

America

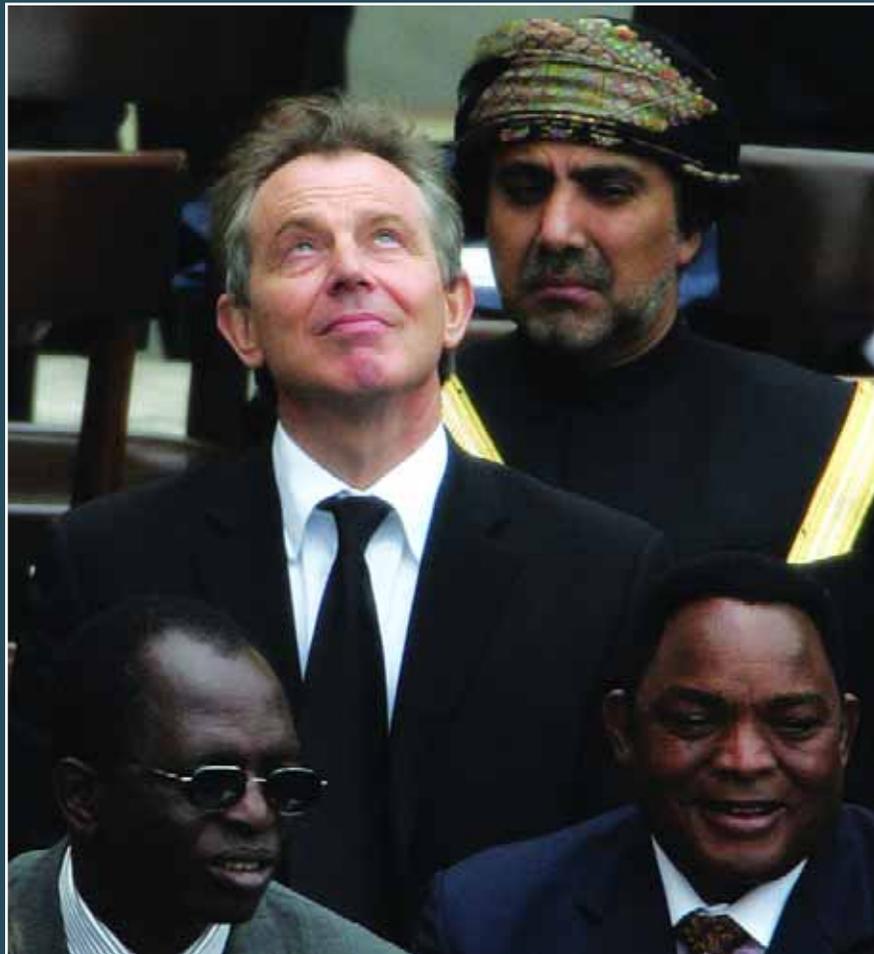
Jan. 7-14, 2008

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

\$2.75

The Conversion of Tony Blair

Austen Ivereigh



Defusing Tensions With Iran
Alon Ben-Meir

Catholics and the New Gilded Age
Daniel J. Morrissey

THE LOVE COMMAND, love of God and love of neighbor—it does not get more basic than that. It is the heart of Jesus’ message and, by Jesus’ reading, of the Hebrew Scriptures too: “On these,” Jesus tells the Pharisees, “hang all the law and the prophets” (Mt 22:40). In Christianity, especially Western Christianity, the unity of love of God and love of neighbor is axiomatic. It was surprising, nonetheless, that 138 Muslim leaders writing Pope Benedict XVI and other Christian leaders last October made the love command a central element of their letter *A Common Word Between Us and You*.

On welcoming the letter, Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, the president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, noted how remarkable it was that the authors of the letter were aligned with so many currents of Islamic thought, most notably Sunni and Shiite. As John Borelli observed in *The Tablet*

(10/20/07), the letter represented an explicit effort to build a

“consensus” among Islamic scholars and religious leaders, a very unusual but theologically significant development for Muslims, who today have no unified religious leadership.

Equally significant, it seems to me, was the letter’s effort to establish a dialogue in terms Christians can understand. Hence the appeal to the double commandment of love. Islam, with the exception of Sufism, seldom speaks of love. While devotion to God is the cornerstone of Islam as a way of life, love of neighbor has not usually had the pre-eminent standing in Muslim thought that it has in Christian ethics. Still, the prophet says, “None of you have faith until you love for your neighbor what you love for yourself.” Most important for interreligious relations, the letter affirms that “justice and religious freedom are a crucial part of love of neighbor.”

For many, the denial of religious freedom in some parts of the Muslim world remains a major stumbling block to deeper Christian-Muslim engagement. In recent months, for example, 45 staffers of the national and diocesan justice and peace commission in Pakistan have been arrested. The forced exile of

Iraqi Christians due to persecution is world news. Thus, some are reluctant to respond positively to *A Common Word* because of ongoing persecution of and discrimination against Christians. That, of course, is not the strategy of the Gospel, which commands, “Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you” (Mt 5:44).

Pope Benedict XVI has rightly insisted on reciprocity or symmetry in the matter of religious freedom between Islamic countries and the secular (formerly Christian) West. But reciprocity will have to be won country by country, region by region, over time. Lack of reciprocity in some places need not preclude a broader dialogue, especially when the dialogue is producing an unprecedented affirmation of religious freedom, a profession not previously shared in public by a broad range of Muslim leaders. Rather, when dialogue and the struggle for reciprocity go hand in hand, they can be re-enforcing.

Again, Pope Benedict has indicated that the Ten

Of Many Things

Commandments, that is, common human morality, could be the basis for a Christian-Muslim exchange. Some, like the well-known Jesuit Islamist Christian Troll, have argued that this necessarily implies moving deeper to a universal, natural law philosophy. Perhaps, but it seems to me that each side has been exploring what kind of common ground there might be on the topic of morality: Catholics suggesting common morality in keeping with traditional Muslim practice; the 138 Muslim leaders, the love command in an appeal to the whole Christian world.

In the Middle Ages, it may have been possible to have a dialogue on morality in natural law terms, but for the Islam of more recent centuries, speaking largely from the Koran is more usual. Likewise, it is appropriate for Muslims speaking to Christians across denominational lines to use biblical (New Testament) language, because, no matter how universal Catholics intend appeals to natural law to be, for Orthodox, evangelicals and most Protestants as well, natural law is in practice an alien, peculiarly Catholic mode of thought.

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America

Published by Jesuits of the United States

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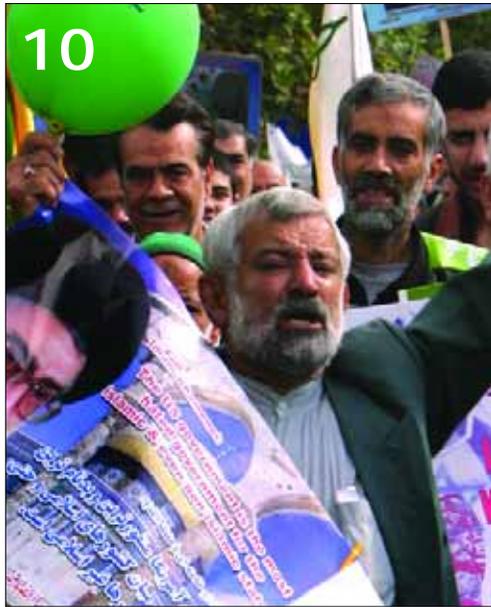
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Customer Service: 1-800-627-9533.
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Cover photo: British Prime Minister Tony Blair looks upward during the funeral for the late Pope John Paul II in St. Peter’s Square. Reuters/Yves Herman.



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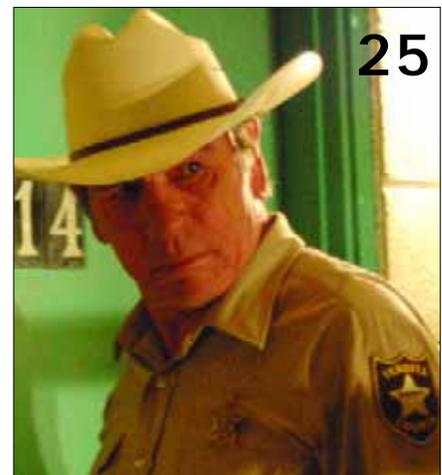
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Gordon Zahn, Prophet of Peace

BY THOMAS A. SHANNON

WHEN GORDON ZAHN (1918-2007) began his own journey to pacifism, he was convinced of two things: first, that had he been educated in the traditional Catholic schools of his time, he would never have heard of pacifism; second—and he was given rather strong encouragement to think this way—that he was on the lunatic fringe of the church. But he was also convinced that the path of the early church was the correct one and that pacifism was the normative Christian position and that the just war theory was at best an attempt to justify what Realpolitik had already decided was necessary. For many a decade, Gordon followed the lonely road of preaching pacifism in the company of others on the edges of mainstream Christianity. But this was a determined lot, and Gordon, who despised meetings to the depth of his being, continued to show up whenever asked, attended meeting after meeting and was eventually successful in efforts with others to resurrect Pax Christi USA, establishing it as a premier American peace organization.

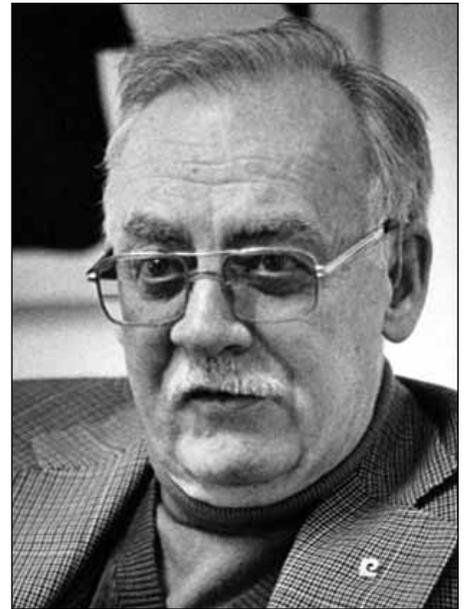
Gordon's witness to peace was accomplished in the classroom, on the lecture circuit, writing at his desk or attending endless meetings for the cause; but developments gave special luster to his contributions. First, during discussions at the Second Vatican Council on the draft of *Gaudium et Spes*, then known as Schema XIII, about war and the just war theory, he met Archbishop Thomas Roberts, S.J., of Bombay and members of the British hierarchy in England and began a correspondence with Archbishop Roberts. Gordon gave a major briefing to members of the British hierarchy in Rome and was instrumental in persuading them to support the insertion of a positive statement on conscientious objection. The council thus reversed Pius XII's teaching that if one was a Catholic and one's nation legitimately declared war, a Catholic citi-

zen could not be a conscientious objector.

Second, and perhaps more important, Gordon discovered the story of Franz Jägerstätter, the Austrian peasant who refused to serve in Hitler's army in any capacity because he was convinced of the immorality of the war. Franz, married and the father of three daughters, was beheaded for his convictions. Gordon came upon this story while doing research on the role of Catholics in Hitler's Germany, and then sought out Franz's widow and interviewed many of the townspeople and some clergy. The resulting book, *In Solitary Witness*, celebrated Franz's life and became a major contribution to the Catholic peace movement. One of Gordon's proudest moments came when he was at yet another antiwar rally and heard someone say that he was burning his draft card in memory of Franz Jägerstätter. One flame had led to another.

But surely the proudest moment would have been the beatification ceremony of Franz last month in Austria. Unfortunately, Gordon suffered from Alzheimer's disease during the past several years and was unable to attend. One of Gordon's relatives reported that she read the letter of invitation to him and, though he had been unresponsive, he opened his eyes, sat up and took a deep breath. Perhaps he was aware of the ultimate fruit that his story bore.

Gordon was not a flashy person and was rather modest in his personal way of living, but day in and day out he bore constant and often solitary witness to the cause of peace to which he dedicated his life. He can now skip further meetings and rest in peace.



THOMAS A. SHANNON is professor emeritus of religion and social ethics at Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

"The Draft: An Occasion of Sin?" by Gordon Zahn,
at americamagazine.org.

Migration, the Larger Picture

AMID THE NEGATIVE RHETORIC of some presidential candidates who seek to exploit the issue of undocumented immigrants, it is important to keep in mind a larger view of “people on the move.” What is happening in the United States represents just a small part of a world-wide phenomenon.

A major reason for migration lies in economics. Of special note is the extreme disparity in wages between countries in the developing world and in the developed world. The Global Commission on International Migration, in its 2005 report, *Migration in an Interconnected World*, notes, for example, that people in sub-Saharan Africa earn less than a dollar a day. Those who manage to move to higher income nations send remittances back to their home countries: an estimated \$167 billion a year. Even though sub-Saharan Africa receives the lowest proportion of global remittances, the report observes that remittances amount to 50 percent of household income in Somalia, for example.

Almost half the world’s migrants are women, according to the report. Some have received training in their home countries as teachers and nurses. Aware of the significant difference between what they can earn there and the much higher wages elsewhere, many choose to migrate to wealthier nations. The departure of such skilled workers, however, has had an adverse effect on their own countries, giving rise to a so-called brain drain. One long-term goal should therefore be to create adequately paying jobs in low-income countries to lessen the pressure on people to migrate for economic reasons.

Although migration may allow women to learn new skills and earn higher wages in destination countries, those with limited education are especially vulnerable to exploitation, and can easily be forced into prostitution. Their vulnerability is all the greater if they are unfamiliar with the language of the country to which they are brought. Children are also vulnerable to trafficking. The United Nations has called this the third largest criminal business in the world. Nor are men exempt from human trafficking. Lured to wealthy countries like the United States with promises of well-paying jobs, many have found on arrival that they are all but enslaved at work sites, with their passports taken from them.

