three "Standards for Excellence" booklets outlining codes of ethics and accountability for Catholic dioceses, parishes and nonprofit organizations.

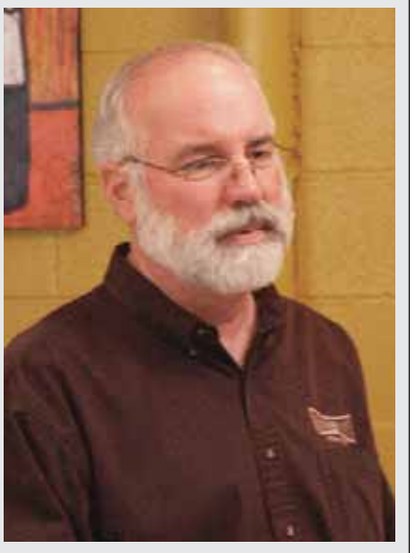
It also worked in partnership with the Archdiocese of New Orleans to help restore Catholic schools following Hurricane Katrina. "We have been able to reopen 86 of the 106 schools" in operation before the hurricane, including seven regional schools in the areas most devastated by the 2005 disaster, said Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes of New Orleans. Because so many New Orleans public schools still remain closed, he added, "70 percent of our students after Katrina are not Catholic; most come from families living below the poverty level."

Van Kaam, Religious Psychologist, Dies

Adrian van Kaam, a Spiritan priest who was a noted author in the field of formative spirituality and a retired professor at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, died Nov. 17 at age 87. A funeral Mass was celebrated for him Nov. 24 in the Duquesne University chapel, followed by burial at Queen of Heaven Cemetery in Peters Township, Pa.

Father van Kaam was born in The Hague, Netherlands, professed his vows in 1940 at the seminary in Gemert, Netherlands, and was ordained there July 21, 1946. After serving in the Netherlands for eight years, he moved to the United States and was appointed to the psychology department faculty at Duquesne University, which is run by the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, or the Spiritans. He founded Duquesne's Graduate Institute of Formative Spirituality in 1963 and taught there as a professor until it closed 30 years later. He trained priests, nuns, brothers and laypeople from around the world who worked as directors of seminaries and novitiates.

G-Dog Honored



Gregory Boyle, a Jesuit priest known to former gang members in East Los Angeles as "G-Dog," is pictured in a 2005 photo. Father Boyle, who founded Homeboy Industries in 1988 to provide "hope, not jail" for former gang members who want to turn their lives around, received one of the Caring Institute's 2007 National Caring Awards at a Nov. 16 ceremony in Washington, D.C.

Oregon Jesuits Near Settlement of Abuse Suits

The attorney for plaintiffs in more than 100 claims of sexual abuse by members of the Catholic clergy announced Nov. 18 a $50 million settlement with the Society of Jesus for cases involving more than a dozen Jesuits posted in Alaska between 1961 and 1987. But John D. Whitney, S.J., superior of the Jesuits' Oregon Province, said in a statement that "there are still many issues that need to be finalized before it is appropriate to make an official announcement about a settlement." He said the province was disappointed by the announcement by the attorney Ken Roosa of Anchorage, which he described as "premature and detrimental to the work of healing about which we are all concerned." The Diocese of Fairbanks is a co-defendant in the cases. Separate lawsuits against the diocese remain unresolved.

From CNS and other sources. CNS photos.

A Future Without Parish Schools

‘We ought to begin the search for alternative models of catechesis.’

LAST TIME WE MET, I expressed some concerns about the future of Catholic schools in states and municipalities with high property taxes. I suggested that the next generation of closings and consolidations will be centered not in the inner cities, but in the older suburbs that support services such as paid fire departments, local police forces, extensive parks and recreation facilities, and, of course, public education. In such areas, five-figure property taxes are bound to have an important effect on families deciding between free public schools or tuition-charging Catholic schools. Based on the reaction I have received in recent weeks, I’m not the only person with such concerns.

The question Catholics may face in the next quarter-century may be this: Can we imagine American Catholicism without Catholic schools, or certainly without the number of schools we have now? And if further closings and consolidations are inevitable, even in strong, affluent parishes, what models of religious education should we investigate today in preparation for tomorrow?

Even as I write, my two middle-school children are attending a meeting of their faith-based youth group, which is sponsored not by our parish but by a local Methodist church, and is supervised by an energetic minister named Brenda Elhers. The group, part of a broader Methodist network called Junior Youth Fellowship, coordinates service projects, encourages fellowship, and—here’s the hard part—attempts to offer instruction in the tenets of Christianity. The program is designed to prepare Methodist eighth-graders for confirmation, but it is open to middle-schoolers of all faiths.

As an outsider, though hardly the only Catholic parent whose children attend J.Y.F., I’ve been impressed with Rev. Elhers’s ability to connect service with spirituality. My kids are getting the best of both worlds: They are receiving a sound background in Catholic doctrine in their parish school, and through their membership in J.Y.F. they are receiving an education in the application of Christian principles.

Could programs like J.Y.F. offer a model for what Catholic education might become if schools grow increasingly hard to sustain? Frankly, that very thought occurred to me recently as I watched my kids emerge from a meeting with smiles and chatter that are quite unlike the expressions I associate with classroom learning. Granted, J.Y.F. is not school, and even a faith-oriented youth group isn’t a religion class or C.C.D. But still, I wondered, could this well-organized, effective, and—let’s face it—cost-effective program provide a model for how a future generation of Catholic children may be catechized?

I certainly thought so, but a conversation with Rev. Elhers offered a cautionary tale. “We do service and fellowship well,” she said, “but the religious education piece is the hard part, especially at the high school level.” She also coordinates a high school youth group that, among other things, carries out three service projects a year. In a few months, the group will journey to the Texas-Mexico border to assist Mexican children whose parents have crossed into the United States.

But service projects alone, no matter how worthy, cannot provide the sort of religious education young people need, Rev. Elhers said. A parent like myself might be impressed by earnest projects and good fellowship, but without proper religious instruction the picture is incomplete.

“In doing youth groups, I see how little time I get with high school students,” Rev. Elhers said. “I get them for two hours once a week, and in general, we haven’t quite figured out how to get them involved in the life of the church.”

That concern is hardly unique to any one church or denomination today. Catholics have had a relatively easier time of it over the last century or so, thanks to that great building-block of faith and practice, the parish school. But what happens if those schools continue to disappear? And here is another question that might well become part of the Catholic conversation over the next three decades: Could regional consolidations and well-planned closings actually help us to create more vibrant youth ministries by redirecting resources and energy?

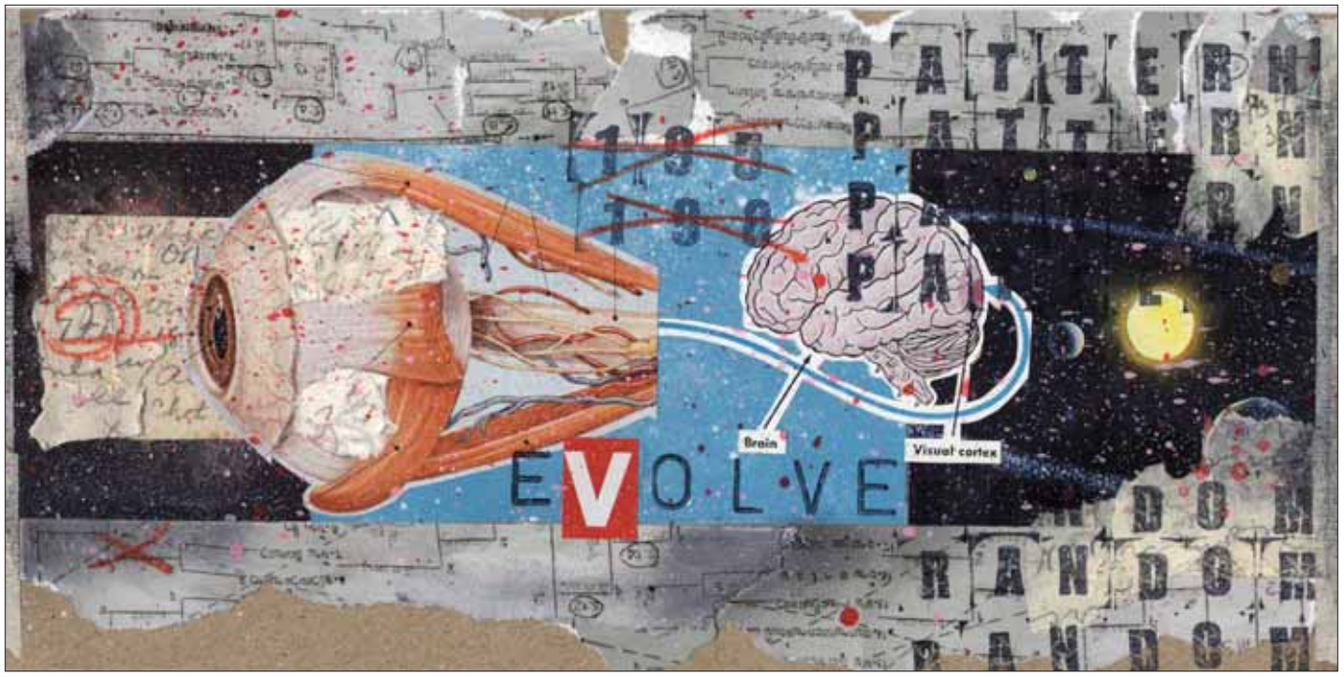
I don’t claim to have the answer, but I surely would argue that this is a conversation that ought to take place within the church, and that we ought to begin the search for alternative models of catechesis and values-centered instruction. That search would hardly be a lonely one, for other communities of faith will be similarly engaged.

