

# America

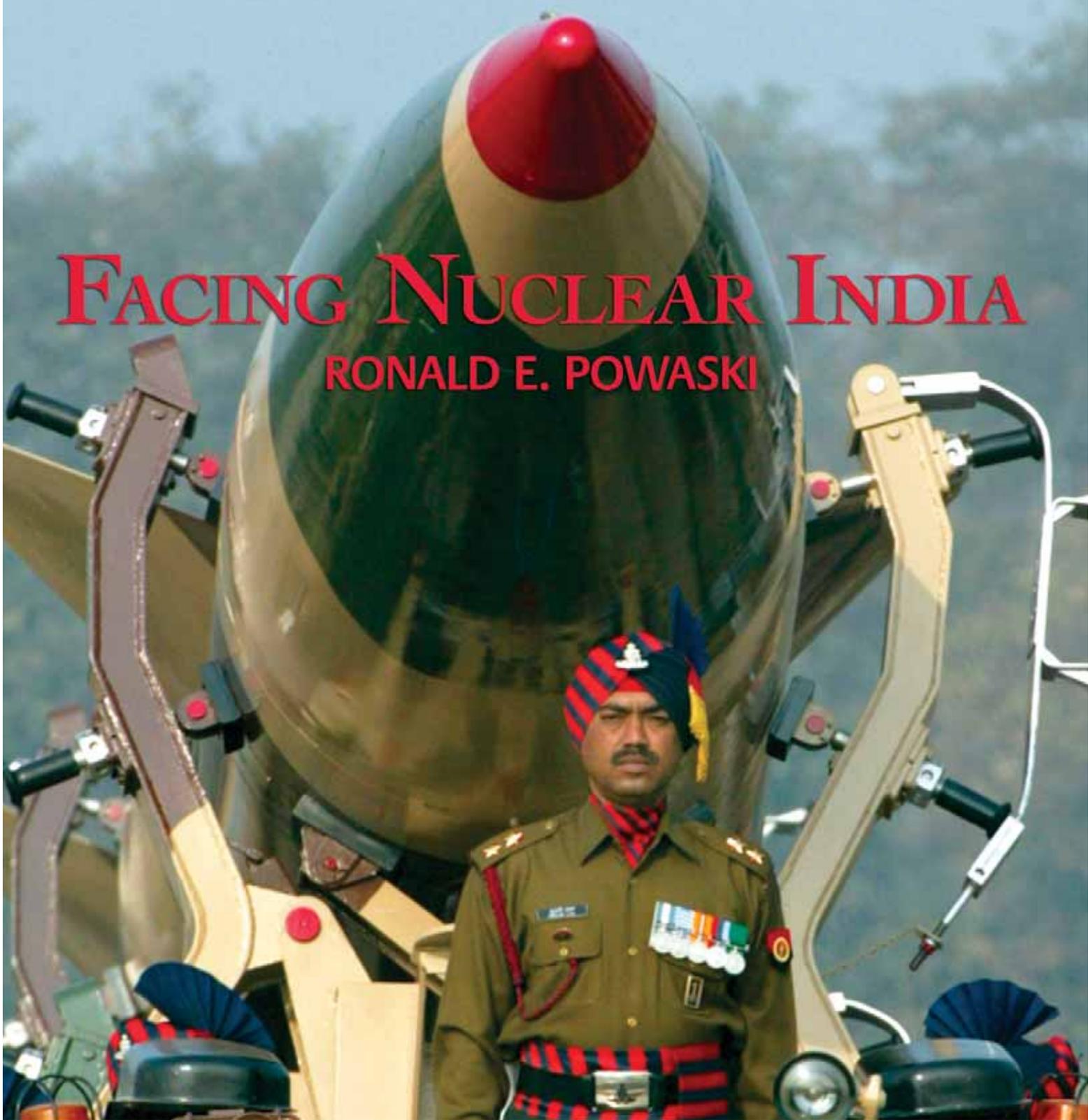
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1000's  
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of 2009

## FACING NUCLEAR INDIA

RONALD E. POWASKI



I was tempted to use this space to proclaim Feb. 23 *America's* official Oscar issue, in honor of the Academy Awards ceremony held on Sunday the 22nd and our newly expanded film coverage (see pg. 31). Then I remembered that our issue of Feb. 23 is our Lenten issue, and few things are as incongruous as these 40 days of penance and Hollywood's red-carpet indulgences.