Many migrants from Africa die at sea in desperate attempts to reach Europe. Hundreds of undocumented immigrants from Central and Latin America perish annually as they try to cross the southern border of the United States. Ironically, while wealthier countries create ever stricter barriers against undocumented migrants and asylum seekers, the parliament of the European Union has called for increased legal migration to offset the effects of aging populations. Some European officials point out that the possibilities now for legally entering European countries are so restrictive that in effect they encourage illegal immigration.

ADVOCATES OF A JUST APPROACH to the worldwide migration challenge believe that it cannot be dealt with by individual countries, but must be addressed multilaterally. To that end Kofi Annan, before stepping down as secretary general of the United Nations, proposed a forum of the 191 member states to discuss best practices in international migration policy and the relation of immigration to global development. In making his recommendation, Mr. Annan said that “our focus in the international community should be on the quality and safety of the migration experience and on what can be done to maximize its development benefits.” His proposal resulted in the creation of the Global Forum on Migration and Development, which held its first meeting this past July in Belgium. For the forum to succeed, however, a level of generosity on the part of the U.N. member states will be required that has not always been in evidence. Ideally, women, men and children should be able to realize their potential in their home countries and not have to migrate.

In the meantime, nativists in the United States continue to press for a one-size-fits-all approach to undocumented immigrants. Some presidential candidates have urged that all 12 million be sent home as “illegal aliens.” But as one advocate has said, “People themselves can’t be illegal: the term is almost a slur against God.” The Universal Declaration of Human Rights will celebrate its 60th anniversary next year. With migrants ever more vulnerable at borders and in countries to which they move, 2008 is a fitting time for world leaders to remember that migration is a human rights issue.

New Jersey Lawmakers Abolish Death Penalty

Bishop John M. Smith of Trenton, N.J., said Dec. 14 he was pleased that New Jersey legislators voted to abolish the death penalty, but said he would not have a “triumphalist attitude about it” because capital punishment is such a sensitive issue. Members of the General Assembly voted Dec. 13 to end the death penalty in their state, four days after the measure was approved by the state Senate. Gov. Jon Corzine signed it into law Dec. 17. In remarks at the state capitol, Corzine said the decision to abolish the death penalty in the state demonstrated that “New Jersey is truly evolving.” He said a fundamental argument against the death penalty is for society to “determine if its endorsement of violence begets violence, and if violence undermines our commitment to the sanctity of life.” The governor also issued an order to commute the sentences of the eight men on the state’s death row to life in prison without the possibility of parole. He thanked advocacy groups, naming the New Jersey Catholic Conference and the American Civil Liberties Union, among others, for their efforts “that put pressure on those of us in public service to stand up and do the right thing.”

Priest’s Stabbing Called Attack on Christians

The recent stabbing of an Italian Capuchin friar in Turkey marks yet another act of violence targeting the minority Christian community in the country, said Bishop Luigi Padovese of Anatolia. Father Adriano Franchini was attacked Dec. 16 after a Mass in a church in Izmir. The 65-year-old priest underwent surgery soon after and was declared “out of danger,” because the attacker had missed hitting any vital organs, Bishop Padovese told the Rome-based missionary news service AsiaNews. “What must be underlined is that, once again, an act of violence has targeted a Catholic priest in Turkey,” he said in a Dec. 16 interview with AsiaNews before police had captured the suspected attacker.

AsiaNews reported Dec. 17 that police

identified 19-year-old Ramazan Bay as the primary suspect. It said the teenager reportedly confessed to the crime, saying he had stabbed the priest because of Christian proselytism, which he read about on the Internet and saw depicted on a popular Turkish television series, “Valley of the Wolves.”

Catholic Duty and Right to Share the Gospel

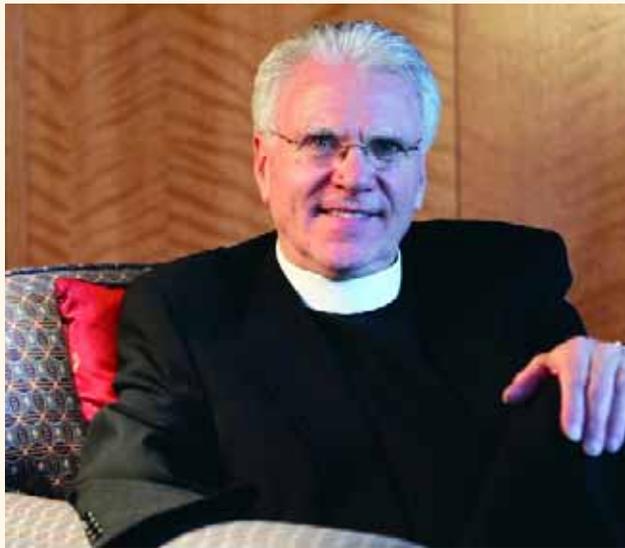
When Catholics fulfill their right and duty to share their faith with others, they are not engaging in proselytism or showing contempt for the beliefs of others, said a new document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Sharing the Christian faith with the hope that another may accept it is a command given by Christ to his followers and is a natural result of wanting others to

share something special, said the *Doctrinal Note on Some Aspects of Evangelization*.

Cardinal William J. Levada, prefect of the doctrinal congregation, presented the document at a Dec. 14 Vatican press conference. In addition to reminding Catholics of their obligation to share the Gospel with others, the document criticized Catholics who believe that every religion offers salvation, and it defended Catholics in some Orthodox countries from charges of proselytism when they welcome into the Catholic Church people who freely ask to join.

Cardinal Levada said the document, which already was being prepared when Pope Benedict XVI was still prefect of the congregation, was the result of a growing “confusion about whether Catholics should give testimony about their faith in Christ,” particularly to people who already had another religion.

Theater Founder Says Disability Is a Gift



have participated in the group’s programs since its 1977 debut. The New York-based nonprofit organization provides theatrical training and seeks to create a safe haven in which artists with physical disabilities qualify for and obtain work in the performing and baking arts.

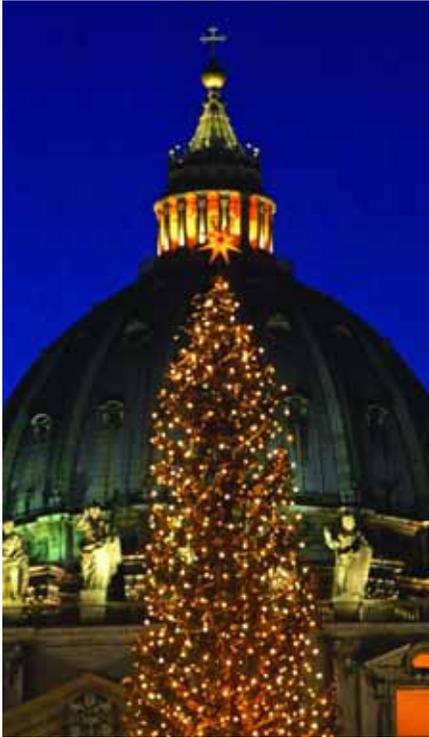
Brother Curry, 64, a native

Philadelphian, was

The life of the imagination has no physical boundaries, and people with physical disabilities can use their imagination to face life’s difficulties. That is the enduring message of Rick Curry, a Jesuit brother, and the organization he founded 30 years ago in New York, the National Theatre Workshop of the Handicapped. The message is taught in classes and demonstrated by the example of Brother Curry and those who work with him. About 15,000 people

born with one arm. He joined the Jesuits in 1961, and is taking a break from the day-to-day leadership of the National Theatre Workshop of the Handicapped to study for ordination to the priesthood at Washington Theological Union. He lives with Georgetown University’s Jesuit community. “No one is more surprised than I am,” he said. “I never wanted to be a priest. It grew from the outside in, not the inside out.”

Holy Family in Joseph's Carpenter Shop



An 86-foot Christmas tree is seen lit against the backdrop of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Dec. 14.

Sheltered under a tree and concealed by burlap and scaffolding, the Nativity scene in St. Peter's Square—still under construction—was designed to place the Holy Family in Joseph's carpentry workshop. The Vatican office in charge of the crèche's construction took its inspiration from Matthew's Gospel account of the birth of Jesus: "When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son and he named him Jesus." The central scene was designed to be Joseph's dwelling and his carpentry workshop with angels hovering above from a small balcony, according to a Dec. 13 written statement by the office for technical services for Vatican City. The scene was to be flanked by another carpentry shop and an inn. Joseph lived and worked in Nazareth, while "Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea," as Matthew's account also confirms. The Vatican Nativity scene is by tradition unveiled

officially on Dec. 24 and remains in the square until the feast of the Presentation of the Lord on Feb. 2.

Dioceses Downsize to Pay Abuse Settlements

The scandal of sexual abuse by members of the clergy continued to have a major financial impact on U.S. Catholic dioceses in 2007 as multimillion-dollar settlements were reached with abuse victims and dioceses funded their share by selling church property, reducing staff and, in at least one case, soliciting contributions from priests and lay Catholics. In California alone, financial settlements from decades-old abuse cases exceeded \$1.8 billion after the statute of limitations was lifted for one year. The Diocese of San Diego began bankruptcy proceedings early in 2007 just as the Diocese of Spokane, Wash., and the Archdiocese of Portland, Ore., emerged from bankruptcy brought on by costly abuse settlements. In early December, the Diocese of Davenport, Iowa, agreed to an abuse settlement of \$37 million. The agreement, which required the approval of the bankruptcy judge to take effect, will allow the diocese to come out of bankruptcy, which it filed last year in anticipation of the sex abuse lawsuits. Two years before filing, the diocese had reached settlements with abuse victims totaling more than \$10.5 million. This fall, the San Diego Diocese and the San Bernardino Diocese agreed to pay \$198.1 million to settle lawsuits brought by 144 people who claimed they were abused by church personnel between 1938 and 1993.

Lebanese Catholics Mourn Slain Leader

Catholic leaders in Lebanon denounced a car bomb explosion that killed a top Maronite Catholic military official in a neighborhood of Beirut. "The war in Lebanon is not finished," Chaldean Bishop Michel Kassariji of Beirut told Catholic News Service from the bishop's residence, which is located near where the bomb exploded Dec. 12. "The big problem is for Christians in Lebanon.

We are afraid we will not have the possibility to elect a president because of the interference of Syria and Iran, and also Saudi Arabia, France and the United States," he said. "Everyone has an interest in Lebanon, and that's not good for our country," Bishop Kassariji said. "We are Lebanese and we want to govern our own country by ourselves." Brig. Gen. Francois Hajj was killed in the blast in Beirut's Baabda neighborhood near the presidential palace. Hajj was slated to succeed Gen. Michel Suleiman as head of the military if Suleiman is elected president.

Bloodshed Desecrates the Holy Land

While the political implications of saying the Holy Land is holy can be debated, a Catholic priest and a Jewish and a Muslim scholar agreed that the land is being desecrated by bloodshed, fighting and claims of exclusivity. The three speakers, who have worked together in Jerusalem, spoke about their religions' teachings about the land during a Dec. 11 conference sponsored by the Cardinal Bea Center for Judaic Studies at Rome's Pontifical Gregorian University. Yehezkel Landau, who directs a program at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut called Building Abrahamic Partnerships, said he believes "the holy land of Israel-Palestine is God's primary laboratory on earth for the practice of justice and loving kindness." Michael McGarry, a Paulist priest who is director of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem, emphasized the importance of Christians reflecting "on the place of the land of Israel and its meaning for the Jewish people." Mustafa Abu-Sway, director of the Islamic Research Center at Jerusalem's Al-Quds University, said that while most Muslims believe the Holy Land was given to them in a perpetual endowment in the seventh century, the only way he sees to resolve the competing claims over the territory is to emphasize "the primacy of human life over that of land."

From CNS and other sources. CNS photos.

Pope Praises Kuwait's Efforts for Human Rights



Kuwait's new ambassador to the Vatican, Suhail Khalil Shuhaiber, presents his credentials to Pope Benedict XVI at the Vatican Dec. 13.

Children must be educated in moral values, in their own religious and cultural heritage and in respect for the religious beliefs of others, Pope Benedict XVI said. Welcoming Suhail Khalil Shuhaiber as Kuwait's new ambassador to the Vatican Dec. 13, the pope praised Kuwait for its efforts to promote democracy, human rights and dialogue within its borders and throughout the Middle East. After the country's invasion in 1990 by Iraq and a seven-month occupation, Kuwait has continued "to play an important

role in the delicate process of reconciliation which offers the only sure hope for a resolution of the many complex problems affecting the Middle East," the pope said. "Interreligious and intercultural dialogue for the promotion of peace," especially between Christians and Muslims, is "essential for overcoming misunderstandings and forging solid relations marked by mutual respect and cooperation in the pursuit of the common good of the whole human family," the pope said.

Report Analyzes Church Response to Abuse Crisis

Although the church has taken positive steps in its response to the sexual abuse crisis, more needs to be done, according to a five-year report on the crisis released Dec. 13 by the National Review Board, the lay group that oversees the U.S. Catholic bishops' compliance with child protection policies. The report, addressed to U.S. Catholics on the fifth anniversary of the board's establishment, called the church's response to the crisis "impressive" but also noted that its "work is only beginning." It said church officials must do a better job providing victims with the help they need and should also help Catholics at the parish level understand how best to respond to victims and their families. It also recommended that

church leaders provide "protection and restoration" for priests accused of abuse who are later found innocent and called for "greater speed" in investigating and responding to abuse allegations. The full report is available online at: www.usccb.org/nrb/nrbreport2007.pdf.