If we are destined to have fewer (and, perhaps, stronger) Catholic schools in the future, if Catholic parents will find themselves hard-pressed to pay tuition when their property taxes hit five figures, it would seem imperative that clergy and laypeople think about what comes next. Vibrant youth organizations that combine religious education with service and fellowship require trained leaders, and even then, as Rev. Elhers points out, the task is not easy.

But the burdens are lighter when they are shared. Whatever our differences over doctrine, Christians in the 21st century surely share a concern about the spiritual well-being of their young people. Where schools are becoming untenable, Catholics ought to take a hard look at how other denominations transmit faith and values without the benefit of classrooms.

And, even better, we ought to join in on the fun. ***Terry Golway***

TERRY GOLWAY is the curator of the John Kean Center for American History at Kean University in Union, N.J.



ART BY MICHAEL ALTMAN

Do the questions science poses diminish the God of faith?

The Eye and I

– BY WILLIAM J. O'MALLEY–

FOR 40 YEARS, I HAVE TAUNTED high school seniors with the problem of God. Given their only recently evolved capacity to reason and its concomitant resistance to authority, it would be easier to market acne. The ethos confirmed them, long before the church did, as relativists ("Up to the individual"), materialists ("Show me!") and pragmatists ("This on the test?").

But I always held the trump card (I thought): the elegant human eye, a near-perfect mechanism whose exquisite parts are pointless without the others. A transparent lens corrects for color and spherical distortion; an iris diaphragm fine-tunes focus continuously, even for those whose vision is otherwise impaired. The retina's 125 million color-coding cells automatically switch among wavelengths. They take three-dimensional color pictures as long as one can stay awake, and they never need developing or new film. Then images converge into a brain that turns them into abstract ideas. And often if they are damaged they repair themselves. No way could that just "happen" in correct sequence, even with a gazillion lucky chances! It is as close to certainty as one can get that God, not evolution, created the universe. Darwin himself found the eye a puzzlement: "To suppose the eye with all its inimitable contrivances...could have been formed

WILLIAM J. O'MALLEY, S.J., teaches English and religious studies at Fordham Preparatory School in the Bronx, N.Y. This is an excerpt from his newest book, *Help My Disbelief* (Orbis).

by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree."

For 40 years, I was smug as a bug in a rug.

Then, to my chagrin, I found not only that the eye could evolve, bit by infinitesimal bit, but has done so more than once. And the defenders of that capacity were not only apostolic atheists like Richard Dawkins and fair-minded agnostics like Steven Jay Gould, but also an evangelical like Francis Collins, head of the Human Genome Project, and Catholics like the Brown University biologist Kenneth Miller and George Coyne, S.J., former head of the Vatican Observatory. Evolution had more latitude than I had guessed even from John Paul II's address "Truth Cannot Contradict Truth" (1996) and Joseph Ratzinger's *In the Beginning* (1986).

It was like the shock I had studying theology, accepting that snakes never talked, or learning that scientists find the Bohr model of the atom, with its companionably orbiting electrons, as far from actuality as 15th-century maps: not useless, but quite inadequate. I was Alec Guinness standing amid the ruins of his beautiful bridge on the River Kwai.

The unpleasant facts: Limpets have just a few pigmented cells in an eye-spot, but these are effective enough to sense predators. One step up, split-shell mollusks' eyes recede into pits; the marine snail, the Nautilus, has its focus narrowed by a pinhole lens. Octopuses and most vertebrates have sharp-focus camera eyes just like ours. Using computer mock-ups (and presuming a pre-existent photo-sensitive cell), the Swedish biologists Dan-Erik Nilsson and Susanne Pelger estimated that an animal could go from flat-skin eye to camera-lens eye in less than 500,000 years. Cells have "motive, means and opportunity."

Time and Chance

But does Darwin necessarily displace God? For a philosopher, "random" means "haphazard, purposeless"; but for a scientist it merely means "imperfectly predictable," lacking certainty but still constrained by the laws of physics and chemistry and the particular environment. By definition, unexpected changes are a break from what had been pretty much predictable behavior. And while mutations in a species over vast savannahs of time do arise from purely chance "blips" in cell replication, the selection and continuance of those changes is anything but haphazard. Only changes making the host a better predator (or more elusive prey), a more seductive attraction to mates and provider for young win the chance to continue in the opportunistic game.

So at horse races, experts who study the contenders, controllers and environment make quite confident guesses about outcomes. Similarly, atomic probers track errant electrons, and theologians grapple with the elusive Creator. The astounding rationality of the physical world, coupled with the analytic and imaginative powers of the human mind, give rise to both science and theology—making educated guesses about unseen causes of visible effects. Annie Dillard writes: "What is the difference between a cathedral and a physics lab? Are they not both saying: Hello?" Newton, Einstein and Heisenberg are like Isaiah, Paul and Rahner in exploring the same terra incognita with approximating tools, assessing all the pertinent factors and taking calculated risks. Despite our inadequate grasp of the divine nature, God would seem the best odds-maker in the universe.

Diminishing God?

Many believers in creationism and intelligent design balk at yielding much to evolution (or relativity or quantum theory), lest it jettison God after such long service. Atheist evolutionists worsen matters by reminding us that God gave us an appendix with no function but to rupture on occasion, viruses whose sole aim is to destroy, and a world "red in tooth and claw." In *River Out of Eden*, Dawkins writes remorselessly: "This is one of the hardest lessons for humans to learn. We cannot admit things might be neither good nor evil. Neither cruel nor kind, but simply callous—indifferent to all suffering, lacking all purpose."

In 2004 the International Theological Commission of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith wrote in *Communion and Stewardship* (No. 69): "According to the Catholic understanding of divine causality...even the outcome of a truly contingent natural process can nonetheless fall within God's providential plan for creation." God did not have to rig natural history so a particular branch of primates would begin to stand up and look around, any more than God had to steer us toward Babylon or Rome or Buchenwald. As Kenneth R. Miller writes: "If we can see God's will in the flow of history and the circumstances of our daily lives, we can certainly see it in the currents of natural history.... Given evolution's ability to adapt, to innovate, to test, and to experiment, sooner or later it would have given the Creator exactly what He was looking for."

A constantly meddlesome God leads to the Deist "watchmaker" of the 19th century, consolingly purposeful but inflexibly determinist. Our lives would be nothing more than unrolling prewritten scrolls, constantly edited by Someone Else. On the contrary, could it not be that God is more dedicated to freedom than we are comfortable with? God could well get a kick out of watching even genes learning. Divine wizardry is in the power and fecundity of the universe itself.

God as Cause

Science still yields plenty of clues to a Designer, who might not be as intrusive as we have been led to believe. Every

planet circles the sun at precisely the one speed that will keep it from drifting into deep space or crashing into the sun. The four fundamental forces in the universe are gravity (the attractive pull of every body), electromagnetism (bonding atoms), the strong nuclear force (binding elements within the nucleus) and the weak force (radioactive decay). If any of these forces were even minutely different, the advent of humans would have been unthinkable. In fact, according to Stephen Hawking, "If the rate of expansion one second after the Big Bang had been smaller by even one part in a hundred thousand million million, it would have recollapsed before it reached its present size." Conversely, if gravity were weaker, Big Bang dust would have just continued to expand, never coalescing. If the strong nuclear force were a little weaker, no elements heavier than hydrogen would have formed. If electromagnetism were stronger, electrons would be so tightly bound to atoms, chemical compounds would have been impossible. Any weaker, and atoms would disintegrate at room temperature.

Miller writes: "As His great creation burst forth from the singularity of its origin, His laws would have set within it the seeds of galaxies, stars, and planets, the potential for life, the inevitability of change, and the confidence of emerging intelligence." God works not in the intimate, palpable anthropomorphism of Genesis, kneeling in the mud to fashion Adam and turn his rib into Eve, but God is—and always will be—vibrant and at work in every physical law that evolution presumes.

The Missing Link in Atheism

Dawkins flirts with being hoist with his own petard. In *River Out of Eden*, he writes, almost huffily:

> We humans have purpose on the brain. We find it hard to look at anything without wondering what it is "for," what the motive for it is, or the purpose behind it. When the obsession with purpose becomes pathological it is called paranoia—reading malevolent purpose into what is actually random bad luck. But this is just an exaggerated form of a nearly universal delusion.

Thus is the core of humanity dismissed as merely bothersome, like an appendix.