The connection between faith and film often does seem tenuous. The late John Updike once observed that the decline in church attendance in America mirrored the growth and popularity of the movie business. Weekend afternoons spent watching lights play on a scrim provided a spectacle that even the highest of liturgies could not match.

Yet it would be a mistake to label the movies a purely secular enterprise, as I am sure Mr. Updike would have agreed. Yes, much at the multiplex is fatuous and trivial, but occasionally film's unique alchemy of light and sound provides a spiritual experience that is simply unavailable elsewhere. Many examples can be cited, among them the excellent "Into Great Silence," a 2007 documentary about the Carthusian Grand Chartreuse monastery in France. Another is "Silent Light," or "Stellet Licht" (2008), by the Mexican director Carlos Reygadas, a film whose journey from darkness to light is well suited to Lent.

Set in Mexico, the film chronicles the consequences of marital infidelity in one Mennonite community. Shot on location with Mennonite actors, many of whom had never acted before, "Silent Light" employs a rare German dialect and long tracking shots that can test the patience of even the most courageous cinéastes. If in outline "Light" strikes you as pretentious, a parody of an art house film, I would concede the point, and then urge you to see it anyway.

The viewer's first test comes with the opening sequence, in which the director uses time-lapse photography to capture a Mexican countryside just as the sun begins its ascent. The gradual transition from night until morning, compressed to five minutes in the film, hints at what is to come. We are introduced to Johan and Esther, a traditional Mennonite couple, and their six children. Yet while the children seem innocent and cheerful, their parents' faces are marked with a sadness that verges on despair.

Soon we learn that Johan has fallen in love with another woman, who he believes may be his natural partner, the one God intended for him. His predicament causes him no small amount of spiritual pain, as he loves his wife and loathes the prospect of leaving her and his children and giving scandal to the community. Yet he cannot resist the centripetal force that pulls him to Marianne, a rather plain woman who also recognizes the misery she is bringing to "poor Esther."

I will not give away anything more here; but in a film as artful as this, attention must be paid to even the smallest of moments. The first: a shot of Johan and a longtime friend, resting on the back of a pickup truck, the sky radiant in the distance. The composition is exquisite, reminiscent of Andrew Wyeth or Edward Hopper. A second image: Marianne, caught at the point of sexual ecstasy, evinces a bliss that is mixed with a profound spiritual desolation.

In an age of computer generated imagery and IMAX technology, it has become a cliché to call a film miraculous, but in the case of "Silent Light" the adjective is unusually apt. The trio at the heart of the film, Johan, Esther and Marianne, find themselves at the mercy of the fates, and it is only to God that they can look for their deliverance.

MAURICE TIMOTHY REIDY

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Cover: A soldier stands under India's surface-to-surface missile, named 'Prithvi' (Earth), in New Delhi, January 2004. REUTERS/Kamal Kishore

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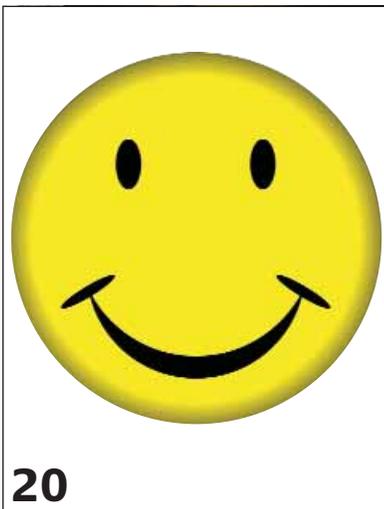
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James Martin, S.J., and Bill McGarvey of BustedHalo.com analyze the Oscar race on our podcast (right, Kate Winslet in "The Reader"). Plus, from the archives, Sidney Callahan on Mary and the feminist movement and a selection of essays by William J. O'Malley, S.J. All at [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org).