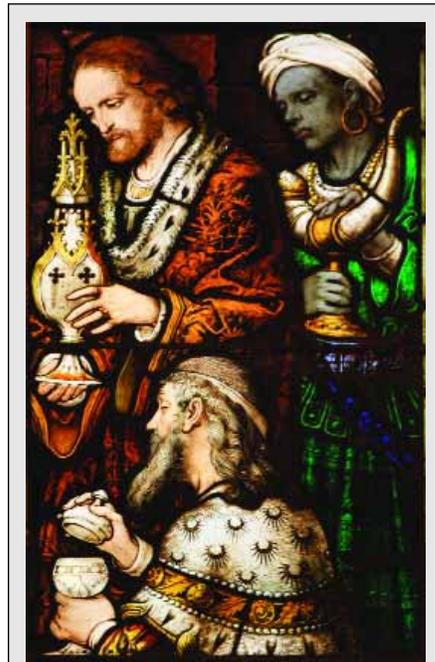
Violence Against Venezuelan Cardinal

Pope Benedict XVI expressed his concern over the recent violence aimed at Cardinal Jorge Urosa Savino of Caracas, Venezuela. The cardinal announced he had been verbally assaulted and that the vehicle he and his driver were in was violently attacked by a group of people in downtown Caracas, the capital. In a brief letter dated Dec. 9, the pope said the news "of the aggression...by a violent

group" Dec. 7 caused him concern. "I am urgently expressing my sincere closeness and solidarity in these regrettable circumstances," the pope wrote in a letter published on the Web site of the Venezuelan bishops' conference. He said he was keeping the cardinal in his prayers, encouraging him "to stay true [to] the fulfillment of your pastoral mission." Cardinal Urosa said in a statement that he was not physically harmed in the attack.

Interfaith Gathering to Light Historic Menorah

The Rev. David Garcia, rector of San Fernando Cathedral, said the annual Catholic-Jewish Hanukkah commemoration in San Antonio, Tex., was an opportunity to illustrate how people of various faith traditions have worked with one another over the years. "Each one," he said, "has added a wonderful richness that only their tradition could give." Good relationships among different faiths in San Antonio is what distinguishes it as a premier city, he added.



The visit of the Magi is portrayed in a stained-glass window at St. Michael's Cathedral in Toronto. The feast of the Epiphany of the Lord in the Catholic Church in the West is Jan. 6, 2008. It commemorates the adoration of the newborn Christ by the Magi, or Wise Men.



Sacred Space for Transformation

‘The cost of living our vocation is to be fixed and rooted in the cold soil.’

ACCORDING TO the Swiss painter Paul Klee, “the artist is like the trunk of a tree, drawing up through its roots in the unknown soil below what will bring life to the branches above: leaves, flowers and fruit, a life of which he or she knows nothing.”

That strikes me as a pretty apt description of the priestly calling, as well as the call of every believer, to be deeply in touch with the power of an invisible reality, and to be willing to be a space where that reality is transformed by God into infinite possibilities of leaf, flower and fruit.

But the cost of living this vocation is to be fixed and rooted in the cold winter soil, to stand firm through both storm and drought, to be constant in all weather, to trust that God is with us wherever we may find ourselves, standing alone yet standing for others.

My personal reminder of this call is a baobab tree, or at least a raffia representation of one that I brought back from South Africa. The importance of the baobab first caught my attention when I watched a television documentary filmed in Tanzania. In a remote rural village stood an ancient baobab, already completely hollowed out by the passing of the centuries. Its roots reached deep into the African earth. Its branches stretched out to the brilliant blue skies and the star-laden canopy that have captured the human

MARGARET SILF lives in Staffordshire, England. Her latest books are *Companions of Christ: Ignatian Spirituality for Everyday Living* and the Catholic Press Association award-winning *The Gift of Prayer*.

imagination since *Homo sapiens* took his first bipedal steps here and told stories around the campfire in the equatorial night.

This was a sacred tree, not only because of its ancient lineage, but because it was the community’s birthing tree. Whenever a pregnant woman came to term, she would enter into the hollowed-out sanctuary of the baobab, give birth to her child and remain there with her young until the umbilical cord fell away. Every child in the village had first seen the light of day within the enfolding shelter of that tree. It had literally borne the fruit of the human family in that place, delighted them with its large white flowers and nourished them with its gourd-like fruit.

When I gaze at my miniature baobab, I rejoice in the fruits that 2007 has borne. Epiphany is a good time to celebrate the gifts life has brought to our own messy stables, and especially those people whose personal rootedness in God has borne fruit that has nourished us.

I think of Puleng, a black South African woman, born and raised in the troubled township of Soweto on the margins (in every sense) of Johannesburg. As a small child and a growing, questioning teenager, she lived through the worst and the best of Soweto’s history as well as the post-apartheid struggle to build a just and peaceful future for her nation. Her roots have drawn from Africa’s earth the knowledge of hunger, fear and anger but also a deep faith and unquenchable hope. She is transforming these raw materials into a powerful ministry for peace and reconciliation.

Puleng’s particular gift to the Christ

Child—though she would not recognize herself in the role of “wise visitor from the East”—is her work to express the wisdom and spirit of the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises in terms of her own native images and stories, so that others might engage with them more fully.

Then comes John. Of Polish descent, his father suffered dreadfully as a prisoner in Siberia when Poland was overrun by the power blocs of wartime Europe, and he became the victim of a brutal Stalinist incarceration. The justice genes live on in John, and the fruit he bears is to be a quiet, insistent, unrelenting investigator and exposé of the human rights violations that lurk undetected beneath the surface of our Western democracies.

And Bridget, whose ancestors suffered the ravages of the Irish famine and subsequent brutalities which must be laid at the door of the British military occupation. Bridget has every reason to be embittered by the memories her life draws up from the soil of history, but she has transformed those memories into the often unregarded service of the “border children,” who have grown up in the shadow of tensions in Northern Ireland, teaching them to beat their inherited swords into ploughshares for a different world.

These are three of my Magi today. They are three among many. They are who they are because they are living true to their deepest vocations. They are birth-givers, sturdy and courageous, who draw from the God of transformation abiding within them and give freely of the fruit that grows from that deep rootedness.

What might it take to respond to such a vocation—the call to bring to birth, to make incarnate, the riches that we draw upon when we put down the roots of prayer into the soil of God’s mystery? Two things perhaps: first that we really do put down those deep roots, taking the time to be still, in prayer, before the mystery we call God, and then that we allow the fruit to be God’s concern and not ours. We may never know how the tree of our life bears fruit, or for whom, but we are asked simply to entrust the fruiting to God.

May the hollows of our own hearts become spaces of transformation where God can come to birth in new ways for planet earth in 2008. *Margaret Silf*



CNS PHOTO BY REUTERS

An Iranian protester shouts slogans against the U.S. and Israel during a Jerusalem Day demonstration outside the University of Tehran before Friday prayers Oct. 28. Two days earlier, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had called for Israel to be “wiped off the map.”

A proposal to promote regional stability

Iran and the Bomb: Defusing Tensions

– BY ALON BEN-MEIR –

ALTHOUGH THE RECENTLY PUBLISHED National Intelligence Estimate has changed the nature of the international discussion about Iran’s nuclear ambition, it has not answered the question of Iran’s ultimate intention to acquire nuclear weapons. Whereas the intelligence estimate suggests with “high probability” that Iran froze its nuclear weapons program in 2003, neither the United States nor Israel, distrustful of Iran’s intentions, believe that the findings warrant a new reconciliatory approach toward Iran. Yet the new report offers the

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Bush administration an opportunity and imposes a new obligation to engage Iran through direct and unconditional negotiations in an effort to defuse the nuclear issue and substantially improve the prospects for regional stability.

How We Got Here

Iran's insistence on its right to enrich uranium, which is a prerequisite to developing nuclear weapons, remains at the core of the dispute. Regardless of how consistent that may be with the provisions of the Non-Proliferation Treaty of which Iran is a signatory, Tehran's behavior and defiance of the international community continues to raise serious questions about its real intentions. Iran has hidden much of its nuclear development program for 18 years, and it continues to seek industrial scale enrichment of uranium; it supports Islamic and Arab extremism in Iraq, Lebanon and Afghanistan; it repeatedly threatens Israel's existence; and it consistently undermines the Arab-Israeli peace process. These actions reveal Tehran's ambition to be the region's hegemon, possibly armed with nuclear weapons once it chooses to restart its development program. But while the Bush administration is right to condemn Tehran's unsavory activities, it was wrong in its approach and policies toward Iran before the new intelligence estimate was made public, and the administration is certainly wrong now.

For nearly seven years the Bush administration has failed to articulate a coherent policy toward Tehran and bring it to heel. Mr. Bush's wishy-washy approach permitted Tehran to outwit Washington in the game of brinkmanship and gain the time it needed to make tremendous progress, at least until 2003, toward acquiring the know-how for making nuclear weapons. The Bush administration's refusal to conduct direct negotiations, its obsession with regime change and preoccupation with Iraq have given Iran the leverage to refuse to negotiate on America's terms while emboldening it to defy Washington without fear of reprisal.

Meanwhile, Britain, France and Germany, representing the European Union, have made little headway in their on-again off-again negotiations with Iran. By the time they finally presented Iran, more than a year ago, with a so-called generous economic incentive package and a promise that the Americans would enter into the negotiations if Tehran

stopped its uranium enrichment program, Iran was swimming in oil money, more than \$100 billion in hard currency. Meanwhile, Tehran has been dismissive of the United Nations Security Council resolution calling on it to end its uranium enrichment program by the end of August 2007.

Tehran's governing clergy is counting on Russia and China, with their substantial oil and gas interests in Iran, to prevent any meaningful economic sanctions from being imposed on it by a future Security Council resolution. Moreover, the lessons learned from the Bush administration's direct negotiations with North Korea were not lost on Iran. Pyongyang's adamant refusal to give up North Korea's nuclear program before sitting face-to-face with the Americans, and then receiving much of the economic incentives along with security guarantees that it demanded, gave

the Iranian clergy a strategy. Iran's propensity for playing for time was only encouraged by the administration's inability to fashion a coherent policy that could mobilize the international community to act in concert against Iran. Stalling and resorting to ambiguities and contradictions have well served Iran's designs. As a result, the Bush administration has had to settle for ever-reducible leverage.

Now it must capitalize on the new National Intelligence Estimate, depart from its current policy toward Iran and chart a much bolder course of action.

A New Way Forward

Any new policy of the Bush administration must begin by ending all public denunciations of Iran and reintroducing some civility to the public discourse. The United States should not stoop to the level of Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad by trying to match his outrageous public pronouncements. It must consider Iran's national mind-set, which is nurtured by religious ideology that has little or nothing to do with reality. Ahmadinejad and his kind revel in denunciations of the United States and now feel particularly emboldened by the U.S. intelligence community and the attention paid it by the administration. The Iranian president may even welcome another Bush misadventure, one that will finally destroy what is left of America's prestige and power in the wake of the Iraq war.

From the time Mr. Bush labeled Iran as a member of the



axis of evil, followed by constant repudiation and criticism of its behavior, Tehran simply intensified its anti-American and anti-Israeli activities.

By all assessments, Iran has reaped the greatest benefits from the Iraq war. The war has provided Iran with a historic opportunity to establish Shiite dominance in the region, and its aggressive pursuit of a nuclear weapons program deters any challenge to its strategy. Tehran is fully cognizant that the successful pursuit of its regional hegemony has now become intertwined with the clout that a nuclear program bestows, even if it is not intended to lead to the development of nuclear weapons, as Iran claims. Now that international pressure on Iran is likely to recede following the new intelligence estimate, it is most unlikely that Iran will give up its uranium enrichment program at this juncture, unless it concludes that the price will be too high to bear.

The second phase of the new American policy should offer Iran a way out. The administration can make a real case against Iran and resolve the impasse by not insisting that Iran suspend the enrichment of uranium as a precondition of direct negotiations with Tehran. The White House must enter into direct and unconditional negotiations, along with its European partners and with Russia and China, for a limited period of, say, three months. During this time, the parties must hammer out a negotiated settlement that satisfies both the United States and Iran. This

approach would allow Tehran to continue to enrich uranium only during the negotiations. Permanent suspension of enrichment would be the result, rather than the precondition, of the negotiation, satisfying Iran's main demand and giving the regime a face-saving way out. The presence of Russia and China at the negotiating table would be critical, especially if no agreement is reached. By including these two parties, the United States would demonstrate that it had negotiated in good faith and exhausted all possible diplomatic options.

During the negotiations, the Bush administration should offer a detailed economic incentive package so that Iran knows precisely what the potential gains are and what the possible losses would be, should it decide to turn down the American/European offer. Regardless of the size of the economic incentive, since Iran fears America the most, Tehran, like North Korea, will likely insist on a non-belligerent agreement with the United States, which could eventually lead to the establishment of normal relations and regional security. Surely this would require the Bush administration to abandon its desire for regime change and accept the Iranian clergy as the legitimate government of Iran.

The United States has no other realistic option. Any political change in Iran must come from within, and it is the U.S. threat that pushes the government to tighten its grip on power and therefore keeps the regime in place. There is



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a growing moderate and powerful constituency in Iran that recognizes the importance of normalizing relations with the United States. This constituency can become far more vocal in promoting significant social and political reforms without being accused of disloyalty, provided that their government is no longer threatened by the United States.

And If Negotiations Fail...

Should the negotiations break down after three months without any agreement and Iran still refuses to halt its uranium enrichment, the Bush administration would then be in a much stronger position to mobilize the international community, especially Russia and China, to consider punitive measures against Tehran. In the wake of the National Intelligence Estimate, neither Russia nor China will support a new set of U.N. sanctions. Yet both Russia and China have tremendous oil and gas interests in Iran and are therefore vested in finding a peaceful solution to the impasse between Iran and the United States. Neither wants to risk long-term multibillion dollar investments. Russia and China, however, will cooperate with the United States only as long as they are convinced that the Bush administration is now willing to exhaust all diplomatic channels.