But the very term "natural selection" seems a misuse of words, since only an intelligence can assess options and choose. How do we get laws out of luck, predictable "processes" out of brute chance? If what differentiates our species from other animals is learning and altruism, why do Neanderthals still wildly outnumber the wise? The atheist popularizers, of course, never use the word "soul," since the only difference they acknowledge between ourselves and

other apes is a smattering of renegade DNA. Even the best Christian philosophers, however, have also contented themselves with the woefully inadequate "rational animals," as if that could account for a MASH unit treating North Korean prisoners or Teihard's obedient silence.

Atheists like Dawkins and Carl Sagan go way beyond their scientific passports. They are disconcertingly learned, sorcerers of analogy, writers of sinewy prose. But when they depart from "how" into "why," they are way beyond their credentials, like athletes plugging Wheaties. To anyone outside a lab, the difference between humans and our chimp cousins is not simply a measurable difference in DNA.

We are the only creatures we know who are aware we are selves, able to use the future tense and to regret. Other animals know facts, that danger is near, but do not seem to ask why. They give their lives for their own but not, like us, for a principle or for people we do not even like. Only we have hungers not rooted in a needful body or coldly rational mind: to be honorable, to find meaning, to survive death. Ignoring those indisputable facts is the rankest reductionism.

Charles Darwin, brilliant herald of this astonishingly fruitful theory, was less simplistic than some of his ardent disciples. In the final sentence of *The Origin of Species*, he concludes:

> There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved.

Perhaps we might find more motivated belief if we were more at peace with intriguing questions than prefabricated conclusions, if we could stop needing to prove anything and delight in pursuing the clues. A

From the archives: William J. O'Malley, S.J., on "Carl Sagan's Gospel of Scientism," Feb. 7, 1981, at www.americamagazine.org

Further Reading

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Benedict XVI And the Synod of Bishops

Are significant changes in the synod process likely?

BY KEVIN E. McKENNA

AT THE TIME OF POPE BENEDICT'S ELECTION in July 2005, Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles made a conjecture. Based on the way then-Cardinal Ratzinger had run the College of Cardinals' meetings before the conclave, Cardinal Mahony said that he would be surprised if the new pope did not reform the church's process for the World Synod of Bishops. During the cardinals' meetings most of the initial speakers came from Europe or North America. "The future pope paused the discussion and asked for cardinals from southern Africa, English-speaking Africa, French-speaking Africa and different areas of Asia to prepare presentations on the pastoral challenges they face," said Cardinal Mahony, "I thought that was extremely helpful…and that gave me an insight into what he is looking for at synods" (Catholic News Service, 7/8/05).

Since the Second Vatican Council, synods have borne the hopes of many who desire a continuation of the council's collaborative, collegial spirit. Yet numerous complaints have been raised about the synod process; some have questioned the synods' utility, given that the process seeks so little input into the topics discussed and the results promulgated.

On Oct. 5, 2008, Pope Benedict will convene the 12th ordinary assembly of the Synod of Bishops, to discuss "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church." Aware of the criticisms that have been expressed, the pope could make changes to the synod structure and process. The question is, will he?

Paul VI and a New Collegial Structure

Pope Paul VI, desiring to maintain the momentum of conciliar collegiality sparked by Vatican II, issued the apostolic letter *Apostolica Sollicitudo* on Sept. 15, 1965, which gave form and structure to a new creation, the Synod of Bishops. It is an assembly of bishops representing the Catholic episcopate as a whole; its task is to help the pope govern the universal church by giving him counsel. In the wake of Vatican II, it had become clear to Paul VI that such a body could be useful, a "continuance after the council of the great abundance of benefits that we have been so happy to see flow to the Christian people during the time of the council as a result of our close collaboration with the bishops."

Today, in accordance with Paul VI's legislation and the 1983 Code of Canon Law, the Synod of Bishops provides

CNS PHOTO FROM REUTERS

The first general session of the Synod of Bishops at the Vatican on Oct. 3, 2005.

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information and advice to the pope. Ordinary general assemblies (as opposed to the extraordinary general sessions that are called to deal with matters requiring a "speedy solution" or special sessions that deal with matters concerning a specific region or regions) have addressed a number of themes, such as "The Ministerial Priesthood" and "Justice in the World" (1971), "Evangelization in the Modern World" (1974), "Catechesis in Our Time" (1977), "The Christian Family" (1980), "Penance and Reconciliation" (1983), "The Bishop: Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World" (2001) and most recently "The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church" (2005).

The synod also enjoys the power of decision-making when "conferred upon it by the Roman Pontiff; in this case it belongs to him to ratify the decisions of the synod."

Pope Benedict and the Critics

Pope John Paul II referred to the synod as "a particularly fruitful expression and instrument of the collegiality of bishops," and the Second Vatican Council elucidated the importance of the worldwide episcopacy in caring for the entire church (*Lumen Gentium*, No. 23). But some wonder whether such participation can take place given the strictures currently imposed on the synod—limitations on the formulation of the agenda and the power of decision-making, for instance. One critic describes the current synod process as offering intriguing debates at the start that lead to no substantive changes at the end. Some observers complain about a lack of outside experts (*periti*), the kind of theologians whose behind-the-scenes contributions were a prominent and valuable part of the council, and posit their absence as a reason forceful, creative suggestions fail to reach or influence the pope. Still others comment that the synod has lost sight of its purpose and now moves in reverse, seeking the pope's advice, with bishops quoting him in their public addresses, as if he does not know what he himself said.

While he was a bishop in Germany, Joseph Ratzinger participated in 15 of the 20 general, extraordinary and special synods held. Perhaps because of his experience, some procedural changes were made at the October 2005 synod: the gathering's length was reduced from four weeks to three, and the time allotted each bishop for speaking was shortened from eight minutes to six. That year, too, each bishop was strongly encouraged to focus his reflection on but one of the four main points in the synod's working document, and the bishops were asked to sign up to speak in the order of the chapters of the synod's working paper. In addition, the pope added an hour of open discussion at the end of each day during which formal sessions were conducted, permitting all members to dialogue with or ask for and obtain information from the synod fathers who had spoken that day.

Structural Challenges

In 1988, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger published "The Structure and Tasks of the Synod of Bishops," in *Church, Ecumenism and Politics: New Essays in Ecclesiology* (Crossroad, 1988). The essay analyzes the Synod of Bishops from theological and canonical perspectives and may reveal much of the pope's thinking about the role of the synod in the life of the church.

Although many had hoped the synod would develop greater collegiality between the pope and the bishops—where collegiality entails a sharing of power in the church—Cardinal Ratzinger does not understand collegiality in this way. As he understands Pope Paul's vision, the synod was intended to involve the bishops of the church collectively in the formation of policy on major questions. But according to the council, there are only two ways in which the college of bishops could act with legal force: in an ecumenical council (such as Vatican II) or by all the bishops of the world acting together. The synod assists the pope by giving advice and counsel in the defense and development of faith and morals and in the preservation and strengthening of ecclesiastical discipline, but it cannot make decisions or issue decrees.

Furthermore, Cardinal Ratzinger argues, the legal status of the synod is not changed by the additional provision that in certain cases the pope can confer deliberative power on the synod. That is because this deliberative power is not inherent in the college of bishops but rather remains dependent on the pope. The college of bishops, then, can exercise its own deliberative powers only as a whole, either in council or in practice. Bishops' participation in the governance of the church does not come by having representation in some central organ; the communion of churches is not governed by a central parliament or by an aristocratic senate or a monarchical head, but is entrusted to bishops who lead the Catholic Church in its particular churches and thus lead the universal church. "It is in governing the particular church that the bishops share in governing the universal church and not otherwise," writes Cardinal Ratzinger. The bishop of the particular church of Rome makes the church's unity visible and upholds its realization as a communion.

Cardinal Ratzinger argues that making the synod a regular component of the church's life would deform the nature of the episcopacy. The Tridentine reform emphasized the importance of the bishop's responsibility to reside in his own diocese. This duty is not purely a matter of discipline but a requirement of divine law: "To be a bishop means to be a shepherd of one's church," Cardinal Ratzinger writes, "not its delegate at some center…. The fundamental principle of a bishop's duty to reside in his diocese is not something for the church to make up as it goes along." A council, as a rare and extraordinary event, is exceptional in the life of the church and, in Cardinal Ratzinger's estimation, justified the excessive absence of a bishop from his diocese. But an ongoing sense of unity between a diocese and its bishop is essential in his view: The people "need a shepherd who is not looking to be a bigger fish somewhere else but is simply their shepherd and pastor who knows his own and stays with them. In this sense one can call the Tridentine reform truly pastoral; princes had to become shepherds, pastors, once again."