### Khmer Rouge Trials

The trials of several Khmer Rouge leaders are set to begin Feb. 17 in Phnom Penh. The most notorious is Kaing Guek Eav, better known by his revolutionary name, Comrade Duch. He is accused of overseeing the torture and death of some 16,000 men, women and children at Tuol Sleng, a former school that the Khmer Rouge turned into a detention camp. Duch, a former mathematics teacher who worked closely with Pol Pot, has been incarcerated since 1999. Overall, during the Khmer Rouge's years of power, 1975 to 1979, close to two million Cambodians died from hunger, disease, torture and outright execution. Besides Duch, four others are to appear before the tribunal.

The tribunal came into existence six years ago as a joint undertaking of the United Nations and the Cambodian government. The relationship has been thorny, with the Cambodian government trying to limit the number of defendants. Cambodian officials contend that five are sufficient, but critics feel more should be indicted. Moreover, with corruption an ongoing problem in Cambodia, one human rights group has alleged that judges and other court personnel had paid part of their wages to government officials in exchange for their posts. The trials will at least focus world attention on one of the 20th century's most horrific genocides.

Tuol Sleng is now a museum. Victims' ID pictures line the walls, and cabinets hold skulls and instruments of torture—reminders of incalculable levels of suffering inflicted by one group upon an entire population. May the trials bring some measure of justice.

### Dodging Taxes

For years the public debate over federal income tax has focused on how much taxes can be cut and for whom. What should have been asked as well was: Are the taxes owed being paid, and by whom? Creative tax dodging, it appears, is no stranger to Congress, and it has also sullied the appointment of three persons invited to join President Obama's new leadership team. Tim Geithner paid back taxes plus late fees after an audit, though he repaid earlier untaxed earnings only when he was nominated for a cabinet post; he is now secretary of the U.S. Treasury. Tom Daschle and Nancy Killefer withdrew their names from consideration, when tax evasion itself became a public distraction from the focus of the president's first 100 days.

The problem could be solved if some courageous public servant would champion a remedy like the following: Require by statute that all members of Congress sign an annual statement that they have filed their taxes and included all income owed. Some law firms do this, and have found it helpful. Also, the names of Congresspersons would go into an I.R.S. random-selection pool for as long as they serve; and a significant number, perhaps up to one in four (not the current one in 100) would be audited. That would virtually end the bipartisan practice of tax evasion by legislators. Other high-salaried executives on the federal payroll could be included, too. And the states might want to follow. As regards the vetting of candidates for executive appointments, an audit should be routinely conducted, unless a candidate shows that the I.R.S. has audited him or her in the last three years.

To implement these remedies, the I.R.S. would need to hire more auditors. That would create well-paying jobs, increase federal revenues and demonstrate that those who lead government abide by its laws.

### Poetry and Prose

A political seer of another age once said that candidates campaign in poetry but, once elected, must govern in prose. That distinction came to mind as President Barack Obama, who ran such a compelling campaign, moved forward with his first cabinet appointments. The president discovered to his chagrin that several of his nominees had been remiss in paying their taxes. Former Senator Tom Daschle, a close friend and adviser to Mr. Obama, was the president's nominee to be secretary of health and human services; but Mr. Daschle, it turned out, was one of those who had been delinquent.