To be sure, the conditions under which negotiations should be conducted must convince Iran that a failure to reach agreement could lead to crippling economic sanctions

even if imposed by the United States and the European Union alone, while not excluding the use of other coercive measures as may be deemed necessary.

The Bush administration must also seek better working relations and cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency. In the final analysis, this agency is the non-proliferation watchdog; it and the administration must not work at cross-purposes. So far, the Iranian government has skillfully played the I.A.E.A. against the United States, managing to gain not only more time but also legitimate cover under the agency rules. That is precisely what prompted President Ahmadinejad to state in his speech of September 2007 at the United Nations General Assembly that Iran's nuclear issue is no longer political but technical in nature and can be resolved between the I.A.E.A. and Tehran without outside interference. Although the I.A.E.A. director, Mohamed ElBaradei, welcomed the new National Intelligence Estimate, he strongly suggested that the new report "should prompt Iran to work actively with the I.A.E.A. to clarify specific aspects of its past and present nuclear program as outlined in the work plan and through the implementation of the additional protocol." In any future negotiations, Tehran should have no choice but to accept unfettered inspection by the I.A.E.A., while observing total and complete transparency in all of its nuclear facilities with no exception.

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Understanding Israel's Position

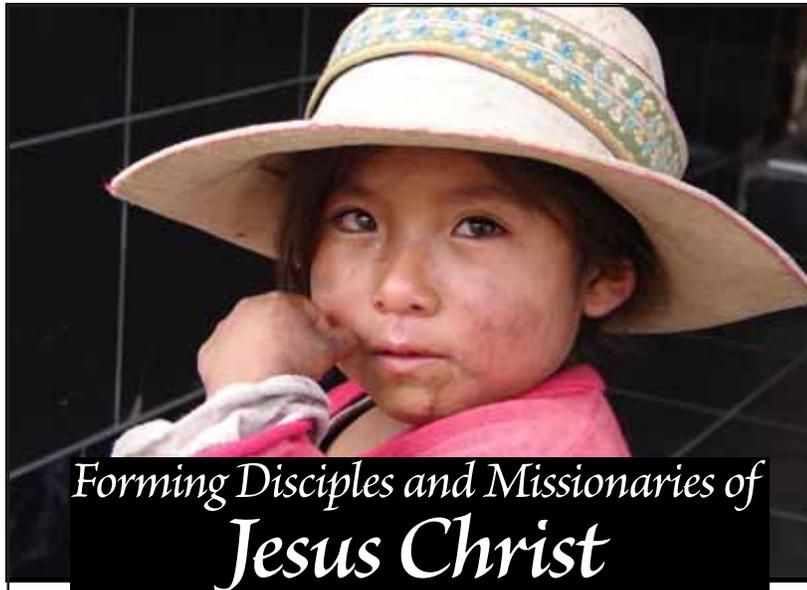
One other critical issue must be kept in mind. If the Bush administration fails to end Iran's nuclear program peacefully, it will be left to Israel, which remains convinced that Iran is still actively pursuing nuclear weapons, to deal with Iran. Concerning Iran's nuclear program, Israeli intelligence may be more accurate, specifically because of Israel's pervasive human intelligence in the region. Although America and Israel share, among other things, pertinent intelligence, their respective intelligence communities do not always reach the same conclusion. For one thing, feeling consistently threatened by Iran, Israel delves much deeper into

intentions discerned from religious convictions, which requires a more nuanced intelligence analysis that a more detached examination tends to yield. For this reason, Israel does not accept the freezing of Iran's nuclear program in 2003 as nonreversible. In fact, Israel believes the program has already been reversed and that Iran's ambition to reach industrial levels of uranium enrichment only reinforces this contention.

For Israel, the point of no return (the point at which Tehran masters the technology to produce nuclear weapons) looms ever closer. Israeli intelligence circles and government officials disagree with the new intelligence estimate; they still believe that Iran could master the technology in less than two years, not the five to seven years estimated by the C.I.A. Iran's president has repeatedly and unambiguously threatened Israel's right to exist. No Israeli government would be so foolish as not to take these threats very seriously.

After reading the new National Intelligence Estimate, Israel's Defense Minister Ehud Barak suggested, "It is our responsibility to ensure that the right steps are taken against the Iranian regime. As is well known, words don't stop missiles.... We cannot allow ourselves to rest just because of an intelligence report from the other side of the earth, even if it is from our greatest friend." The war in Lebanon gave Israel a rude awakening. A nuclear Iran does not merely intend to "eradicate the nuclear prestige of Israel" as the Iranian newspaper Kayham editorialized recently, but, many Israelis believe, to eradicate Israel itself. From the Israeli perspective, the Iranian threat is extremely real and the international community must open its eyes to the looming danger.

During his remaining year in office, President Bush has to choose between defusing the tension with Iran while promoting regional stability and continuing his bellicose denunciation of Tehran, which could lead inadvertently or by design to a violent conflict. It was the Bush administration that turned down Iran's offer in early 2003 to negotiate a comprehensive peaceful settlement between the two sides. The burden is now on Mr. Bush. Only through face-to-face negotiations will his administration be in a position to discern the true intentions of the Iranian government, completely remove the nuclear threat and put in place the building blocks of peace and stability. 



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From Thames to Tiber

Tony Blair and the politics of conversion

Editor's note: Tony Blair converted on Dec. 21, 2007. An updated version of this article appears on our web site www.americamagazine.org.

BY AUSTEN IVEREIGH

WILL HE OR WON'T HE? The answer is yes, very likely; but the reception into the Catholic Church of the former British prime minister, Tony Blair, is proving hard to tie down to a date. The word in Rome was that it would happen in November at a private service conducted by the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor. But that date has come and gone. One British newspaper says there are fears Blair's conversion could impede his role as Middle East envoy—why, it is not clear—and pins the event with suspicious certainty to next Easter.

The announcement was supposed to have been made last June when Blair, then still prime minister, saw Pope Benedict XVI and the two men spent at least 10 minutes in private conversation. But quizzed on the matter by *The London Times*, Blair said on that occasion that things were “not as resolved as they might be.” Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor, it has since been reported, advised the prime minister against making the announcement until after he stood down.

“Here is a well-known convert who is

AUSTEN IVEREIGH is a writer and journalist and former adviser to Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor.



Tony Blair, former British prime minister and current special envoy to the Middle East, smiles next to a model of the Church of the Nativity during a visit to Bethlehem on Dec. 11.

on his way to sainthood,” Blair told Pope Benedict, presenting him with a picture of John Henry Newman. (Newman was the famous 19th-century convert from Anglicanism who “poped”—as Anglicans scornfully put it—in 1845 and became a cardinal in 1879.) “Ah yes,” sighed the

pope. “But the trouble is that miracles in England are rather hard to come by.”

This was followed by what the British press called the “papal chiding.” One newspaper quoted the mother of the mistaken savior in “*Monty Python’s Life of Brian*,” with the headline “He’s not the Messiah, he’s a very naughty boy!” The Vatican’s spokesman, Federico Lombardi, S.J., described the exchange as *un franco confronto*, which *The Times* said was Vatican-speak for a row, but which Father Lombardi insisted meant “full, direct and friendly.” Take your pick. Whatever it was, it was over hot-button issues with which Blair’s premiership has been identified in Catholic minds: embryonic stem cell research, gay marriage, abortion, the Iraq war. But was Pope Benedict speaking to Blair as a head of government or as a future convert?

Faith and British Politics

Playing in the background of this “will-he-won’t-he” intrigue are Blair’s revelations in a recent BBC documentary that while prime minister, he feared being seen as a “nutter” if he failed to keep his faith below the radar. It is a grand irony that in the United States, where church and state are separated by high constitutional walls, it is helpful for politicians to speak

often of God; whereas in Britain, where the Anglican Church is “by law established” and the state is officially Christian, it is advisable for politicians to steer well away from the subject. “We don’t do God,” Blair’s press secretary, Alistair Campbell, once famously remarked. And in his interview Blair explains what Campbell meant.

“If you are in the American political system or others then you can talk about religious faith and people say ‘Yes, that’s fair enough’ and it is something they respond to quite naturally,” he says in the BBC documentary. “You talk about it in our system and, frankly, people do think you’re a nutter. They sort of [think] you maybe go off and sit in the corner and commune with the man upstairs and then come back and say, ‘Right, I’ve been told the answer and that’s it.’”

He is not exaggerating. Consider the reaction to a television interview Blair gave last year in which he spoke of his agonies over the war in Iraq. “That decision has to be taken and has to be lived with, and in the end there’s a judgement that, well, if I think you have faith about these things... is made by other people,” he said, adding: “If you believe in God, it’s made by God as well.” The headlines? “God Told Me to Go to War, Says Blair.”

Little surprise, then, that Blair has kept his religious views private, and even less surprise that if he had been tempted to convert in office, there was no shortage of counsel against the idea. There would have been a host of questions: how can a Catholic oversee 200,000 abortions a year, appoint Anglican bishops, encourage British experiments on embryos and approve gay marriage? These are not questions asked of Anglican, atheist or Protestant prime ministers, because public opinion assumes that such persons are not beholden in the same way to a higher authority. But for a practicing Catholic, it is a no-win situation. Vote with the Vatican and you are a Roman stooge; vote

against and you are a hypocrite.

The head of state, the queen, on whose behalf the prime minister governs, must swear to uphold the Protestant faith. Even poor Prince William will be unable to marry a Catholic without giving up the throne—an astonishing anachronism.

Most attractive to Tony Blair is the church’s vast international reach, its commitment to the poor, its capacity for mobilization against injustice and its courage to stand firm on unpopular issues.

‘Nutter’ or Hypocrite?

There is no constitutional bar to a prime minister being a Catholic, but, like many elements of an unwritten British constitution, this has never been put to the test. British politics has largely deferred to the consensus view that if you start to unpick one strand of a messy ball of wool, the whole thing will unravel, and pretty soon you’ll have disestablishment and the horror of French secularism.

A little indication of what would have been in store for the Catholic Blair—and a good indication of why Cardinal Murphy-O’Connor may have been stalling him—comes in a recent Telegraph article headlined “To many of us he isn’t a nutter but a hypocrite.” Damian Thompson, editor in chief of The Catholic Herald, points out that “Catholics have not forgotten that the former P.M., although claiming to oppose abortion, consistently voted with hard-line pro-abortionists at a time when he was already attending Mass. This they regard as sickening hypocrisy—and they wonder why Cardinal Murphy-O’Connor is so silent on the matter.”

Yet the response of popes, cardinals and priests to Blair’s desire to become a Catholic is not to organize an *auto-da-fé*

or to throw stones to keep him from the church door. It has been to engage Blair in the kind of preparation every novice Catholic must undergo. Not a few priests have been involved in the process, which has been going on for some time.

The Road to Rome

One can only imagine Blair’s struggles on his way to the faith of his wife, Cherie, and their four children. Blair’s background is in liberal Anglo-Catholicism; his favorite theologians are Leonardo Boff and Hans Küng, not Joseph Ratzinger and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Blair belongs to an ecclesial tradition in which the gate is wide and bridges are more important than borders. When, many years ago, he was reprimanded by

Cardinal Basil Hume, the former archbishop of Westminster, for publicly receiving the Eucharist at Westminster Cathedral, Blair was heard to splutter, “What would Jesus have made of that?”

Unlike most Anglican converts (3,981 adults crossed from the Thames to the Tiber in 2005) Blair’s attraction to the church lies less in its doctrinal clarity, or impatience at the Church of England’s eternal wranglings over gay priests and female ordination, or even its confident “otherness”—its sacramentality and very un-British mysticism and supernaturalism. Most attractive to Tony Blair is the church’s vast international reach, its commitment to the poor, its capacity for mobilization against injustice and its courage to stand firm on unpopular issues—a courage he always admired in Margaret Thatcher. (Blair himself has demonstrated it more than once in his premiership.)

Yet it is a big leap for him to accept the magisterium, to assent to dogmas, to promise obedience to positions that, were he to have adopted them publicly, would have killed his political career at the starting blocks. That is why, now that he has left office and remains determined—as far as we know—to become a Catholic, it

is worth pausing before using a word like “hypocrite.”