The Power of the Episcopal Conferences

Another proposal Cardinal Ratzinger challenged in his 1988 essay is the concept of individual bishops' conferences discussing a synod agenda, deciding on it as a conference and mandating their delegates, who would serve as representatives of the conference, to put forward and support only the conference decisions. Such a format he found untenable, because it presumes that delegates would be unanimous in their opinions. Consistent with a theme that runs through his thought, particularly in regard to episcopal

conferences, Cardinal Ratzinger believes that on matters of faith and morals, no one can be bound by majority decisions. Truths are defined not by resolution but by recognition and acceptance of the truth. He wrote: "My view is that the work of bishops' conferences should by its nature be directed not towards a lot of resolutions and documents but rather towards consciences becoming more enlightened…." In a similar manner, the discussions of a synod derive their weight, not from the number of votes cast in favor of a proposition, but from the truth found in the individual consciences of the participants.

The Service of the Synod to the Church

As pope, will Benedict XVI make any significant governance changes in the operation of the synod? Given his previous writings and ecclesiological perspective, most likely not. He might, however, enhance or emphasize his previously stated understanding of the proper responsibilities of the Synod of Bishops.

Information. The Synod of Bishops is held to exchange information. The bishops' conferences inform the pope and the Curia; the pope informs the bishops, the bishops inform one another. But there is more involved than just the exchange of items of interest. "It is a mutual process of forming oneself in learning to understand the ideas, the actions, the urgent questions and the difficulties of the other person," writes Cardinal Ratzinger. "Informing oneself in this way in learning to share in the ideas of others so as to become capable of acting together thus becomes a process of communications in the truth, the maturing of that awareness which the shepherd needs in order to know his own and to be known by them."

Self-correction. There takes place in the synod discussions a manner of mutual self-correction. To enter into the process more deeply, one must be ready to learn: to accept something different, to re-examine what is one's own and, if necessary, to change it. The synod must also be ready to speak to the world, offering fraternal correction by way of prophetic ministry when needed.

Encouragement. The synod must above all encourage and strengthen the positive forces inside and outside the church and foster all activities that let trust and love grow and thus contain hope.

WE KNOW THAT POPE BENEDICT XVI can surprise and that his papacy is not easily categorized or predictable. But whatever form future synods of bishops take, they will during his tenure undoubtedly reflect his understanding of the church. Whatever structures have been devised organically to make fruitful God's saving work, it is essential that the church be the place where Christ binds himself to humanity in a new covenant, to which God is always faithful. A

Hanukkah and the Miracle of Self-Renewal

BY DANIEL F. POLISH

THEY START ARRIVING in August: the interminable parade of catalogues hawking tantalizing Christmas wares. Before I have finished writing my High Holy Day sermons, before the start of school, long before the leaves have turned, before anyone has given the remotest thought to getting bags of candy for the neighborhood children's trick or treat, my mailbox begins to flood with the glossy spreads about tree decorations, gift stockings and this year's must-have accessory to enhance the family celebration. More than a few of these catalogues now devote space to accommodate those of us who light a menorah (a nine-branched candelabra) and spin a dreidel (a four-sided top), inspiring many to imagine that it's all the same thing, Hanukkah and Christmas, just dressed up differently. On this page of a catalogue Mickey Mouse is a Christmas ornament; on the next he is part of a Hanukkah menorah. Such images reinforce a popular misperception of Hanukkah as "the Jewish Christmas." I was told as much last summer when I inquired at my daughter's day camp why she was given the choice of making a Christmas stocking or a clay dreidel as an arts and crafts activity in July (!): "It's just two ways of celebrating the same holiday, isn't it?"

Not the Same

Hanukkah, the Jewish Christmas? Greek Orthodox Christians do celebrate a Greek Orthodox Christmas: the same Nativity, the same birth of the Messiah, the same wise men. What Jews celebrate, however, is hardly a Jewish Christmas. The elements central to what Christmas means to Christians are clearly absent in our Jewish celebration. The holidays are hardly parallel and certainly not proportionate in religious significance. Just ask any Jewish parent who has had to sit through some public school celebration of the Christmas holidays. The splendor of "Adeste Fidelis" is not challenged by the folk ditty that tells us, "I have a little dreidel, I made it out of clay…." One is magnificent, the other banal. One makes an assertion that is theologically consequential; the other about the plasticity of clay. The disparity evokes an underlying difference between the two holidays: Christmas celebrates an affirmation central to Christian faith, while the events of Hanukkah are not at the core of Jewish history or religious belief. Take Christ out of Christmas and you have little left. You could not have Christianity without the events celebrated on Christmas. Judaism without Hanukkah, however, would look pretty much like it does already.

Light for a Dark World

On another level, the two holidays do share something deep in common. It is hardly an accident that both occur around

ART SHUTTERSTOCK/EUGENE IVANOV

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the winter solstice. In this regard both are responses to profoundly human needs, anthropologically deeper even than the manifest theological or historical content of the two celebrations. Both come at the time of year when days are shortest (at least in the northern hemisphere where both religious traditions had their origins) and the weather the least hospitable. Both come when the darkness of night looks as if it might well prevail. And both respond by celebrating light. The lights of the Christmas tree, the Yule log and "Jesus the light of the world" represent light entering a dark world. Before that, on the Jewish side, at a time of year when the world grows darkest, Jews responded by lighting one light and then another and another until they had, by their own efforts, brought warmth and light into a cold, dark world. On each night of the eight-day festival, we light one more candle—as well as the *shamash* (the helper candle), which lights all the others; by the end nine candles are burning. Hanukkah may not be the Jewish Christmas, but both Hanukkah and Christmas—like Dewali in India—grow out of human responses to a threatened dominance of darkness.

Hanukkah began as a celebration, instituted by the Hasmonean dynasty in Judea, of a great military victory by their ancestors over the remnants of the empire of Alexander the Great. Their celebration of Hanukkah told of the overbearing ruler Antiochus, who tried to impose his own religious practices on the Jewish population of Judea. The Macabbees, ancestors of the Hasmoneans, led a popular guerilla uprising that defeated the mighty Greek army. The rabbis, who established the patterns of Jewish life, were no admirers of the Hasmoneans. So they reshaped and transvalued the holiday. The military victory was relegated to the background. In its place the rabbis emphasized the rededication of the temple in Jerusalem that followed the victory—the name Hanukkah means dedication. And they emphasized a miracle concerning a small jar of oil for the eternal light that burned in the temple and was never to go out. Only enough oil remained in that jar to keep the flame burning for a single day, and the specially consecrated oil needed for the lamp was an eight-day round-trip journey away. Miraculously the light continued to burn for the entire eight days. For the rabbis—and for the Jewish tradition that followed them—Hanukkah came to celebrate that miracle.

There is an element of the supernatural, then, in Hanukkah, no less than in Christmas. Perhaps we all need such assurances of hope when the night grows long and the weather raw. But the religious faith of most modern Jews does not rest on the miraculous. Hanukkah is Hanukkah with or without the miracle.

American Jews tend to hear the story of Hanukkah as an encomium to religious freedom: "No one has the right to tell us how to worship." Israelis and Zionists tend to hear Hanukkah as celebrating the national self-liberation of the Jewish people: "By the might of our own arms we have thrown off all who would oppress us." And when we get down to the realities of personal celebration, Jewish children (at least in the United States) may not be all that different from Christian children in the focus of their observance: presents—no matter the reason why they are given, and no matter how much we might decry it. For many, then, Hanukkah is wholly devoid of miracles.

> Christmas celebrates an affirmation central to Christian faith; the events of Hanukkah are not at the core of Jewish history or religious belief.

The Greatest Miracle

Even so, smack in the middle of the Hanukkah story is that cruse of oil. Perhaps the greatest Hanukkah gift we are given is an encounter with "perhaps." Perhaps that cruse of oil actually did burn for eight days. After all, the story of the Maccabees was written well into the time of accurate historical record-keeping. Perhaps things do occur that exceed our ability to explain. Perhaps, as Shakespeare said, "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,/ Than are dreamt of in your philosophy." Perhaps there is more to our world than things we can explain. Hanukkah allows us to open ourselves to that "perhaps." It may well be, after all, as Albert Einstein once said, "There are only two ways to live your life.

One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."

This we know for sure. Our lives are shaped and given richness by those things that exceed our ability to explain: love, deep contentment and happiness; the joy we feel in being with loved ones and friends—these are all beyond the ability of the mind to comprehend. Our ability to rise above adversity, to triumph over seemingly insurmountable obstacles—the strength to accomplish these comes from a source we do not understand and cannot begin to put into words. Indeed we overcome when reason would tell us we have been defeated. The Hasidic Rebbe Simcha Bunim (d. 1827) once taught, "We don't know how…[our redemption from destruction] happens—but it does." More recently Chaim Weizmann, the first president of the State of Israel, has said, "a Jew must believe in miracles if he is a realist."

The miracle, in this understanding, may not be in that cruse of oil so long ago, but right now, within each of us. Hanukkah reminds us that we can find the capacity to overcome the darkness that would engulf our lives. Every one of us has the ability to overcome the forces that would oppress us. Each can break the shackles of our destructive habits and inclinations. That is a Hanukkah miracle we can celebrate at any moment when things get dark around us.