The president's initial support of Mr. Daschle was a mistake in judgment that Mr. Obama came to recognize and for which he apologized to a national television audience. The president's apology was reassuring for several reasons, not least the fact that it marked a sharp break from the pattern of White House statements over the previous eight years, when "never apologize, never explain" seemed the norm for presidential pronouncements. President Obama's candor in speaking to the American public should set the standard for statements from public representatives of his administration in the years ahead. In doing so, the president and his staff will confirm his covenant with the nation's citizens and build the trust that will be of critical importance as the nation and its leaders confront the formidable challenges that lie ahead.

# Reaching Right

Ecclesial unity, a defining feature of the Catholic Church, is a passion of Pope Benedict XVI. Pope Benedict has demonstrated praiseworthy willingness to seek unity, even when the effort risks stirring controversy, as has occurred with the pope's recent overtures toward the breakaway Society of St. Pius X. Two weeks later, however, the project seemed to lie in tatters. Catholics and non-Catholics alike have expressed confusion and outrage. What went wrong, and what can be learned from the affair?

A brief restatement of the facts: On Jan. 24, the eve of the 50th anniversary of the announcement of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Benedict announced the lifting of the ban of excommunication from four bishops ordained by the schismatic Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. The four are members of the Society of St. Pius X, founded by Lefebvre in 1970, which has rejected the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and the authority of recent popes. In 1988 the Vatican said that by being ordained without a pontifical mandate (that is, Vatican permission), the four had automatically incurred excommunication.

The initial announcement on Jan. 24 was soon followed by a firestorm of criticism when it was discovered that one bishop, Richard Williamson, had made public assertions that minimized the extent of the Holocaust. In an interview broadcast on Swedish television, Williamson claimed that the Germans had killed perhaps 300,000 Jews, no more. These positions were soon condemned by Vatican officials; the society's superior general silenced Williamson on "political and historical matters"; and Benedict condemned Holocaust denial and reaffirmed his "full and unquestioning solidarity" with the Jewish people.

Still, the damage had been done. People within the Vatican expressed uncertainty over the canonical import of the pope's action. Were these four bishops now in full communion with the Catholic Church? What changes or commitments had been required of them, if any? Meanwhile, others inside and outside the church continued to wonder whether the church countenanced Holocaust deniers. Religious and secular leaders alike called on Pope Benedict to clarify the church's position. On Feb. 4 the Vatican Secretariat of State issued a strongly worded document stating that the Society of St. Pius X, as an "indispensable" condition of full communion, would have to accept all the reforms of the Second Vatican Council and the teachings of the last five popes (who were named, lest anyone miss the point).

Additionally, Bishop Williamson would have to revoke in an "absolutely unequivocal and public" way his incendiary and false comments on the Holocaust.

The entire episode raised serious questions not only about the church's relations with Judaism, but about the internal governance of the Curia and the way the Vatican communicates its message. In a rare move of public criticism, Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said, "Up to now people in the Vatican have spoken too little with each other and have not checked where problems might arise." Federico Lombardi, S.J., the Vatican spokesperson, was just as blunt. He called for the creation of a modern communications culture inside the Curia; currently each dicastery (department) communicates for itself.

In the end, it was hard to know whether to praise the Vatican for its openness or to fault it for playing the blame game. Clearly, much of the confusion and controversy could have been avoided if the Vatican had issued its clearly worded Feb. 4 statement, which explained what precisely was being done and what was required of the Society of St. Pius X, at the time of the initial announcement on Jan. 24. In our fast-paced, media-driven era, there is no substitute for a well defined message. If these difficult events have any upside, it is the opportunity they offer for the Vatican to evaluate and renovate Curial communications policies.

Given the pope's desire for unity, many also hope that the Vatican has plans to reach out to theologians who have been subject to Vatican sanctions and to other groups as well. They too represent serious voices that express vital concerns in our church, and their current status at times strains our bonds of unity. And while some of their writings and positions may require ongoing discussion, it is noteworthy that unlike the Society of St. Pius X, none of them explicitly reject any prior papacy or council.