For it is one thing is to hold Catholics in public life to account: to question how Judge Antonin Scalia can be in favor of the death penalty, or John Kerry of abortion. But it is another to call them hypocrites, to pretend to know what choices have faced them and why they made the decisions they did. Prying into a man’s conscience is something we can do only with trembling, which is why it is left to spiritual directors and priests under the seal of confession. Even less should people question the sincerity of a former prime minister who has long been a Catholic “of desire.” Better to trust in the sincerity of that desire, if it is put there by the Holy Spirit (and that is for his clergy advisers to judge), while the rest of us hold out our hands in welcome. **A**

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THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

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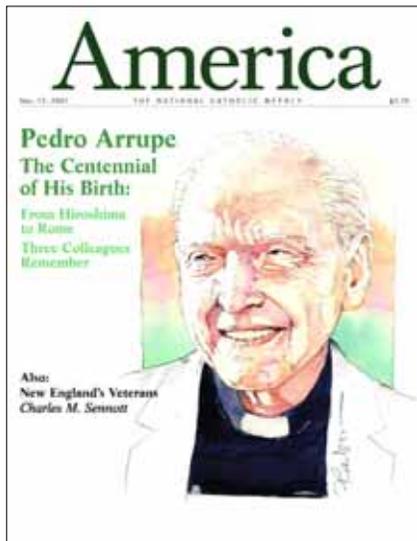
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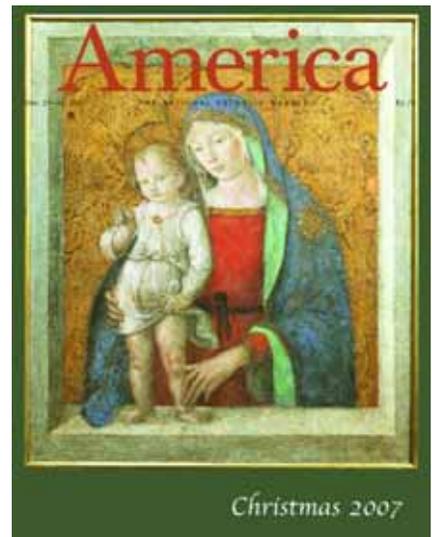
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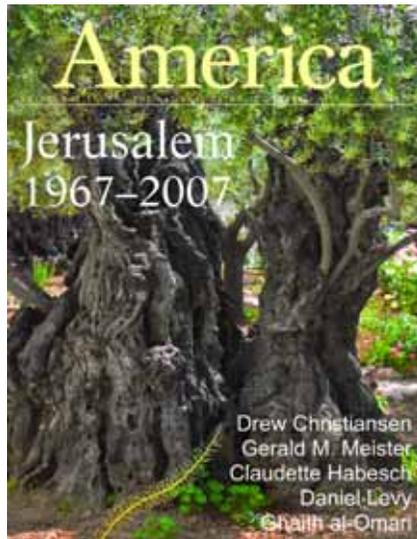
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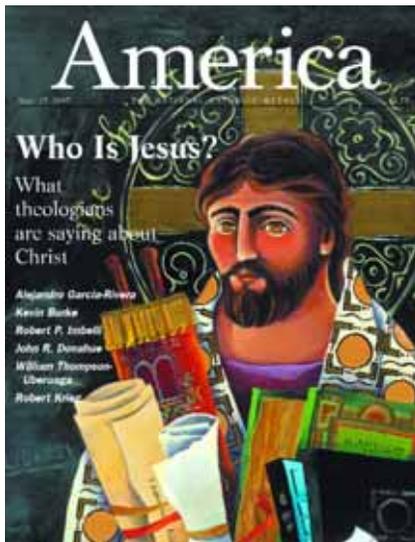
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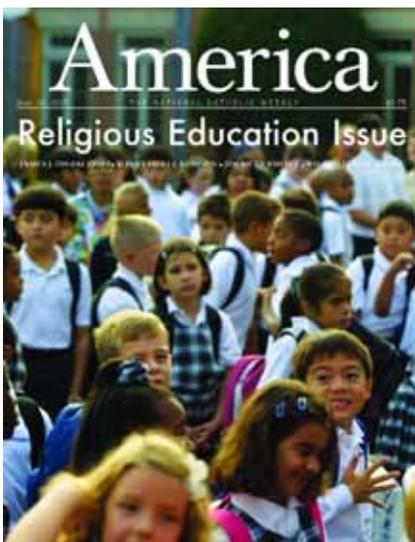
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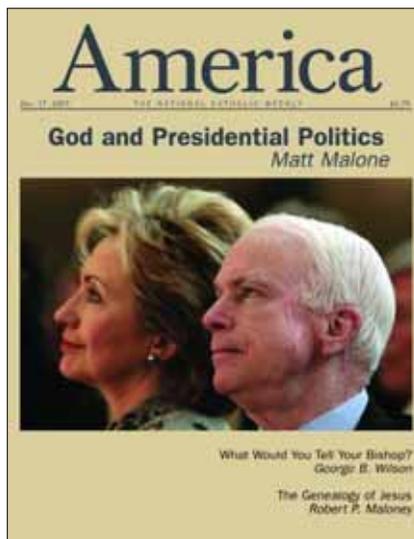
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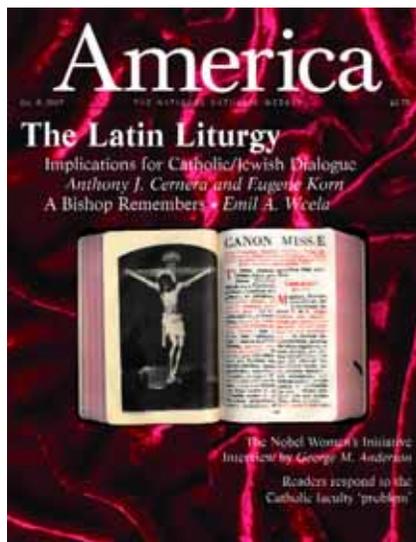
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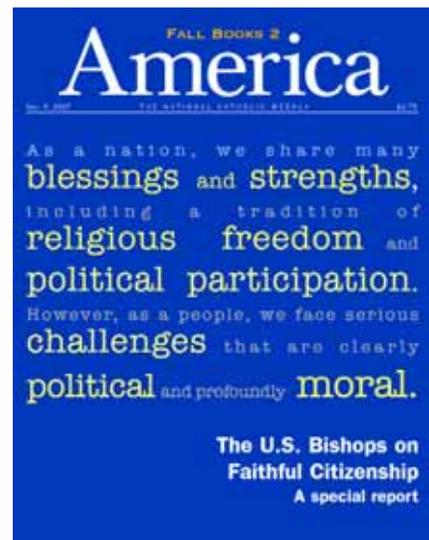
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American Catholics In the New Gilded Age

BY DANIEL J. MORRISSEY

WHAT A DIFFERENCE a few months make. Early last summer, knowledgeable observers were saying that we live in a new gilded age. The compensation of top business leaders had reached astronomical levels, with C.E.O.s being paid on average almost 400 times what the typical worker earns. And that did not even count what some business officials had been stealing from their shareholders in a string of scandals. Even the Enron-scale corruption of the post-bubble period was being eclipsed by the latest trend in corporate kleptomaniacism, options backdating.

Officers of more than 150 public companies have been under investigation for manipulating the prices of their stock so that they could grab illegally even more of their firms' gains. Meanwhile, private equity kingpins have been buying and chopping up companies. The annual compensation of three hedge fund managers reportedly topped \$1 billion; one of them boasted of eating \$400 worth of crabs for lunch. All this took place while the middle class was being restructured into oblivion and retirees were watch-

ing their pensions vanish.

Now, however, it has become apparent how perilous all this newfound wealth is. An inflated housing market has come crashing down, along with the fortunes of all kinds of investors who were hooked into its unstable values. Hedge fund investors have discovered that some of their holdings were backed by subprime mortgages, and the ensuing insecurity has

depressed the once-booming stock market. The credit markets have suddenly become unpredictable, causing corporate shake-ups to be put on hold. Anxious investors look to the Federal Reserve and find temporary reassurance.

Any reassessment, though, of the wobbly and uneven prosperity of recent times must take into account its political underpinnings. The masters of the uni-

verse in the new golden age of greed were aided and abetted by the only tangible achievements of the Bush administration: its tax reductions and deregulatory schemes. Every profile of contemporary American Catholics must come to grips with the uncomfortable fact that a majority of the Catholics who attend church every week voted for George W. Bush in 2004.

Maybe pragmatic considerations were uppermost in their minds at the time. American Catholics have been doing fairly well in the recent economy, at least according to a study by Lisa Keister, a professor at Duke University, who was cited in a New York Times column on May 25 by David Brooks. Their forebears may have been digging canals and working in domestic service in the late 19th century when



A trader works on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. "Officers of more than 150 public companies have been under investigation for manipulating the prices of their stock so that they could grab illegally even more of their firms' gains," writes Daniel J. Morrissey.

DANIEL J. MORRISSEY is a professor and former dean at Gonzaga University School of Law in Spokane, Wash.

CNS PHOTO FROM REUTERS

the tycoons of that gilded era were amassing their fortunes. Now, however, most descendants of such Catholic immigrants have an education to add to a work ethic they inherited from their grandparents. According to Brooks, they have become full partners in America's prosperity.

But have Catholics really been cashing in? Lawrence H. Summers, a former president of Harvard University, famously noted that Catholics are still underrepresented in the most lucrative profession of the new economic era: investment banking. With a touch of irony, one might say that for all their financial success, members of the faith are still not fully participating in the social injustices of our time. Perhaps such inhibited behavior results from a fear of achieving more than their tradition would consider acceptable. But maybe such scruples are also owing to something more significant: a recollection of the seemingly quaint notion that gaining the world can sometimes cost you your soul.

Yet a larger question remains for American Catholics who are serious about the social implications of their faith: Can they be a positive force to confront the gross economic inequities of our time? For a while, things did not look good, but that trend appears to have stalled; in general Catholics voted for more politically progressive candidates in last year's congressional elections.

There are other hopeful signs that U.S. Catholics are ready to take a more active role against income inequality. Pope Benedict XVI, no radical on many matters, has spoken of capitalism as an "ideological promise that has proven false." Catholics, after all, are the heirs of both the Hebrew prophets who railed against economic oppression and the early followers of Jesus, who held all things in common.

Perhaps no saint better encapsulated the message of equality and human dignity at the heart of the Gospels than did Vincent de Paul, who said we must ask forgiveness from the poor for the charity we give them. If our country is ready to enact social policies to curb the shameful excesses of our new gilded age and better distribute the abundant wealth of our society, Catholics ought to be front and center in that movement. **A**



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At Journey's End

The last in a series for Advent and Christmas

BY MAURICE TIMOTHY REIDY

THE FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY signals the coming end of a long journey. For the church, it is a crowning celebration in the Christmas calendar, which is nearing the termination of a liturgical arc that began with the first Sunday of Advent and Matthew's admonition to be prepared for Jesus' coming, "for you do not know on which day your Lord will come." Of course the Epiphany also celebrates the end of the journey of the three kings, which begins in the East and ends beneath the star in Bethlehem.

The story of the Magi is compelling, almost fantastic. Men from the East, guided only by a star, find their way to a stable to worship the son of God. One can see why Matthew included it in his narrative; it immediately piques the reader's interest. Kings bearing exotic gifts bowing before a newborn infant: just what child is this?

The story is also an excellent piece of propaganda. Matthew was writing at a time when the question of whether a Gentile could become a Christian was much disputed. Paul ministered to the Gentiles, but others believed Christians had first to undergo certain Jewish initiation rites before professing the faith. Matthew sides with Paul's view, reminding readers that among the first to recognize Jesus' divinity were three men from the East (who have since come to be known by the exotic names of Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar).

That these men were of varied ancestry has not been lost on the millions of ethnic Catholics who celebrate the feast of the "Tres Reyes" with a special enthusiasm. Sometimes we in the West incorrect-

ly conclude that since the spiritual heart of Catholicism is in Rome, ours is a Western religion. The story of the Magi is a reminder that the Christ Child came to



save all peoples. The Catholic Church is truly a universal church.

All we know about the Magi concerns the end of their journey. What happened along the way remains a mystery. Theirs was the first Christian pilgrimage; and in the centuries since they made their trip, millions of Catholics have followed their example. Pilgrimage is among the richest of Christian traditions, one that continues to this day in places like Santiago de Compostela in Spain and Knock in Ireland.

The spirituality of pilgrimage teaches that we can draw closer to God by contemplating his graces as we travel toward him. It is a physical manifestation of the spiritual journey that we seek to undergo during seasons like Lent and Advent. Pilgrims would often travel rough roads and depend on strangers for shelter at night. They believed that physical hardship could help enable spiritual purifica-

tion, and that God would take care of their needs.

Pilgrimage is not a common pursuit for Catholics today, but travel can still be an occasion for spiritual reflection. Leaving home can be an unpleasant experience, one that reminds us that we are ultimately dependent on God. Even the most meticulous planner cannot foresee every event that may happen on the road. Something always surprises. So we must put our faith in God knowing that despite airport delays, missed trains or unfamiliar languages, we are not alone.

Of course the Magi probably traveled in style on their way to Bethlehem. Wherever they were from, these kings almost certainly had servants in tow. And unlike most pilgrims, these men knew nothing of the Christ Child they would ultimately find. They simply followed a star, a most rudimentary form of global positioning system. Yet they had faith that they would find their way.

Jesus begins his own journey after his baptism in the Jordan, the feast that follows Epiphany in the liturgical cycle and concludes the Advent-Christmas season. From his home in Nazareth, through Galilee and on to Jerusalem, he preaches to both Jews and Gentiles, tax collectors and prostitutes. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, his apostles begin their own journeys to the ends of the Roman Empire and beyond, bringing Christ's message to all who would hear it.

Perhaps in their travels they found themselves in the land of the three kings, where the first journey to Christ began. It seems only appropriate that years after that fateful pilgrimage to the newborn Christ, word of the risen Christ would reach the home of those intrepid travelers from the East. 

ART BY JULIE LONNEMAN

MAURICE TIMOTHY REIDY is the online editor of *America*.

Byzantium, Texas

Meditations on evil in border country

BY RICHARD A. BLAKE



Tommy Lee Jones stars in a scene from the movie "No Country for Old Men."

AS A TITLE, **No Country for Old Men** boasts a noble ancestry. It traces its roots through the novel by Cormac McCarthy to the opening line of William Butler Yeats's poem "Sailing to Byzantium." In the poem Yeats yearns to leave the ephemeral world of "whatever is begotten, born and dies" for Byzantium, a land of art, imagination and consequently immortality. By keeping McCarthy's title for their mesmerizing new film adapted from his work, Joel and Ethan Coen signal that they have striven to reach beyond the American naturalism that characterizes Hollywood movies and create something "of hammered gold and gold enameling." They've transformed the narrative style of American genre films into a poetic and philosophic reflection on time and eternity, on myth and reality, on morality

CNS PHOTO/MIRAMAX/PARAMOUNT VANTAGE

RICHARD A. BLAKE, S.J., is professor of fine arts and co-director of the film studies program at Boston College in Chestnut Hill, Mass.

and pure, undiluted evil.