There is a story about Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav (1772-1810), a great Hasidic rabbi, indeed the great-grandson of the founder of the Hasidic movement, and himself a profound spiritual master. He was also a man well acquainted with the darkness that can envelop us. Nachman taught that the way we light the Hanukkah candles—first one candle and then an additional one each night—is a profound lesson in changing ourselves and our world. When things get the darkest, he taught, it is up to us to find a single point of light—then increase it and rebuild from there. Nachman points us toward the real Hanukkah miracle.

The greatest gift of Hanukkah may be our ability to recognize that miracles can happen for us. And the greatest miracle may well be the miracle of self-renewal that is available to us all the time. In that spirit I wish everyone a *Chag Urim Sameach*, a joyous holiday of lights. A

Waiting for Good News

A lawyer hopes for an end to capital punishment.

BY DAVID WALSH-LITTLE

CRAMMED IN SOMEWHERE among the pre-school Christmas show of my two youngest daughters, the elementary school holiday concert of my second grader and an ongoing murder trial, I visited with my condemned client, John Booth-El, a few days before Christmas last year. I have been to the Maryland Correctional Adjustment Center, or "Supermax Prison" as it is called, in downtown Baltimore many times to discuss various facets of John's case. He has been on death row for 23 years, and I have represented him for the last seven. This visit came amid a changing political landscape for the death penalty in Maryland and across the nation, encouraging hope for its abolition. Our conversation too was encouraging, optimistic and fittingly "adventful" for the season.

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Slow Death

In mid-December 2006, the state of Florida executed Angel Diaz by lethal injection. The killing took 34 minutes according to the Florida medical examiner. The needles, as explained by the examiner, were inserted in and through Diaz's veins, causing the poisonous chemicals to be pumped directly into Diaz's flesh. This prolonged the killing process. Witnesses to the execution reported Diaz licking his lips, grimacing and appearing to try to speak 24 minutes into the execution. A second lethal dose of poison was necessary to kill Mr. Diaz, who clearly suffered both unnecessary and severe pain. Governor Jeb Bush immediately called for a suspension of all executions in his state, a promise that the new governor, Charlie Christ, also pledged to honor.

That same week, a federal judge in California banned the current use of lethal injection in his state as unacceptably cruel and unusual. The judge's order did not preclude a change in the execution protocol by Governor Schwarzenegger to make California's procedure constitutional. It did recognize the inhumanity of the present execution process and again raised questions about the legitimacy of capital punishment in principle.

Similarly, the Maryland Court of Appeals, the highest court in the state, struck down the present lethal injection protocol in Maryland as illegal. The lethal injection process in place was never

ART BY STEFANIE AUGUSTINE

submitted to the appropriate committee in the state legislative body for review or debated at a public hearing, as is mandated. The Maryland prison system ignored public and legislative review of the process as required by the law. As a result Maryland, too, has suspended use of its capital punishment machinery, and my client is for the moment spared.

Rethinking Why a State Kills

What does all this mean? Only that we need to refine our death penalty procedures? Lethal injection is the preferred method of execution, used in 37 states, and is judged superior to hanging, the firing squad and use of the gas chamber. But its continued use has been challenged all over the country. Is the issue simply the need for a more efficient way for the state to kill?

The recent history of the death penalty suggests otherwise. In 1972, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down the death penalty because of its recognized inequities. Since its restoration by the court in 1976, the practical implementation of the death penalty has encountered problem after problem, defying the attempt to make the method of execution "fair."

Take Maryland for example. In 1988, the Supreme Court struck down Maryland's entire capital punishment decision-making process because individual jurors were not given the appropriate opportunity to consider all arguments against the death penalty. In 1993 Kirk Bloodsworth, wrongly convicted of murder and sentenced to die, was exonerated and released. After his nine years of incarceration, DNA evidence conclusively showed that he was innocent.

In 2002, Gov. Parris Glendening of Maryland declared a moratorium on the death penalty because of concerns of racial bias in the use of capital punishment. The state undertook an extensive empirical study of the history of capital punishment in the state. The study concluded that the race of the murder victim was an important factor in determining who was to be executed. When Caucasians were the victims, the defendant was far more likely to be condemned to death than when African-Americans were the murder victims.

None of these practical inequities is unique to the State of Maryland. All of them recur across the country. While proponents of capital punishment claim these problems can be solved, they are in fact symptoms of a much deeper societal sickness, the belief that killing solves problems. We need to confront this sickness. Placing people, poor people at that, on a gurney and pouring poison through their blood cannot be made legitimate.

The debate on lethal injection as the means of capital punishment should be seen as inextricably related to the purposes of capital punishment. Will lethal injection be rejected as a method of execution? I do not know. I know my client's life is currently safe from the government's reach. I know we will debate this issue in Maryland and across the country in the year ahead. I know there is some hope.

So even though Christmas 2006 is long past, for me Advent continues. Maybe at the right moment, when leadership is most needed, shepherds like those described in Luke's infancy narrative will emerge to announce the good news. Lord knows, the abolition of the death penalty in the United States is good news long overdue. A

Facing the Inquisition

A pope seeks pardon.

BY IVAN J. KAUFFMAN

CNS ILLUSTRATION FROM BETTMANN ARCHIVE

WITH ITS VIVIDLY re-enacted scenes of torture, book burning and violence, the PBS series "Secret Files of the Inquisition" made clear that stereotypical views of the Inquisition are not going away anytime soon. It also ensured that a negative interpretation of this Catholic history will be embedded in popular culture, the history as told by those who view the Catholic Church as the foremost obstacle to everything modern and progressive.

Although advertised as based on recently opened Vatican archives, the series contained little that is new. Despite the interviews with Catholic historians, it ignored virtually all the recent scholarship that could have produced a much more complete view of the Inquisition. Its biggest omission, though, was ignoring the story of Pope John Paul II's efforts to bring the Inquisition into the open. That effort constituted a major chapter in John Paul's long, eventful papacy, yet it is little known even within Catholic circles.

Finding the Facts

When John Paul II came to Rome in 1978, he brought with him a deep awareness that two historical events—the condemnation of Galileo and the Inquisition—were essential to anti-Catholicism, and he was determined to deal with both.

In the first year of his papacy, the pope formed a commission to study the Galileo incident, asking the group to tell the church: "What happened? How did it happen? Why did it happen?" The commission issued a report 14 years later supporting neither the ecclesiastical right, which seems to hold that the Catholic Church can never err, nor the secular left, which seems to hold that the Catholic Church can do nothing right. John Paul said of the report, "Often, beyond two partial and conflicting perceptions, there exists a wider perception which includes them and goes beyond both of them."

He addressed the Inquisition in the same way in 1994, including an inquiry into its history among the preparations for the Jubilee year 2000. In a memo outlining the plans, John Paul told the world's cardinals that confessing institutional sin would be a prominent part of the event. "How can we be silent about so many kinds of violence perpetrated in the name of the faith?" he asked, specifically mentioning "religious wars, courts of the Inquisition, and other violations of the rights of the human person." He went so far as to compare them to "the crimes of Hitler's Nazism and Marxist Stalinism."

"The church must on its own initiative examine the dark places of its history and

IVAN J. KAUFFMAN, of Washington, D.C., is a Catholic co-founder of Bridgefolk, a Mennonite and Catholic ecumenical group.

judge it in the light of Gospel principles," he wrote to the cardinals. "The church needs a *metanoia*," he added, "a discernment of the historical faults and failures of her members in responding to the demands of the Gospel." The memo was an internal document, which allowed John Paul to speak more directly than he would have in public, but it was leaked to the press—a rather rare event in Vatican circles—giving the public an uncommon glimpse into the pope's thinking.

John Paul's 1994 proposal did not meet with an enthusiastic reception by all the cardinals. Many Europeans saw it as aiding their longtime critics; many from Africa and Asia regarded the Inquisition as a European issue from the distant past that would only confuse their people and give ammunition to their enemies if an apology were aired at the papal level. Some more conservative cardinals were troubled by the doctrinal innovation it seemed to involve.

Despite these objections, voiced with unusual openness by several cardinals, John Paul proceeded. When the program for the Jubilee 2000 was announced later that year in the apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, the issue of confessing the church's past sins was prominent. "Acknowledging the weaknesses of the past," it said, "alerts us to face today's temptations and...prepares us to meet them."

A Meeting of Minds

Georges Cottier, O.P., then the pope's personal theologian, was asked to form a historical commission on the Inquisition modeled after the Galileo commission. He enlisted prominent scholars, Catholic and not, who were given complete freedom in their proceedings. The commission included 30 scholars from nine European nations and the United States and Canada.

When the commission met at the Vatican in October 1998, John Paul told members he could not take "an action based on ethical norms, which any request for pardon is, without first being informed of exactly what happened." His first step was to ask historians to reconstruct the events of the Inquisition "within the context of that historical period."

The appointment of the commission was largely ignored in the U.S. press, and even in those Catholic areas of Europe where it was reported, it was soon forgotten. For the next six years the effort appeared to have been quietly shelved. In 2004, however, the Vatican held a heavily promoted press conference, which included three cardinals, to announce that the papers from the 1998 conference had been published by the Vatican Press in its prestigious series Studi e Testi. To demonstrate that his Inquisition project had not been forgotten, John Paul issued a personal statement strongly supporting the publication. The overall tone of his message made rather clear that he regarded the actions of the Inquisition as contrary to the Gospel.