The widespread suspicion that anti-Semitism remains in the church is a perception the church must work to correct. Likewise, the authority of Vatican II must not be watered down. Undoubtedly Pope Benedict XVI shares both of these convictions. Yet unless old ways of proceeding are updated, his efforts on behalf of Christian unity risk being gravely misunderstood.



# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

THE ECONOMY

## Crisis Threatens Stability In Latin America

**W**hile Latin American leaders initially struck a positive note in the face of the global economic downturn, most are now hurriedly drafting plans to create jobs, keep financial systems from collapsing and shore up social programs in the event of a prolonged economic recession. The challenges are not simply economic. Presidential elections are scheduled for 2009 in a number of countries, including Chile, Uruguay, Honduras, El Salvador and Panama. Experts expect that as these countries scale back social programs in order to pump more money into other areas of the economy, political instability may result. "At some point, that's going to affect their political support," says Michael Shifter, vice president of the Inter-American Dialogue, a think tank concerned with Western Hemisphere issues. "Unless these governments can deliver, they're going to be in trouble."

The worldwide financial crisis has ended a half-decade-long boom that saw Latin America's economy expand by an average of 5 percent a year, with some countries growing by more than 7 percent annually. The region's economic growth rate slowed to 4.6 percent in 2008, and the most optimistic growth forecast for 2009 is 1.9 percent, according to the United Nations. "It's very hard to have an upbeat outlook about the region," Shifter said.

The boom was spurred by exports of such raw materials as minerals, oil and timber to the United States and emerging economic giants like China, as well as by money sent home by migrants working abroad, payments known as remittances. The plunge in world oil prices has also hit countries like Brazil, Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia particularly hard, while in Peru decreased demand for metals has led to the layoffs of thousands of workers by mining companies and their suppliers. At the same time, remittances are slowing. Only half of Latin Americans living abroad said they sent money home in 2008, down from 73 percent in 2006.

Economic woes could also precipi-

tate serious political crises in the region, further deflecting attention from other pressing social problems. Some observers, for example, fear that the economic crisis will undermine efforts to address environmental initiatives. In Brazil, where the Catholic bishops have made the protection of the Amazon region a priority, the government recently announced a plan to cut deforestation in half over the next 10 years. In neighboring Peru, Environment Minister Antonio Brack told foreign journalists on Jan. 8 that with financial assistance the country could stop deforestation in 10 years. European countries already have pledged more than \$7 million for forest conservation, he said. Yet with budget cutbacks causing countries to spend less on conservation, these plans could all be in jeopardy.

Experts agree that the crisis will hit poor Latin Americans the hardest. It

will increase unemployment, pushing more people into the informal economy—without health insurance, pensions or other social safety nets—and widening the already gargantuan gap between rich and poor. People in desperate economic straits may take even greater risks to get past tighter U.S. border controls, says Rick Jones, deputy regional director of Catholic Relief Services, making them more likely to fall prey to human traffickers. Drug smuggling, migrant smuggling and human trafficking have converged under the control of the same cartels, Jones said, making the migration gamble even more dangerous. Drug-related corruption and violence are on the rise in the region as a result, especially in Central America and Mexico, but also in countries like Peru, at a time when governments are likely to have fewer resources to combat them. These fac-



A remittance office in Honduras



tors should pressure the administration of President Barack Obama to review its approach to combating illegal drugs, said Michael Shifter.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

## Obama, Blair Discuss Faith

President Barack Obama and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair struck similar themes in remarks to the National Prayer Breakfast Feb. 5, noting that all of the world's major religions share a core principle of caring for others. President Obama said, "No matter what we choose to believe, let us remember that there is no religion whose central tenet is hate.... There is no God who condones taking the life

of an innocent human being. This much we know."

Tony Blair, who became a Roman Catholic in June 2007, made similar observations while noting that "religion is under attack from without and from within. From within it is corroded by extremists who use their faith as a means of excluding the other...[saying] if you do not believe as I believe, you are a lesser human being. From without, religious faith is assailed by an increasingly aggressive secularism, which derides faith as contrary to reason and defines faith by conflict." "Thus do the extreme believers and the aggressive nonbelievers come together in unholy alliance."