A useful comparison comes to mind. Quentin Tarantino attempted similar reflections in his two "Kill Bill" movies. With his own encyclopedic knowledge of American film history, he relied on the genres he most admired: science fiction, martial arts and the tradition of comic book superheroes. As a result, the story lifted its audience into a realm of obvious fantasy. The films were playful and never pretended to be "real," even though the ideas they probed were deadly serious. The Coens draw upon other traditions: the detective story, the western, the police procedural and the gangster saga, each of which relies on the illusion of plausibility for its effectiveness. The result for the Coens is myth posing under an easily permeable veneer of reality.

A Coen film looks "real," yet the landscape plays an eloquent mythic role in the dramatic action. In their earlier masterpiece, "Fargo" (1996), the barren North Dakota countryside provided a menacing counterpoint to Marge

Gundersen's (Frances McDormand) hugely pregnant body: cold and warmth, evil and goodness, death and life.

In their current film, the Coens lead us through the desert of the Texas border country. This is not the vast ennobling desert of John Ford's Monument Valley that our heroic ancestors crossed as they built a nation. This is a land of scorpions, rattlers and flies. An inept hunter misses his shot and a wounded animal hobbles off with the herd leaving a trail of blood in the sand. In John Ford's films John Wayne never missed, and fallen animals never bled. In this Coen film, the land is traversed not by noble stallions but by battered pickup trucks, a secluded borderland suitable for clandestine drug deals. And if the deal goes sour, it is a place where the swollen corpses of men and their pit bulls will remain undetected for days, or weeks, or forever.

A mythic story may be set in time, but in fact it transcends time. The Coens set their film in the dusty towns of south Texas sometime in the 1980s. In an open-

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ing voice-over narrative, Sheriff Bell (Tommy Lee Jones), a third-generation police officer, looks back to the old days, when many of his predecessors, like his grandfather, never wore a gun. This seemingly random observation cuts the boots out from under the western myth that the “wild west” was tamed by the settlers. According to a conventional reading of American history, these larger-than-life men used their six-shooters to create a Garden of Eden out of the howling wilderness and set the nation on its irreversible trajectory of progress. It’s not so. Old-time outlaws never conducted multi-million-dollar drug deals outside town and for some unexplained reason killed all the witnesses with automatic weapons. Today no officer would ever think of appearing on duty without his gun. In a conversation with Sheriff Bell, one old-timer laments an end to sanity and order that started when young people began to feel free to walk the streets of his small town in Texas with green hair and “bones in their noses.”

Like myth itself, evil knows no boundaries of time. As the years have passed, Sheriff Bell has grown tired in his work. A calm and competent professional, he has learned well from his experience. He knows the limits of his power. While younger officers urge rushing off in pursuit of their adversary, he imposes restraint until they can devise more realistic plans that offer some prospect of success. He has clearly surrendered the illusion that he can impose order on the frontier. He is satisfied to arrest one criminal at a time, even though he knows another one will appear tomorrow. The grind has sapped his strength. He walks slowly and speaks deliberately. His close-fitting uniform shirt shows the bulge of a middle-aged physique.

Evil, in its timeless form, appears in the person of Anton Chigurh (Javier Bardem). Although the film is set in the 1980s, he wears a helmet of hair that might have been fashionable among rock stars 20 years earlier. His name and the trace of an accent in his voice leave his origin in doubt, since evil has no geographic or ethnic identity. He first appears in handcuffs, being led into a police cruiser by a young, inexperienced deputy, who proves no match for his prisoner. What brought about his arrest? It

makes no difference. He begins his rampage of murder carrying a tank that may be oxygen for asthma, or a welder's torch to torment his victims, or something else. The menace that radiates from his huge frame makes everything he touches an instrument of death, even something that might be a medical device to sustain him if he has a lung condition.

Unlike many zombie-like incarnations of evil, Chigurh speaks freely, even though he uses language not to communicate, but to intimidate. In a beautifully scripted scene, he challenges the owner of a convenience store to toss a coin, but he will not reveal the stakes. He leaves little doubt that he will not hesitate to kill the man whether he chooses heads or tails. The elderly man senses the crisis, but he can do nothing to stop the relentless force of evil embodied in his customer. His life or death is a matter of pure caprice.

Capricious violence threatens the human characters, just as it did the life of the antelope wounded in an opening scene. Chigurh kills because it is his nature to kill. Remorse plays no more role in his life than it does in the conscience of the inept hunter. One merely accepts a violent world because nothing can neutralize this force of impersonal, unfocused violence. His victims, whether implicated in crime or resolutely innocent, remind him that he will gain nothing by their deaths. He agrees. They reason with him; they plead for their lives. Then he pulls the trigger.

Llewelyn Moss (Josh Brolin) thinks he can outwit Chigurh and survive, but he might as well try to outwit a tsunami. He thinks he can build a new life with the money he discovers among the dead in the desert. As a Vietnam veteran he has his own history of violence, but now he has a wife, Carla Jean (Kelly Macdonald), and the semblance of a human existence with her in a trailer park. The match is uneven. Chigurh is not a human person but an abstraction. Bullets cannot kill him. Broken bones cannot divert him from his predetermined path. Police work cannot apprehend him or deter him. He is simply a remorseless part of the human condition. Sheriff Moss, pondering retirement one more time, seeks understanding of Chigurh and his own life by recounting his dreams to his wife, Loretta (Tess Harper). The destructive monster

one faces is not necessarily the objectifiable other but the force that lurks deep within the subconscious of every human being.

"No Country for Old Men" borders on perfection in technique. The sparse soundtrack, almost devoid of music, captures the delight and menace in natural sounds: traffic, labored breathing, footsteps in a darkened hallway, wind in the desert. The skies over the desert press down over the characters as though the vast landscape of Texas can provide no hiding place from the monster that dwells

within. Neither the glorious colors of sunset nor the bleaching light of noonday can mask the horror.

The film casts its shadow far beyond Texas. It penetrates into the heart of the human condition in its universal manifestations, as Yeats would have it, "what is past, or passing, or to come." **A**

James T. Keane, S.J., reviews
"The Golden Compass,"
at americamagazine.org.

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The Heat's Turned Up

Treacherous Alliance

The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran and the U.S.

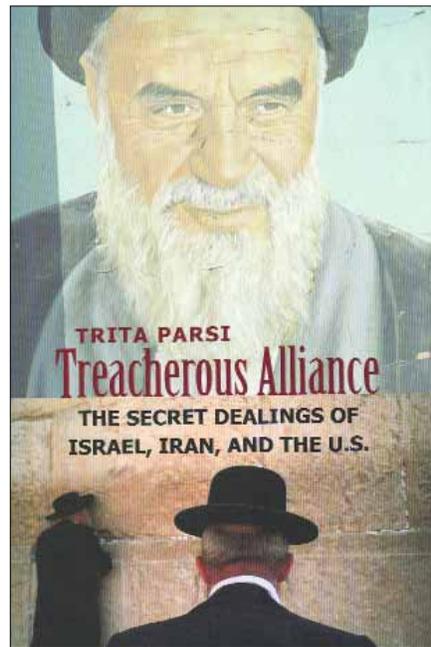
By Trita Parsi
Yale Univ Press. 384p \$28
ISBN 9780300120578

In large part, this book about U.S.-Iranian-Israeli international relations sets out to make a case for the progressive secularization of the post-revolutionary Iranian state. In *Treacherous Alliance* Trita Parsi, adjunct professor of international relations at Johns Hopkins University, argues cogently that the fires of Islamic zealotry as the main determinant in Iranian foreign policy were largely burned out in the holocaust of the eight-year Iran-Iraq war. His command of the details of state relations in the period is impressive, but he does not quite convince me of the complete disappearance of Shiite zealotry in Iranian external relations. Iran has continued to be the largest state sponsor of religiously inspired terrorist activity. That fact is hard to ignore.

Nevertheless, Parsi convinces that Iran has largely become a "rational actor," to use the terminology of international relations. That is, Iran can be expected to make logical decisions based on considerations of national survival, power and prosperity in the Middle East. If these considerations are congruent with the goals of Shiite eschatological dreams, then so much the better from the point of view of the government in Teheran. In the same way, Iranian clandestine "meddling" in Iraq can be seen as serving state aspirations for regional dominance as well as help for Shiite brethren.

The existence of an Iranian nuclear program (possibly a weapons program) makes the issue of whether or not Iran can be expected to act rationally in situations threatening national survival very important. To be blunt, the main question that must be asked is whether or not Iran can be deterred from first use of nuclear weapons out of fear of annihilation by the United States or Israel. If state interests

prevail in Iran's calculus, the answer would be yes. If a search for martyrdom prevails, the answer would be no. Parsi believes that Iran will not commit national suicide



and that therefore a Middle East stabilized through fear of mutual assured destruction is possible, indeed desirable if the Iranian program eventually produces deliverable weapons. The recently released "key judgments" of a U.S. National Intelligence Estimate on Iran elevates doubt as to whether or not the Iranian program is about weapons, but neither Olmert nor Bush seem inclined to be governed by such doubt.

Neither the United States nor Israel accepts the idea as yet that Iran is a country like all other countries, subject to deterrent pressures. Israel has made it clear that with regard to nuclear weapons, it does not accept deterrence as a principle in making decisions. The Israeli logic in this is quite simple. Strategic bombing targets (nuclear) come in two varieties: counter-force (bases, missiles, aircraft, etc.) and counter-value (population centers). Israel's own counter-force targets could conceivably be "hardened" and defended enough to ensure sufficient survival for a retaliatory strike. This "second strike" capability is the basis of any MAD deterrent solution.

On the other hand, Israel is largely an

urban country and has a highly concentrated population. There are only a few major towns, and these contain most of the Jewish people of Israel. Tel Aviv, Haifa, Ashkelon, Beersheba—the list is short. A successful nuclear strike on these towns with just a few weapons would destroy Israel as a country. It might be possible that a retaliatory strike could be made, but what would be the point, revenge?

On the basis of this thinking Israel simply does not accept MAD as a basis for making decisions concerning whether or not to "wait and see" whether countries like Iran prove to be rational actors. From the Israeli strategic point of view the risks involved in this gamble are simply too great. As a result Israel is inclined toward pre-emptive attack against evolving nuclear threats. The Bush administration speaks of the need to prevent the acquisition of the knowledge necessary for Iranians to make nuclear weapons. From that, it seems likely that Israeli strategic thinking in this matter has become American thinking as well.

Finally, Israel's reach with regard to Iran's nuclear program and bomb delivery systems is not sufficient. There are a great many Iranian targets. They are scattered and "hardened." Distances to Iran's facilities are long. Israel has a limited number of tanker aircraft for refueling. Israel's strategic strike force is not large enough to deal decisively with these targets using conventional weapons. Civilians want to believe that the provision of "bunker-buster" bombs by the United States would give Israel the needed capability. In fact, this would not be enough firepower to do

The Reviewers

Patrick Lang, a retired army colonel, served as a Middle East analyst and head of human intelligence for the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency during the 1990s.

Emilie Griffin of Alexandria, Va., writes and speaks often about the spiritual life. Her latest book is *Simple Ways to Pray: Spiritual Life in the Catholic Tradition* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

Cecilio Morales has covered economic policy as a journalist in Washington, D.C., since 1984. He is executive editor of the weekly *Employment and Training Reporter*.



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the job. Would Israel decide that nuclear weapons must be used? Who knows?

Then there is the issue of routes to the targets. Iraq, Turkey and Saudi Arabia would have to be overflowed, but none of these countries would give permission. What would the United States do? Surely America would not shoot down Israeli aircraft in such a situation. In fact, the United States would be politically powerless to stop a first wave of attacks.

The United States would be blamed for the attacks across the world, prompting an asymmetrical Iranian response in Iraq, the Persian Gulf and across the world. The truly frightening thing about this scenario is that the United States might have very little warning beforehand. There might be even less control over events as they developed.

Parsi's book provides a useful source of facts and background for contemplating this conundrum.

Patrick Lang

God- Attentiveness

The Road to Emmaus Pilgrimage as a Way of Life

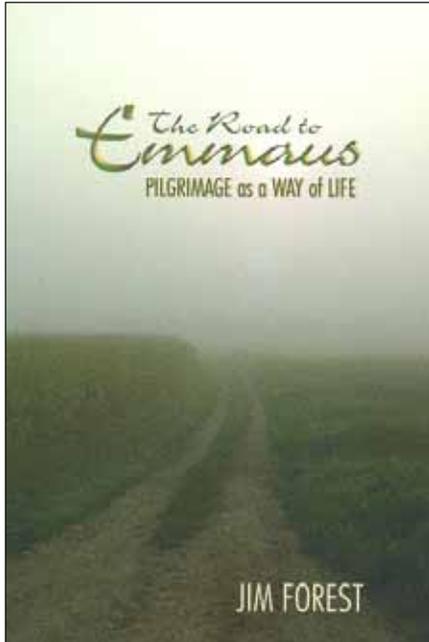
By Jim Forest
Orbis Books. 190p \$16
ISBN 9781570757310

For many readers, Jim Forest is inextricably connected to The Catholic Worker movement, which he joined in 1961 when he was a part-time student at Hunter College and after his discharge from the U.S. Navy as a conscientious objector. In his earlier books he has written well about Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton and other memorable figures he knew. He is not only a memoirist, but also a biographer, historian and fine spiritual writer.