The book itself was a collection of papers written by experts, largely for other experts, and typical of the results of a scholarly conference. Its editorial matter and 10 of the 30 papers were in Italian, with other papers in French (11), Spanish (6) and English (3). The authors were major authorities in their fields. The papers ranged across the entire history of the Inquisition, from its origins in southern France in the 13th century to the development of the Spanish

Inquisition in the 16th century, its institutionalization in Rome and its post-Reformation history.

The volume also included an effort by several Catholic scholars to acknowledge the essential sinfulness of the Inquisition. The commission included scholars who maintained the traditional belief that the negative effects of heresy on civil society were so great that capital punishment was justified, but on the whole the revolution in Catholic doctrine that took place at Vatican II when the "Declaration on Religious Liberty" was adopted prevailed in the reports. One author, for example, referred to the execution of heretics under Pope Pius V as "legal murder." Jean-Miguel Garrigues, O.P., a member of the Pontifical Theological Academy, took both St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas to task in no uncertain terms for having provided the theological rationale for the Inquisition, and called their justification of religious coercion a prime example of the "ways of thinking and acting which were truly forms of counter-witness and scandal," quoting John Paul's words in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*.

Despite all this, the book was virtually ignored in the United States. And while it received widespread coverage in Europe, a headline in the British paper The Guardian was typical: "Historians Say Inquisition Wasn't That Bad." That report claimed that Agostino Borromeo, the volume's editor (and a Catholic commentator for the PBS series), had told reporters that "many executions attributed to the church 'were in fact carried out by non-church tribunals.'" Of course, to many historians the distinction between declaring someone a heretic, knowing that doing so will result in her or his death, and actually executing that person might seem insignificant.

But the book's primary significance lay less in its contents, valuable as they are, than in its history. That the Vatican would initiate an open-ended process in which previous popes and other high-ranking clerics would almost certainly be condemned—as indeed they were—was surely a historic event. In the 19th century, Pope Gregory XVI had called it "insulting" to "infer that the church could be subject to any defect." Pope John Paul II obviously had a somewhat different perspective.

The Church's Mea Culpa

In fact the Inquisition project was part of a larger effort that seems likely to gain significance in Catholic history as we acquire perspective on John Paul's papacy. Almost from the start of his pontificate, John Paul began asking, in the name of the church, for forgiveness for actions taken by his predecessors. These included the role of Catholics in dividing Christianity, in promoting hatred of Jews, in mistreating Native Americans and in enslaving Africans, to mention only a few cases. The public apologies were chronicled by Luigi Accattoli, the Italian reporter who covered the pope for the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera, and published in 1998 with the English title *When A Pope Asks Forgiveness: The Mea Culpas of John Paul II.*

John Paul's apologies in effect subjected the Catholic Church to the same standards to which business corporations are now held in civil law, whereby corporations take responsibility for the decisions of officials no longer living and who had no way to know their actions would cause grave damage in the future.

This admission of fault stirred much

controversy. In response John Paul asked Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, then prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to form a theological commission to study the issues involved. It was this commission's report which provided the theological foundations for a historic penance service known as the Day of Pardon, which took place at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome on the first Sunday of Lent 2000.

At the press conference beforehand, the Vatican announced that "the church today, through the Successor of Peter," would name and confess "the errors of Christians in every age," including "acts of violence and oppression during the Crusades," and the "methods of coercion employed in the Inquisition."

John Paul was willing to admit that the sins of intolerance committed by Christians "in the name of faith and morals" had "[sullied] the face of the church." Such an admission does not require acknowledging doctrinal error, since the Inquisition was never formally approved either by a council or an infallible papal declaration. It does, however, require abandoning dogmatic triumphalism. It also necessitates learning from the past. That requires us to face the facts, all the facts, fearlessly and honestly, and to ask why actions were taken by our predecessors which now shame us so deeply.

John Paul's penitential initiative provides a way for Catholics to create a narrative of the Inquisition that tells the whole story, as opposed to any selective, biased account that Catholicism's severest critics have fashioned or might fashion. That is the road John Paul has set us on, and surely it is the way to free us from this ghost in the Catholic closet. A

The Surprise Child

The third in a series for Advent and Christmas

BY JAMES T. KEANE

FOR MANY CHRISTIANS it has perhaps become commonplace to view Advent as a season of inevitability, a ritual expectation of the birth of the Son of God, surely, but one that lacks suspense. We already know how the story will turn out, don't we? The Holy Family will make it to Bethlehem; they will find a manger; Jesus will be born; everything will run as planned and on schedule. Yet it is worthwhile to recall that Advent celebrates birth, one of the most vulnerable of human moments, and to remind ourselves that Jesus was an unexpected child: Mary had a different life planned for herself and Joseph, not to mention Joseph's own hopes and dreams for his family.

What must those cold final months of pregnancy have been like for Mary, away from home and desperate for shelter? In our still male-centered world, we may think more of the coming of Jesus than of the worries and concerns of his mother, who knew a life we often do not admit, one surely full of confusion about her role as well as dreams and fears for her family's well-being and future. Do we give enough attention in our prayer and celebration to her interior life—this young woman called by forces she did not fully understand to give birth to a child whose coming was shrouded in so much mystery?

I am of an age where my friends and siblings seem to have acquired an incredible fecundity. Not a month goes by without the good news that one or more of them is expecting. Pregnancy involves uncertainty, of course, so they are careful not to make an announcement too soon. Often they communicate the news subtly. A friend declines a glass of wine at dinner; sisters start whispering in the corner at family gatherings; boxes of clothes reappear out of attics and closets, and suddenly everyone realizes the good news. Each time, though, there is worry, but more often than not it is the worry of middle-class Americans supported by family, society and financial security. It is not the worry of an unmarried teenager living at subsistence level in a land under foreign military occupation; it is not that of a woman struggling to avoid public scandal, yet singing a hymn of hope in an environment more suggestive of its opposite.

The great German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer once called Mary's Magnificat, her response to the angel in Luke's Gospel, "the most passionate, the wildest, one might even say the most revolutionary Advent hymn ever sung," not a Christmas carol or a recitation of pious treacle but "a hard, strong, inexorable song about collapsing thrones and humbled lords of this world, about the power of God and the powerlessness of humankind." The woman who sang that song was not the serene and half-asleep royal figure depicted in Western art over the centuries, but a young woman fully alive in history, whose answer to God had consequences both long-range and immediate for herself, her family and the world.

Some have argued that the church would benefit from further reflection on Mary's "yes" at the Annunciation, acknowledging that a component of every pregnancy, expected or not, should be a woman's actively choosing to say yes to the child she will bear. That equation, however, works just as well turned on its head, because we as a church would also profit from reflection on what the angel Gabriel says to Mary in Luke's account: "The Lord is with you. Do not be afraid." Even the most unplanned of pregnancies, Gabriel tells Mary (and us), enjoys divine protection and care. The implied message is a profound one: "Yes, this situation you are in seems impossible, and no one can guarantee you and your child a life without suffering. But you and your child are part of a divine plan, and for this reason, you are never alone." An unexpected child can be treated as a liability or a mistake, not a birth to be anticipated with hymns and celebration, but a problem to be solved. Mary's response, though, is exemplary: she embraced her new reality and her new child.

In this Advent season, let us remember and be grateful for the yes Mary gave to that sudden visitor who brought such shocking news. For Mary's decision brought life to the world. The child she bore and reared has changed our fates forever. Perhaps the joy and gratitude we bring to the new arrivals in our world give us a starting point for loving Mary's son. A

ART BY JULIE LONNEMAN

JAMES T. KEANE, S.J., is an associate editor of **America**.

Deck the Shelves With Books Aplenty

BY PATRICIA A. KOSSMANN

PHOTO FROM *MORAVIAN CHRISTMAS IN THE SOUTH*, COURTESY OF OLD SALEM MUSEUMS & GARDENS

'DON'T WAIT till it's too late. Read Our Town by Thornton Wilder and learn Emily's wisdom after she returns as a ghost." This advice to seize life, to be present to it in both its wonder and gloom, to see importance, value and purpose in the quotidian while we are still alive is among many pearls of wisdom in Before I Go: Letters to Our Children About What Really Matters, by the Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft (Paulist Press). The author chides himself for not having been a better parent and leaves these notes as his legacy to his grown children and grandchildren.

The book offers 163 lessons for the good life based on Kreeft's own experiences and study and just plain living (more than six decades). It is common sense delivered with uncommon ease and sincerity. The reader—and this is a book for all ages—will stop often along the way, so obvious are these bits of wisdom we fail to remember. Topics range broadly: making choices wisely, prioritizing, handling worry, time management, prayer life, sacrifices, marriage and family, keeping a chapbook, love, death. *Before I Go* belongs in every Christian family's library, to be dipped into often.