Both Mr. Blair and Mr. Obama spoke of how their experiences with people of faith helped inspire their own search for God. Blair explained how a teacher knelt and prayed with him as he worried about his ailing father. "Now my father was a militant atheist," he said. "Before we prayed, I thought I should confess this. 'I'm afraid my father doesn't believe in God,' I said. 'That doesn't matter,' my teacher replied. 'God believes in him. He loves him without demanding or needing love in return.'" Mr. Blair continued: "That is what inspires, the unconditional nature of God's love. A promise perpetually kept. A covenant never broken."

For his part, Mr. Obama explained that he was not raised with strong religious traditions. "I had a father who was born a Muslim but became an atheist, grandparents

who were nonpracticing Methodists and Baptists, and a mother who was skeptical of organized religion, even as she was the kindest, most spiritual person I've ever known," the president said. "She was the one who taught me as a child to love, and to understand, and to do unto others as I would want done," he said.

President Obama explained that he became a Christian after he moved to the South Side of Chicago after college. "It happened not because of indoctrination or a sudden revelation, but because I spent month after month working with church folks who simply wanted to help neighbors who were down on their luck—no matter what they looked like, or where they came from, or who they prayed to," Obama said. "It was on those streets, in those neighborhoods, that I first heard God's spirit beckon me. It was there that I felt called to a higher purpose—his purpose," he said.

The National Prayer Breakfast is a privately organized annual event that draws participants from around the world to several days of activities. Every sitting president since Dwight Eisenhower has participated.



Tony Blair, foreground, at the National Prayer Breakfast

## Office for Faith Initiatives Created

President Barack Obama signed an executive order Feb. 5 creating a White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, which will expand upon and rework the Bush administration's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. The office's top priority, according to White House officials, will be "making community groups an integral part of our economic recovery and poverty a burden fewer have to bear when recovery is complete." The office will also focus on reducing demand for abortions, encouraging fathers to stand by their families and working with the National Security Council to "foster interfaith dialogue with leaders and scholars around the world." The president named Joshua Dubois head of the office. Dubois, a Pentecostal minister, ran Mr. Obama's religious outreach efforts during the campaign.

## Malaysian Official Warns Non-Muslims

Amid a dispute over the use of the word Allah in a Malaysian Catholic newspaper, Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, a government official, has warned non-Muslim leaders not to "challenge the sacredness of Islam." The Herald, a Catholic weekly, has been engaged in a dispute with the government over the paper's use of the word Allah in place of God in its section printed in Malay, the national language of Malaysia. The government has said that Allah refers exclusively to the god of Islam. Mr. Zahid said such problems would not arise if all parties recognize that Islam is the official religion of the country, adding that he suspects "a certain agenda" in the Herald controversy, alluding to the prohibition

## NEWS BRIEFS

The Australian Catholic Bishops said the church would lend support to families victimized by a **series of wildfires** that have left more than 180 dead in Victoria State. + A Vatican-sponsored conference on evolution scheduled for March 3-7 will include critical study of the theory of **intelligent design**, which, organizers said, represents poor theology and science. + America's Voice, an immigration reform advocacy group, said about 80 prayer vigils and other faith-based events in support of **immigration reform** had been organized for Feb. 13-22. + Michael J. Bransfield, bishop of Wheeling-Charleston, has been unanimously elected president of the **Papal Foundation**, a group dedicated to the charitable interests of the pope. + **Michel Nguyen Khac Ngu**, retired bishop of Long Xuyen, Vietnam, celebrated his 100th birthday on Feb. 2. Bishop Ngu is remembered for leading Catholics to the south of Vietnam in 1954 following the Communist victory in the north.