In *The Road to Emmaus* Forest views the spiritual life from a special angle: that of pilgrimage. This is a worthwhile exploration. Beginning with simple parallels to other life-metaphors—the journey, the path, the road—Forest plumbs new depths in the understanding of pilgrimage. He draws very pointedly on haunting literature, like Bilbo Baggins's song in *Lord*

of the Rings: “The road goes ever on and on/ Down from the door where it began....”

Forest begins with a limited notion that comes easily to American school chil-



dren: pilgrims are “a community of storm-defying, black-clad English Puritans who crossed the Atlantic on the Mayflower.” But by eighth grade, Forest’s definition expands. Soon he leads us to the established Catholic devotional practice exemplified by Chaucer’s Canterbury pilgrims. Pilgrimage is a religious journey with the shrine or relics of a saint or martyr as its destination. But the author quickly moves beyond definitions. His book is itself a pilgrimage, and a very modern one at that. However much the author draws on ancient Catholic devotions and sacred spaces, still his principal focus is on the inward journey—informed by his own. The result is touching.

One chapter is entitled “Thin Places.” Without saying in so many words that God is more intensely present in given locations, still Forest honors the sacred places of a long Judeo-Christian history: Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Law; the holy island of Iona in Scotland’s Inner Hebrides; and the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem, which occupies the presumed locations where Jesus was crucified, buried and rose. One striking feature of this chapter is Forest’s willingness to describe certain awkward or embarrassing

features of these shrines. Of the Golgotha chapel he writes: “Cluttered as it is with pre-Reformation religious imagery, this chapel can be a disorienting place for Protestant visitors. They may also be disconcerted to witness the physical veneration exhibited by pilgrims belonging to the older churches. Yet once inside the chapel, the most undemonstrative visitor tends to be moved by this climate of quiet....”

Soon Forest moves into a spirituality of darkness. In a chapter called “Dark Places, Dark Paths” he quotes the words of John of the Cross: “If you wish to be sure of the road you are traveling, close your eyes and walk in the dark.” His theology is sound, for he connects anxiety and desolation to a spirituality of the cross. But Forest also describes pilgrimages to modern history’s dark places, where a memory of anguish is stirred: the Dutch synagogue of Alkmaar; the Anne Frank house in Amsterdam, where Otto Frank’s family hid out from the Nazis; the Lorraine Hotel in Memphis, where Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in 1968; the Memphis Auction Stone near the Mississippi River, where slaves were once bought and sold; and the Burkle Estate, a stop on the Underground Railroad in Memphis, where slaves were smuggled through to freedom.

One crucial stop on the journey takes us into Forest’s own time of trial. In a chapter called “Illness as Pilgrimage,” the author describes how when he was diagnosed for kidney disease, he resisted the onset of the illness and the possibility of dialysis. Now he has been in dialysis since January 2006, and his description of this aspect of “pilgrimage” is a telling spiritual reflection. There are times when Forest resisted making any religious interpretation, seeing his illness as merely “rotten luck.” But later he reports a change of heart. “What I had desperately hoped to avoid is now normal. I now spend nearly twelve hours a week—fifty hours a month, six hundred a year—at the dialysis clinic. Dialysis is part of the core structure of each week.”

Forest reports that he has had to rethink how to use his drastically reduced work time. Who among us cannot on some level identify with such loss, such diminishment? But Forest has come to see a spiritual meaning in it all: “It finally



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dawned on me that the hospital I dreaded visiting is actually holy ground. My main pilgrimage these days is the unprayed-for blessing of regularly going to a place where everyone is sick, caring for the sick, or visiting the sick." Through reflection, Forest has connected the dependence of the sick person with being poor in spirit. The sick person is "by definition on the ladder of the Beatitudes. Each of us may still have quite a lot of climbing to do, but, thanks to illness, at least we've made a start. We are on the first rung." At the end

of a session of dialysis, Forest sometimes says to the nurse, "Thanks for saving my life." The spiritual fruit of his ordeal is gratitude.

I found myself remembering—all at once—what Cornelia Connelly sometimes said to her sisters: "How often do you thank God for being delicate?" "Delicate" was Connelly's Victorian euphemism for being inclined to sickness. In reading Forest's fine book I came to understand how much the Catholic tradition—and the experience of the saints—

can tell us about living through adversity with a deeply thankful heart.

Emilie Griffin

Corporations Are Not Citizens

Supercapitalism

The Transformation of Business, Democracy, and Everyday Life

By Robert B. Reich

Knopf, 288p \$25

ISBN 9780307265616

"Feeling discomfort, fellow citizens? Do you have a mild pain in the Congress and bloating in the White House? Does globalization cause belching, nausea or heartburn? Here's something with a very low risk of side effects."

So the pharmaceutical industry might try to sell Robert Reich's new book, albeit with the disclaimer that the economist and Clinton administration secretary of labor is brilliant at diagnosis and at offering medicine that is not mere placebo. But, be forewarned: it may take a change in attitude to ingest his pill.

Reich takes up the familiar U.S. socioeconomic challenges of the 21st century—job off-shoring, mass layoffs, the stagnation of household middle- and low-incomes accompanied by explosive gains among the very, very rich—and refuses to serve commonplace assumptions on silver platters. Neither corporate conspiracies, nor Ronald Reagan, nor neocon social Darwinism—in brief, none of the usual suspects are to blame for what fundamentally has been happening to the U.S. economy even during the booming 1990s.

It all began long ago with the end of what he calls the "Not So Golden Age," the period from 1945 to 1973, in which wages doubled in a generation and productivity soared. The major labor-management pacts of the late 1940s and '50s, coupled with the National Labor Relations Act, the New Deal regulatory agencies and quiet arrangements among major corporations to avoid price wars created what was once described by Catholic news reporter Arthur Jones, originally a financial journalist, as the "mildly heroic" era of American capitalism.

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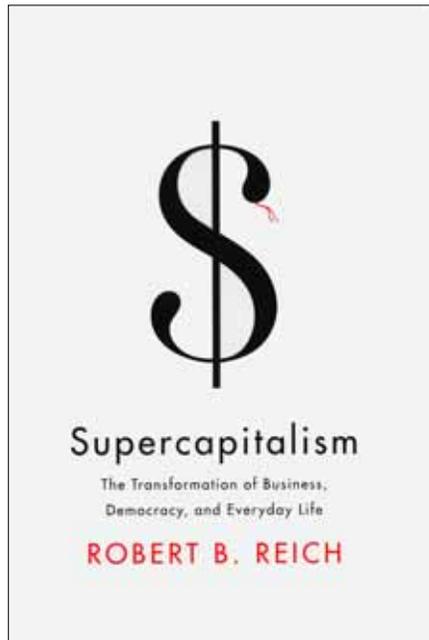
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This was the era of the auto industry's "little Swedens" of womb-to-tomb employment and social protections that allowed a generation of blue-collar workers' children to go to college and shed manual labor. The late Msgr. George G. Higgins fought so valiantly, yet with modest success, to expand this to the migrant workers for whom he negotiated.

In September, the United Auto Workers pact with General Motors, allowing the carmaker to relieve itself of pension obligations in exchange for relatively modest assurances of job security, sounded the final death knell of that era. That is if you weren't watching, Reich explains.

The oil crisis of the early 1970s and Carter administration-era deregulation of major industries, leading to the breakup of even the telephone monopoly, set the stage for the rough-and-tumble competitive environment of today, in which corporations have to move plants to countries where workers will work for pennies of the U.S. wage dollar—or face bankruptcy. All that was needed was an end to the cold war and the start-up of enabling technologies that would make competition possible from all over the globe.



In reading *Supercapitalism*, the reader will be surprised to learn, for example, that the U.S. auto industry began to face domestic competition as a side effect of the Vietnam War. Reich explains that when the U.S. military built a superport at Cam Ranh Bay to satisfy its gargantuan supply needs, it also unintentionally ush-

ered in a new era of trans-Pacific container shipping. Rather than return empty, the shippers began to pick up Japanese cars and other products for delivery in the United States.

Yet if you really want to find out who is responsible for rising inequality, for the loss of good union jobs and job security for families, for the millions (including children) without access to health care, look in the mirror. It's our fault. Reich puts it more gently: "The fact is, most of us are consumers and investors, and as such are benefiting enormously from supercapitalism."

Take Wal-Mart. Its prices make it possible for many more of us to buy consumer goods. The mega-retailer has an enormous influence on the economic behavior of suppliers and very broadly on prices even beyond the doors of its stores. Moreover, any pension plan with investments in Wal-Mart has enjoyed gains.

Should consumers beg to pay more? Should pension fund managers seek to lower the retirement savings of their customers? Reich doesn't think that is reasonable to ask.

Consumer and capital markets have managed to aggregate our demands very



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efficiently, so that we can buy the best for the lowest price and achieve the highest possible returns from our savings, all at the same time. The problem is that the decision-making institutions of democratic capitalism are failing to aggregate the demands of citizens nearly as efficiently or responsively.

Again, this is our fault. "The awkward truth is that most of us are of two minds: As consumers and investors we want the great deals. As citizens we don't like many of the social consequences that flow from them," Reich writes. "Our desires as consumers and investors win out because our values as citizens have virtually no effective means of expression—other than in heated rhetoric directed against the wrong targets."

Do not bother attempting to shame corporations, Reich argues. They have no feelings, and their executives must squeeze out profits or be fired. He eloquently and precisely exposes much of the congressional hand-wringing over corporate misdeeds as show trials meant to appease public opinion—stirring but ultimately ineffective. Instead, he says, change the rules of the game. Here I wish Reich had been more prescriptive.

In focusing on solutions, Reich sounds very much like the current House Democratic leadership. In lieu of re-regulating airlines or hobbling trade with China and India, for example, Reich would favor a plan identical to the bill proposed this year by Rep. Jim McDermott, Democrat of Washington, to expand unemployment insurance and offer wage insurance and job training to those who are laid off.

That new rules are needed is widely agreed on by all who see the malaise of widening inequality. The key is how to get from here to there. In that respect, Reich falls short. One gets the sense that he is withholding the detailed advice he has or will give Sen. Hillary Clinton, Democrat of New York, if she is elected.

Nonetheless, Reich's book provides an acute enough assessment, free of obvious ideological baggage, such as few policy analysts of his level have delivered in years.

Cecilio Morales

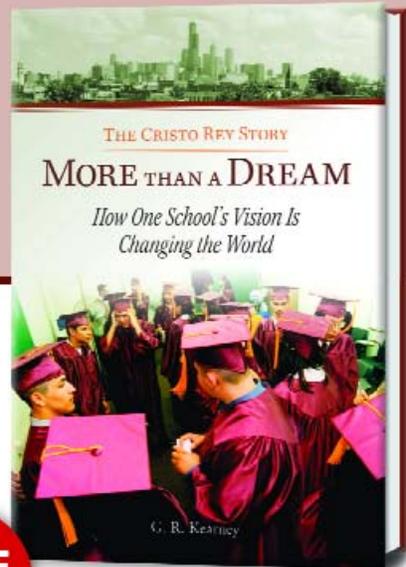
Correction: *Before I Go: Letters to Our Children About What Really Matters*, by Peter Kreeft, is published by Sheed & Ward not Paulist Press (**Am.** 12/10/07). We apologize for this.

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COMMUNICATIONS AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT MANAGER. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development has an opening for a Communications and Resource Development Manager, who will play a central role in the department's communication strategies. The Communications and Resource Development Manager manages the communications systems for the Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development, including Web sites, electronic communications, databases, etc. The Communications and Resource Development Manager is also responsible for non-collection resource development and creative promotion planning to support the annual parish appeal for the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. Bachelor's degree in communications, theology or related field, 5 years of experience in communications, promotions and/or

social ministry.

Office of Human Resources (J.P.H.D.), U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 3211 Fourth Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017-1194; Fax: (202) 541-3412; e-mail: resumes@uscgb.org. No telephone calls, please. EOE/M/F/D/V.

DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION. St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church in Frisco, Tex., seeks a Director of Religious Education for our Faith Formation program from pre-K through all facets of adult education. A master's degree in religious education or related field preferred. Bilingual a plus. Qualified candidates should send a résumé and letter of interest by e-mail to David Utsler: dutsler@stfoafrisco.org.

DIRECTOR OF YOUTH MINISTRY sought for active college-town parish with growing Latino population. Successful candidate will have B.A. or M.A. with theological course work; experience in youth ministry, in Lectionary-based catechesis, and in "Renewing the Vision"; strong leadership and communication skills. Parish is integrating stewardship into all programs, including Youth Ministry. D.Y.M. is directly responsible for continuing to create a prayerful and dynamic environment for youth in grades 9-12 by working with faith development team—Junior Youth Minister (grades 6-8), adult faith formation, staff, catechists and parents. Should want to set standard for such ministries. Competitive salary and benefits. Contact D.Y.M. Search Committee, St. Thomas More Catholic Church, 940 Carmichael Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27514 by Jan. 28 for position available immediately.

HISPANIC MINISTRY DIRECTOR. St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church is a rapidly growing parish in Frisco, Tex., with a large and vital Spanish-speaking community. We seek a director to oversee all aspects of Hispanic ministry in the parish. A qualified candidate must be bilingual and bicultural and possess a degree and/or experience relevant to pastoral ministry. Send a résumé and letter of interest by e-mail to David Utsler: dutsler@stfoafrisco.org.

PROGRAM COORDINATOR. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has an immediate opening for a Program Coordinator within the Office of Cultural Diversity in the Church. Responsibilities include developing project plans, designing brochures, coordinating special interest activities, maintaining Web site and designing and producing a newsletter. Applicants should possess an undergraduate degree, proficiency with Microsoft Word, Power Point, Excel and Publishing; strong writing, editing and speaking skills in both English and Spanish, as well as planning and organizational skills. Experience working with culturally diverse communities and familiarity with pastoral and social issues that affect the culturally diverse groups in the Catholic Church a plus.