Moving from philosophy to poetry, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Mary Oliver has written *Our World* (Beacon Press), a book of reminiscence and reflection on her decades-long friendship with the gallery owner and professional photographer Molly Malone Cook (dozens of whose photos run throughout the book). One of the first photographers hired by The Village Voice, Cook also owned a bookstore and later in life became Oliver's literary agent. Oliver interweaves entries from Cook's journal with her own prose-and-poetry text, revealing a richly textured life, a shared world that included prominent writers and artists. Among those depicted on (candid) camera are Jean Cocteau in Venice (1954), the photographer W. Eugene Smith in New York City (1962), "A Raisin in the Sun" playwright Lorraine Hansberry in New York (1958) and the Catholic activist Dorothy Day with children (1950s). Oliver's lifelong observation of the glistening beauty of her landscape in

PATRICIA A. KOSSMANN is literary editor of **America.**

Massachusetts yields fruit in much of her nature writing. *Our World* would make a wonderful gift this Christmas. You might wish to accompany it with Oliver's last book of poetry, *Thirst*.

Now, from poetry to Pi—specifically *Life of Pi: Deluxe Illustrated Edition* (Harcourt). Yann Martel's award-winning tale of a shipwrecked teenage boy who spent over 200 days adrift in a lifeboat with a few non-human companions, including a 450-pound Bengal tiger, is considered a modern classic. In reviewing the original edition for **America** (4/14/03), Gerald T. Cobb, S.J., said the book "reinvents the lost-at-sea novel in quite striking terms." For this new edition the publisher sponsored an international contest in 2005 that drew thousands of submissions from illustrators. The winner was the Croatian artist Tomislav Torjanac, whose 40 lavish four-color illustrations (his medium is oil) bring new life and perspective to the best-selling novel. These are stunning, creative depictions of key scenes in the story, reflecting both tranquility and ferocity, and always stop the reader in her tracks. Instead of another mincemeat pie on Christmas, consider giving this handsome "Pi" to a favorite friend. It will surely be passed around to others.

PHOTO FROM *ART OF THE CRÈCHE: NATIVITIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD*

A truly impressive treat is *Moravian Christmas in the South*, by Nancy Smith Thomas (Univ. of North Carolina Press). When I visit my brother every Christmas in North Carolina, we take a long drive to Winston-Salem, where the Moravians (one of the earliest Protestant groups, hailing from Germany) took root in the mid-18th century. It was the Piedmont wildernesss at the time. And we stroll through Old Salem's cobbled streets, visiting shops, museums, Salem College (the oldest educational institution for women in the United States), the huge bakery, Home Moravian Church, the cemetery and the Inn (for a superb home-cooked meal). It is all here—and more—in a lavishly illustrated volume full of historic detail, traditions and more. The illustrations span from the 1700s to the present and include photographs, paintings, pencil sketches and other forms.

The Moravians brought with them a distinct culture and unique customs. It is believed that the first verifiable Christmas tree in the South appeared at the Moravians' Springplace Indian Mission in Georgia. Family and community are central (and sacred) to this devout Christian sect. So is simplicity in terms of Christmas gift-giving. The book abounds in fascinating and unusual details, from worship to cuisine, from delighting the children to musical traditions. Readers of all stripes can learn some wonderful and different traditions worth introducing in their own family's Christmas observances. *Moravian Christmas in the South* is a book the whole family can enjoy. It's the next best thing to being there (take it from me).

An equally deluxe book that would make a welcome centerpiece on one's coffee table—and a conversation starter for guests—is *Art of the Crèche: Nativities From Around the World*, by James L. Govan (Merrell). The author and his late wife, Emilia, were avid collectors of crèches, many of which were gifts; others were procured during their travels. They also engaged museum curators, merchants, missionaries and others in building this unique and unusual collection. Their story brims with little-known facts, traditions, spiritual and artistic insight and captivating historical and cultural detail. Accompanying each crèche depicted is detailed background text on its origin and meaning. As these works of art originate in a variety of countries around the globe, so they convey a variety of forms, images and symbolism. From Poland to Peru, Texas to Tanzania, Ireland to Ivory Coast, Montana to Malawi and dozens of other places, each full-color piece tells its own story. We observe the celebration of Christ's birth in virtually every corner of the world. Add *Art of the Crèche* to your Christmas gift list.

A book as much fun to give as to receive is *Inventing English: The Imaginative Origins of Everyday Language*, by Dale Corey (Booksurge). If you're a fan of William Safire's weekly column, On Language, in The New York Times, this book is for you. It is fun, informative and a handy resource. "From the Elizabethan stage to the Sunday funny papers," the author notes, "fictional people, places, and concepts have left their mark on the English language." She explores the origin of scores of expressions, ranging from "Aladdin's lamp" to "yellow journalism." And in between are such favorites as "Beauty and the Beast," a theme common to folk literature, and the writings of Shakespeare, Robert Frost, Charles Darwin and many others, who likewise provide the source for our literary allusions. *Inventing English* would be a useful stocking stuffer for the students on your shopping list.

The next book I read in galley form. Its official publication date is Dec. 26. Unlike the foregoing, this one is not at all a fun read. But it is a noteworthy entry to

the growing genre of resistance literature. *My Life as a Traitor*, by Zarah Ghahramani with Robert Hillman (Farrar, Straus and Giroux) is the memoir of a young Iranian university student arrested and sent to the infamous Evin prison, where she underwent horrific inquisitions and torture. The daughter of fairly well-off parents, living in a suburb of Tehran, Ms. Ghahramani was 20 at the time. Her arrest was ostensibly for baring part of her hair on a sunny day. A more or less model Islamic woman in public, she and her family were less so in the privacy of their home. The story is told in alternating chapters of personal growing-up reminiscences and her daily ordeal in a tiny cell. Disaffected by their government's repressiveness, she and a group of friends had taken to airing their views and asking questions. After grueling weeks wracked by despair, she yielded information on members of her group, identified in photos taken by the police. That won her a mock "trial" and ultimate release in the dark of night, dropped in the middle of nowhere. The writing is taut, clear and always engaging. At the risk of sounding clichéd, *My Life as a Traitor* is a page-turner. But most of all, it is a vivid testament to one woman's rising above a treacherous regime and winning back her dignity.

Also, we cannot forget the little ones on our list—those inquiring minds, with life "aspirations" that change daily. For yours who don't know what they want to be when they grow up, here are a couple of suggestions. *Ernie & the Big Newz: The Adventures of a TV Reporter*, by the award-winning New York television anchorperson Ernie Anastos (New World Books), tells the story of a young boy who fulfilled his dream to become a television reporter. The eponymous hero is a voracious reader at a young age. From a make-believe studio in his basement, and with help from a few "assistants," young Ernie kept everyone up to date on local events. We follow him all the way to adulthood and his first huge breaking story on Thanksgiving Day. The book has charming illustrations by the distinguished Daily News cartoonist Bill Gallo.

Growing Up With Loukoumi, by Nick Katsoris (Loukoumi Books) is a book for the littlest ones. The titular Loukoumi is a lamb we follow during the course of a day after she meets a farmer who plants "seeds" of possibility with our heroine. We watch her "try on" many possible choices, each deftly illustrated (by an Indian artist known only as Rajesh) and sharing a common refrain: "Believe in yourself and dreams come true." The book comes with a CD featuring the voices of Gloria Gaynor and Olympia Dukakis, among others.

Finally, for the Civil War buff on your list—or anyone who enjoys great history—consider *A Slave No More: Two Men Who Escaped to Freedom*, by the Yale University professor David W. Blight (Harcourt). The book includes two newly discovered slave narratives and the gripping story of the men who wrote them—Wallace Turnage (Alabama) and John Washington (Virginia). They were but two of the four million who traveled from slavery to freedom in the 1860s. Blight, a noted scholar who has devoted himself to advancing black studies and whose prior books include *Race and Reunion*, has once again written a compelling history of one of our nation's darkest times. Abraham Lincoln described the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation as "the central act of my administration, and the greatest event of the nineteenth century." Messrs. Turner and Washington undoubtedly said "Amen" to that.

Merry Christmas, dear readers!

PHOTOS FROM *MORAVIAN CHRISTMAS IN THE SOUTH* (TOP) AND *ART OF THE CRÈCHE*

Classified

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Letters

No Simple Answers

The editorial "Amnesty and Abortion" (10/29) raises difficult questions. I agree that we should continue to reach out to those with whom we disagree. But I think it is incorrect to say that Amnesty International adopts a "utilitarian calculus."

It is a "murky world" in which we work, and there is no simple answer here. But more respect and response to women who have been raped is called for.

The "right to privacy," "unwanted pregnancy" or "reproductive rights" are not issues here. It is the treatment of women in a most horrible situation where no choice is perfect. I do not see Amnesty's position as troubling, but one of utmost concern for individual women in the most difficult imaginable circumstances.

Most of us will never be in a position to experience such violence against women or confront its results. Amnesty International should be supported in this instance. I certainly will continue to send my support to Amnesty International as they fight for the rights and dignity of women in the third world.

Joseph J. Koechler
Ormond Beach, Fla.