Helping wildfire victims in Melbourne, Australia

against non-Muslims proselytizing Muslims in the country. Bernard Dompok, a government official and a Catholic, urged the Home Affairs Ministry in January to stop "harassing" the Herald, noting that the term Allah is widely used by Christians in Indonesia and in Arab countries. The use of Allah as a name for God among Malaysian Christians became more pronounced after the importation of Indonesian bibles.

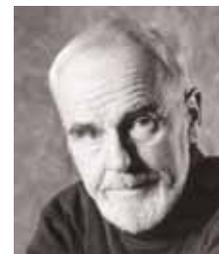
## Faith-Based Investors Apply 'Green' Index

The Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility, a leader in the corporate social responsibility movement, said Feb. 5 it would use an index measuring how "green" publicly traded corporations are in order to help it make

investment decisions and push for more eco-friendly business practices. During a conference call with reporters, the ratings of 150 companies were released by Trucost, an independent environmental data company retained by the center.

Among the companies analyzed by Trucost, the health care and insurance firm Aetna was the leader with a rating of minus 1.40. Under the evaluation method used, the lower the score, the greener the company; the higher the number, the less environmentally friendly a company is judged to be. One hundred and fourteen of the companies had "minus" rankings. The worst offender was the investment firm Goldman Sachs, with a rating of 3.21.

From CNS and other sources.



# Moral Exceptionalism

Where is Kant when we need him? In a culture that seems to have a watered-down version of John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism as its default position, personal liberty and happiness are the moral mantras.

Kant would say that happiness and utility have nothing to do with moral worth. Duty does. Kant does give high priority to liberty or personal autonomy (self-rule); but by his account such freedom may never be used to violate our fundamental duties, expressed in his great categorical imperatives. Such imperatives oblige us never to treat persons as mere means or things and always to act in such a way that our maxim could be a universal law. If it is permissible for me, it must be permissible for all.

It is this principle of universalizability that seems lost in contemporary discourse. About the only place it is practiced, at least ideally, is in sport contests—perhaps because it is only sport that we really take seriously. But in matters of the nation, the church, the economy and the world, moral exceptionalism holds sway. We seem unable to extend the rules we live by to others.

Imagine yourself a university student in Tehran. You hear from U.S. leaders that Iran must never be allowed to have nuclear weapons. This principle is posed by a country that has more nuclear weapons than the rest of the world combined and is allied with the states of Israel, India and Pakistan, all of which hold nuclear weapons. Does that compute? Might you come to distrust, even hate anyone who would hold such a personal "exception" for oneself and one's

friends? The same self-exemption applies to other countries. Is it permissible for the leaders of Gaza to operate under Israel's principle of "overwhelming force" wherein half of the 1,300 Palestinians killed were women and children? Is it permissible for Israel to use the tactics of directly targeting civilians in the same way that Hamas has done?

Or imagine yourself someone who supports women's ordination in the Catholic Church. You have seen a prominent priest excommunicated for supporting women's ordination and a religious sister, noted for her service, generosity and love for the church, similarly excommunicated with a full page of condemnation in her diocesan newspaper. Then you read that the Holy Father has lifted the excommunication of illicitly ordained bishops in the Society of Saint Pius X. This is a group in formal schism, insisting that Vatican II was a handmaid to heresy and false religion. The canon law spin is that those who support women's ordination do not admit that they are wrong. But look at the letter that the superior general of the Pius X Society wrote. There is not one admission that they were wrong. In fact, it is an assertion that the church was wrong: "Catholic tradition is no longer excommunicated." This incident triggered outrage because one of the bishops denies the Holocaust. One might also be troubled by the Vatican's selectivity in the use of excommunication and reconciliation.

Our politics is a parade of exceptionalism. The Republicans are staunch in their resistance to the near trillion dollar package requested by President Obama.

Is that based on principle? Then where were their principles when so many of them joined President Bush and the Democrats in giving \$700 billion to the banking and Wall Street moguls, all without oversight or transparency? The money seems to have disappeared into thin air.