U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of Human Resources, 3211 Fourth Street, N.E.,

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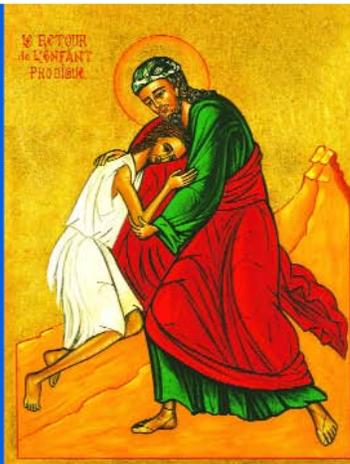


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Letters

Fuzzy Focus

Regarding "My Second First Mass" (12/3): While Father Kerper's insights about priestly service are to be applauded, there is a troubling impression that readers can be left with from comparison of presiding at the "extraordinary form" versus the "ordinary form" of Mass. He writes, "I actually felt liberated from a persistent need to perform, to engage, to be forever a friendly celebrant." One wonders where he received this impression (not from his seminary liturgical formation, it is hoped). There is nothing about presiding at the Novus Ordo that indicates that the priest is supposed to perform or be friendly in a superficial sense. Many liturgy documents, including the current *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, are clear that the priest is at the service of the liturgy. If there is a lack of reverence in the Mass, or if it seems too priest-centered, the problem is not with the rite; the problem is with the way we are doing the rite.

Father Kerper's statement that the focal point when he celebrated the Tridentine Mass was not the priest but the gathering of the people is therefore somewhat confusing. The priest should not be the focus for either form of Mass. In addition, how can the focal point be the gathering of the people in the form of the rite where the people are clearly following along with what the priest does? The liturgical actions in the Tridentine Mass are centered on the actions of the priest instead of on the actions of the body of Christ, the gathered assembly as a whole, priest included. We should never forget that the two forms of the Mass represent starkly different ecclesiologies.

(Rev.) Joseph DeGrocco
Director of Liturgical Formation
Seminary of the Immaculate Conception
Huntington, N.Y.

Patriot Games

In the editorial "Thanking Our Soldiers" (11/12), you did the expected and politically correct thing to do in celebration of Veterans Day. We have come to a place in American political culture where everyone must "support the troops" or be labeled unpatriotic. It is a major psycho-

Letters

logical force, along with perpetual fear, that is used by the national propaganda machine to keep us all in line.

Veterans Day, of course, had its origin in authentic and sincere gratitude for the sacrifices made by our soldiers in wars of necessity that were actually fought to preserve our sovereignty and freedoms. But the current war is different. It is actually destroying our freedoms to preserve the militaristic ambitions of those now in power. It is an illegal war of aggression based on trumped-up evidence, lies and political corruption.

Real patriotism defends the truths and principles on which our nation was founded and which, for the most part, have guided us for 200 years. Real patriotism renounces the twisted agenda that has hypnotized and mesmerized our country, trashed our constitution and repudiated international law.

*Hugh B. Skees
Miamisburg, Ohio*

Let's Call the Whole Thing Off

"What Divides Orthodox and Catholics?" by Maximos Davies, (12/3) was enlightening on the conflict the title describes.

Since both our Catholic Church and the Orthodox are churches of apostolic succession, we should be able to achieve reconciliation. This divide has, in my opinion, been created and fostered through human actions and jealousies.

The way both sides of this divide consider the various issues reminds me of the old song with the line, "You say potay-to and I say potah-to." I personally do not care for a lot of high formality and ceremony, but I would have no problem being associated with those who do.

Let us hope and pray that this argument will be settled amicably.

*John L. Coakley Jr.
Kansas City, Mo.*

Union Yes

I found "What Divides Orthodox and Catholics?" (12/3) very enlightening in explaining why such ecumenical dialogue has only gotten "close" for so many years. Yes, the facts are usually more complex than meets the eye for those of us not directly involved. It is discouraging if such union will take place only if the "faithful Christians must do the rest," as the article concluded. These "faithful Christians" are looking for and need leadership from the clergy. Do we (on both sides) not have this leadership? Practically, lay Christians, taught to be followers, will not act without such.

*Don Jones
San Jose, Calif.*

Contemplation in Action

What a blessing to hear again from William Johnston, S.J., ("In Mystic Silence," 11/19). For years Father Johnston has enriched anyone interested in Christian mysticism and especially its potential for dialogue with Eastern religions. I hesitate to take exception to anything he writes. However, his reference to "pure Carmelite contemplation" may lead some to think that Carmelite contemplation as described by Teresa of Ávila and John of the Cross is not for those engaged in active ministry. Cloistered Carmelite nuns practice the ministry of prayer on behalf of others. Some offer spiritual guidance to those not members of their cloister, and still others engage in an apostolate of print.

More to the point, John of the Cross was a very busy friar, whose ministries of spiritual guidance and administration kept him constantly on the road. Carmelite contemplation, like all contemplation, nourishes one for whatever God calls one to be or to do.

*Keith J. Egan
President, Carmelite Institute
South Bend, Ind.*

Scientific Facts

As John F. Kavanaugh, S.J., recently pointed out in "In Defense of Human Life" (11/26), there is a lot of confusion regarding the issues of abortion and stem cells.

What is often not brought up regard-

ing abortion is a fact that all reputable biologists agree on: no animal changes species during the course of its life cycle. There can be metamorphosis (e.g., from caterpillar to butterfly), but no change of species. That means that from the time of conception on, biologically the human pre-born is human. This is a scientific issue, not just a religious one.

*Robert Sargent
Carrollton, Tex.*

Photo Finish

The two primary candidates for the U.S. presidency, one a Democrat (Hillary Clinton), the other a Republican (John McCain), pictured on your cover of 12/17 are precisely the two persons whom I most fondly hope will *not* be nominated by their parties.

In the case of the Democratic candidate, you reinforce the claim of "inevitability" that is being advanced in her campaign. Rather, for the single Democrat you should have pictured the intellectually brilliant Senator Barack Obama, a candidate who would certainly be a most welcome replacement for the incumbent resident of the White House.

*James F. Bresnahan, S.J.
Chestnut Hill, Mass.*

Sharing or Solutions?

In "I Need Your Help," by George B. Wilson, S.J., (12/17) the imagined bishop the author creates dismisses the "big" options (to address the priest shortage) as blind alleys. Unfortunately but truly, such unproductive resignation has become standard operating procedure. About the "possible strategies," he suggests we "share ideas." But that's as far as it ever goes.

Almost half a century ago, Baltimore's Cardinal Lawrence Shehan engaged the esteemed sociologist Dean Hoge to address this same subject. Just as today, we were discussing the "big options" and "possible strategies." Way back then, Hoge asserted that the "worst thing we can do is nothing." Sadly, that is exactly what we've done!

Would so little have been ventured, were we more concerned for the folks in the pews?

*(Rev.) Brian M. Rafferty
Lake Shore, Md.*

America (ISSN 0002-7049) is published weekly (except for 11 combined issues: Jan. 7-14, 21-28, March 31-April 7, May 26-June 2, June 9-16, 23-30, July 7-14, 21-28, Aug. 4-11, 18-25, Dec. 22-29) by America Press, Inc., 106 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019. Periodicals postage is paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. Business Manager: Lisa Pope; Circulation: Judith Palmer, (212) 581-4640. Subscriptions: United States, \$48 per year; add U.S. \$22 postage and GST (#131870719) for Canada; or add U.S. \$32 per year for overseas surface postage. For overseas airmail delivery, please call for rates. Postmaster: Send address changes to: America, 106 West 56th St. New York, NY 10019. Printed in the U.S.A.

Jesus Goes Public

The Baptism of the Lord (A), Jan. 13, 2008

Readings: Is 42:1-4, 6-7; Ps 29:1-4, 8-10; Acts 10:34-38; Mt 3:13-17

*“Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness”
(Mt 3:15)*

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS inaugurates his public ministry as an adult. From Matthew’s infancy narrative we have already learned that Jesus is the Messiah, Son of God, Son of David and King of the Jews. From Matthew’s description of John the Baptist we know that John was preparing the way of the “Lord” and looking forward to the “mightier” one coming after him. At last, Jesus the adult comes to John at the Jordan River to seek his baptism. In doing so, Jesus steps onto the public stage.

Matthew’s account of Jesus’ baptism is unique in including a conversation between John and Jesus. When John objects and insists that Jesus should be baptizing him, Jesus dissuades him on the ground that “it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” The idea seems to be that in John’s baptism of Jesus, the divine plan was being carried forward.

What was the problem? On the one hand, John’s baptism involved repentance and forgiveness of sins in the face of the coming kingdom of God. Presumably Jesus did not need that. On the other hand, John proclaimed that the “mightier” one would bring a better baptism, not with water only but with the Holy Spirit and fire. Why then did Jesus accept John’s baptism? In doing so Jesus identified with sinful humankind and thus expressed his full solidarity with us. Along these lines Pope Benedict XVI has suggested in his book *Jesus of Nazareth* that Jesus loaded all our guilt on his shoulders and bore it down into the depths of the Jordan. In this way, the baptism of Jesus by John marked his

DANIEL J. HARRINGTON, S.J., is professor of New Testament at Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, Mass.

acceptance of death for the sins of humankind, and Jesus’ coming up from the water was an anticipation of his resurrection.

What happens when Jesus comes out of the water is another epiphany, this time of Jesus the adult. It too is narrated with rich biblical symbolism. The new possibility of communication between God and humankind through Jesus is expressed in turn by the images of the heavens opening, the dove-like descent of the Holy Spirit (see Gn 1:2) and the voice from the heavens (Psalm 29). The voice speaks in the third person singular (“This is...”), indicating a public event, not merely a private religious experience or vision on Jesus’ part. The voice combines key phrases from the Old Testament: “my son” (the Davidic king as God’s adopted son, Psalms 2 and 110), the “beloved” (Isaac in Gn 22) and “with whom I am well pleased” (the Servant of God in Is 42:1). From the start of his public ministry we know who Jesus is.

Today’s selection from Peter’s speech in Acts 10 reminds us that while John baptized Jesus in water, God anointed Jesus with “the Holy Spirit and power.” In our own baptism we are privileged to have been incorporated into Jesus’ life, death and resurrection and granted the gift of the Holy Spirit. We could do so because in Jesus’ baptism by John all righteousness was being fulfilled.

Praying With Scripture

- Why do you think Jesus accepted John’s baptism?
- How do the titles attributed to Jesus by the heavenly voice prepare for Matthew’s portrait of Jesus in the rest of the Gospel?
- What is the relationship between Jesus’ baptism and our baptism?



What John Saw

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time (A), Jan. 20, 2008

Readings: Is 49:3, 5-6; Ps 40:2, 4, 7-10; 1 Cor 1:1-3; Jn 1:29-34

“Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God” (Jn 1:34)

JOHN’S GOSPEL DOES NOT include a direct account of Jesus’ baptism. Instead it supplies the testimony or witness of John the Baptist and his reflections on who Jesus is. By considering what the Baptist saw in Jesus, we may see more clearly what we can hope for from Jesus.

In his first chapter John the Evangelist develops an overture or prologue to his account of Jesus’ public ministry as well as his death and resurrection. He gives special attention to the various titles applied to Jesus, ranging from Word of God to the glorious Son of Man; taken together these titles highlight the decisive importance of Jesus. Today’s selection devoted to the testimony of John the Baptist focuses on Jesus as the Lamb of God, the bearer or vehicle of the Holy Spirit and the Son of God.

John testified that Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the

ART BY TAD DUNNE

world.” This imagery evokes the Old Testament rituals of sacrificing an animal to God as a way of atoning for sins and restoring right relationship with God. For early Christians the image of Jesus as the Lamb of God expressed the conviction that Jesus died for us and for our sins and made possible a right relationship. Theologians call this justification. Through the Lamb of God we can hope for forgiveness of our sins and right relationship with God.

John also testified that at the baptism the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus, and that Jesus became the primary bearer or vehicle of the Holy Spirit. This in turn qualified Jesus to baptize with both water and the Holy Spirit. In his Last Supper discourse Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit upon the community of his followers. He calls the Holy Spirit the Paraclete, a word that combines the Spirit’s roles as consoler, guide and defender. Through the Spirit of Jesus we can hope for the gift of the Holy Spirit and the possibility of living “in the spirit.”

John testified that Jesus is the Son of God, a title that evokes the figure of the Servant of God described in Isaiah 49. There the servant has the mission to proclaim God’s saving power not for Israel alone but for all nations. As the Son of God, Jesus addressed God as his loving father. And Jesus invites us to share his own unique relationship of intimacy with God. Through the Son of God we are God’s children now. We can stand alongside Jesus and call upon God as our father too. What did John see in Jesus? What can we hope for from Jesus? Through Jesus we can hope for forgiveness of sins, right relationship with God, the guidance of the Holy Spirit and permission to approach God with confidence and even boldness as befits the spiritual brothers and sisters of Jesus. This is what Paul means when he describes Christians as “sanctified in Christ Jesus” and “called to be holy.”

Daniel J. Harrington

Praying With Scripture

- How do you respond to the image of Jesus as the Lamb of God?
- How is the gift of the Holy Spirit related to Jesus?
- Do you ever think of Jesus as your brother?

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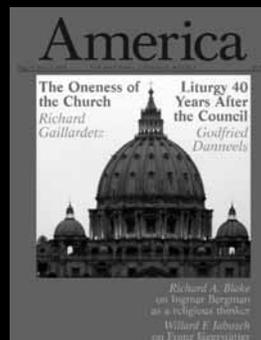
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