Called and Gifted

In "A Struggle for the Soul of Medicine" (11/05), Myles N. Sheehan, S.J., reviews the many challenges that confront medical education as it tries to confer the highest qualities of the profession upon its students. The soul of the practice of medicine lies in how we care for our patients. Our Catholic concepts of virtue and vocation are powerful guides to those of us called to care for patients and should direct us to the soul of our practice of medicine.

Embracing what we do as vocation and cultivating virtues are important for the physician of faith. St. Benedict's admonition is a bold testament to this: "Before all, and above all, attention should be paid to the care of the sick so that they shall be served as if they were Christ himself." When physicians use their talents to the utmost to care for others, guided by virtues, the Christian concept of person informs the physician-patient relationship, and that relationship becomes one of love. At the same time we realize the great blessing inherent in the call to serve.

Andre F. Lijoi, M.D.
York, Pa.

Beyond the Hospital Door

I enjoyed reading "A Struggle for the Soul of Medicine," by Myles N. Sheehan, S.J. (11/05). Appearing as it did in the same issue as Jim McDermott's perceptive review of "Sicko," it made me wonder if the soul of modern medicine stops at the consulting room or hospital door. Medical education in the context of social justice involves more than clinical skills. I suggest that it should include a preferential focus on the poor and underserved, given that the greatest burden of illness in any society falls on the lowest levels. It should also provide students with a broader appreciation of medicine in the

community, including preventive and public health, and early low-tech but affordable interventions. Yet this aspect of medicine is too often undertaught or given short shrift.

Michael W. Ross, M.D.
Houston, Tex.

Political Calculus

Regarding "Bishops on Citizenship," by Matt Malone, S.J. (11/5): I hope that this bishops' document explicitly distinguishes between support for or opposition to some moral doctrine and my vote for some candidate's policy. A vote can be cast in a political contest for any number of defensible reasons.

For example, in casting a ballot for a candidate, I may be supporting him or her as the best available candidate, voting against opponents, casting a protest vote against all major candidates, or supporting or opposing some major political party or coalition.

Similarly, I may vote for or against specific policy proposals for several defensible reasons. A proposed policy may aim to support a good moral principle but still be a bad policy.

For example, a specific policy proposal aimed at outlawing or restricting abortion may still be a bad proposal and deserve to be defeated. Everything depends on what the proposed policy says and the particular context in which it is proposed.

The bishops should explicitly acknowledge that neither they nor anyone else can rightly deduce solely from how I vote whether I adhere to Catholic moral doctrine.

Bernard P. Dauenhauer
Watkinsville, Ga.

Into Great Silence

I am always interested to read about contemplative prayer in your magazine, so I was especially delighted to read "In Mystic Silence," by William Johnston, S.J. (11/19), on the practice of Zen and

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other forms of quiet prayer. His description of praying with a mantra was very familiar to me since I have been practicing this way of prayer for more than 30 years. There are Christian meditation centers in more than 25 countries, and more than 1,000 weekly meditation groups meet in churches, homes, prisons, schools and places of business. Twice each day, thousands of individual meditators around the world follow this selfless way of prayer marked by silence, stillness and simplicity.

Gregory Ryan
Wall, N.J.

Virtue Civics

Regarding "A Catholic Call to the Common Good," by Alexia Kelley and John Gehring (10/15): There is more to the concept of the common good than a sum of social benefits. It is also a concept of balance between the order of things and the order of persons, a balance based on the dignity of the human person.

Today's American culture speaks a language of individualism, a distortion of the civic republican language upon which our country was founded. James Madison felt that civic virtue in American citizens would allow them to elect men of equal civic virtue as their leaders and actively to participate in political life, but somewhere along the road to territorial and economic expansion this vision of public virtue, this "aristocracy of merit," was dimmed.

Utilitarian individualism is not the language we need to solve the problems of our relativized society today. As we prepare to elect new leaders, shouldn't we remember our Catholic worldview, which is based on our understanding of the Gospels and of the human person? Don't we have the duty to participate in civic life and to discern our choices carefully?

Alexis de Tocqueville worried that a democracy could easily atrophy because of citizen apathy. Madison emphasized the need for the citizens of the newborn "republic with a democratic constitution" to participate in the political process and thus to seek the common good. To preserve our rights as Americans now, isn't it our duty as people of God to speak publicly Catholicism, the language by which we live?

Mary Jo Harrington
Houston, Tex.

War No More

Regarding the editorial "Thanking Our Soldiers" (11/12): Lost in the fog of war are the civilian casualties, which number much higher than soldiers, by a ratio of 8 to 1. Civilians who suffer the horrors of war receive no honor. There are no parades or memorials for them. Their suffering and death are seldom included in our church prayers as we pray weekly for our troops in harm's way. We should not forget that this "collateral damage" of war is done by marching armies.

If dioceses and parishes took the teachings of Jesus more seriously, we would actively encourage our young men and women to consider conscientious objection as an alternative to this immoral and illegal war. We can make war and those who fight in wars out to be honorable and heroic by our prayers. Our unconditional support for "the troops" could be another unintended anthem for sending our youth to a disastrous fate.

(Rev.) Rich Broderick
Cambridge, N.Y.

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Salvation and The Savior

Third Sunday of Advent (A), Dec. 16, 2007

Readings: Is 35:1-6, 10; Ps 146:6-10; Jas 5:7-10; Mt 11:2-11

"Go and tell John what you hear and see" (Mt 11:4)

ART BY TAD DUNNE

THE WORD "SALVATION" and the related terms "save" and "savior" are heard frequently in Advent. Their basic meaning concerns being brought to healing and wholeness; the process involves a transition from one state or status to another. Today's Scripture readings can help us better understand the various biblical contexts of these words and reflect on two fundamental questions: What is salvation? Who is the savior?

Today's reading from Isaiah 35 alludes to Israel's return from exile in the 6th century B.C., a topic treated extensively in what is commonly called Second Isaiah (Chapters 40 to 55). It refers to Israel's journey home from Babylon to Mount Zion. For Jews in the mid-6th century B.C. this was salvation. According to Isaiah 35, salvation involves the renewal of the earth through the glorious presence of God with his people. The desert will bloom, and nature will enter into the celebration. It also includes the physical wholeness of the travelers: the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame leap about and the mute sing. Moreover, it involves lasting joy on the pilgrims' part as they arrive at the site of their ancestral temple on Mount Zion. In the context of Isaiah 35, salvation is the deliverance of God's people from captivity, physical obstacles, opposition and conflict. It is both material and spiritual. It brings about perfect peace and renewed relationship with God and other persons. The savior here is the God of Israel: "Here is your God, he comes with vindication; with divine recompense he comes to save you."

Psalm 146 paints a similar picture of ancient Israel's hopes for salvation. Here salvation is justice for the oppressed, food for the hungry, freedom for captives, sight for the blind, protection for strangers, sustenance for the orphan and widow and frustration for the wicked. As in Isaiah 35, salvation is primarily concerned with life in this world. Again the savior is the God of Israel, because "the Lord God keeps faith forever."

The theme of salvation is also central in the first part of today's selection from Matthew 11. When John the Baptist inquires from prison about Jesus ("Are you the one who is to come?"), the reply from Jesus echoes many of the themes in Isaiah 35 and Psalm 146. Jesus points to the signs and wonders he has been accomplishing: the blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. This list not only corresponds to its biblical prototypes but covers much of what Jesus had done, according to Matthew 8 and 9. The new element here is the identity of the savior. Here the savior is Jesus of Nazareth. The salvation hoped for by the prophet and the psalmist has been brought to a new level by Jesus. The name Jesus means "the Lord saves." Because Jesus does what God does in the Old Testament, he earns the name Savior.

What Jesus does is sometimes called "the works of the Messiah." In response to John's inquiry, Jesus replies in effect, "What kind of messiah are you looking for?" He is not a warrior messiah like David or a splendid king like Solomon. Rather he appeals to his own acts of compassion and healing. They define the kind of messiah he is. He lives up to his name; he is Jesus the savior. With his mighty acts the kingdom of heaven has dawned, so those who are privileged to hear and see him in action are even greater than John the Baptist.

Today's reading from the Letter of James reminds us that through Jesus' life, death and resurrection the concept of salvation has been expanded from the this-worldly concept of salvation so prominent in the Old Testament to include right relationship with God and eternal life in God's kingdom. In the context of the New Testament "the coming of the Lord" refers to the second coming of Christ as part of the process of resurrection, judgment, rewards and punishments, and the fullness of God's kingdom. Against the horizon of these hopes, James counsels patience after the example of the biblical prophets and Job. What the prophets waited for has been accomplished in part through Jesus the savior. But as our Advent readings keep reminding us, the fullness of salvation is yet to come. In the meantime we must not ignore the challenge present in both Testaments to imitate the example of the Lord who is "compassionate and merciful" to those in greatest need. That is part of the patience we must exercise in our everyday Christian lives.

Daniel J. Harrington

Praying With Scripture

- What comes to mind when you hear the word "salvation"?
- What do Jesus' name and his saving actions suggest about his person?
- Have you ever experienced the saving action of God in your life? How might you describe it?

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