Former Senator Tom Daschle, a man to be admired in many ways, has wisely stepped away from the Health and Human Services nomination. He said he was "embarrassed and disappointed" that he failed to pay \$128,000 in taxes. Perhaps he thought that would work for him. Does it work for you when you fail to pay taxes? What is more troubling, Daschle made \$5 million in the last two years, some of it from the health care industry that he would have been overseeing.

"We will have no lobbyists," President Obama has said. But now we know there are "waivers." Daschle was only one. William Lynn, named to serve as deputy secretary of defense, was the top lobbyist for Raytheon, which made a nice \$10 billion from armament sales last year. And Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner not only failed to pay income taxes for five years; as the head of the New York region of the Federal Reserve, he was also one of those in charge of the banking crisis in which we now find ourselves mired.

"Waiver," of course, is another word for exception to the principle of "no lobbyists." Immanuel Kant would say that if you are going to announce a principle, you should follow it; and if you do not follow your principles, do not expect others to follow theirs.

We seem unable to extend the rules we live by to others.

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

WHAT BUSH DID, AND WHAT OBAMA CAN DO, TO FACE AN ARMS  
BUILDUP ON THE SUBCONTINENT

# The Fallout

BY RONALD E. POWASKI

Perhaps the most blatant example of former President George W. Bush's disregard for the effort to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons is an agreement he signed with India in July 2005 and that Congress ultimately approved on Oct. 1, 2008. The agreement, now called the U.S.-India Nuclear Cooperation Approval and Non-proliferation Enhancement Act, allows the United States to sell India civilian nuclear technology despite the fact that India, which became a nuclear weapon state in 1974, has never signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

This international accord, to which 189 states are party, requires signatory countries that do not possess nuclear weapons to refrain from acquiring them. In return, the member states that do possess nuclear weapons—the United States, Russia, China, Britain and France—promise eventually to eliminate their nuclear arsenals.

In addition, the N.P.T. requires the nuclear powers to provide assistance to the non-weapon parties, but only for the production of civilian nuclear energy. To ensure that this assistance is not diverted to military use, the treaty requires recipient states to open their nuclear facilities to inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency.

In light of the alarming vulnerability of the Indian state on display in Mumbai, and the ever-worsening relations between India and Pakistan, the campaign to prevent the buildup of nuclear arms in India takes on renewed urgency. Though economic conditions at home have been the focus of President Barack Obama's first days in office, ensuring that India does not use nuclear technology for military purposes must also be a top priority.

## India's Nuclear History

India first received nuclear assistance from the United States and Canada before the N.P.T. came into force in 1970. Although India had opened its nuclear facilities to inspection by the I.A.E.A., some of the nuclear assistance they received under the U.S. Atoms for Peace program

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was diverted to clandestine military installations. There it was used to produce nuclear weapons, the first of which was tested in 1974 under the guise of a “peaceful nuclear explosion.”

In response to India’s subterfuge, in 1978 Congress enacted the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act, which bars the United States from providing nuclear technology to countries that have not signed the N.P.T. By approving the U.S.-India nuclear agreement last October, Congress exempted India from this act. In return, India once again agreed to open its civilian nuclear facilities to inspection by the I.A.E.A, but not its eight military nuclear plants.

After Congress passed the 2008 agreement, President Bush promised that it would “strengthen our global nuclear nonproliferation efforts, protect the environment, create jobs and assist India in meeting its growing energy needs in a responsible manner.” Needless to say, the deal also would open up the energy-hungry Indian market to U.S. nuclear technology sales.

Supporters of the deal, which included then-Senator Barack Obama, predicted that it also would strengthen U.S. ties with a country that has long kept its distance from Washington, thereby offsetting China’s dominance in Asia. The Bush administration also viewed India as a potential U.S. ally against Islamic militants in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

While the arrangement may or may not strengthen the U.S.-India relationship in the long term, it certainly risked further undermining the international effort to contain the spread of nuclear weapons. By approving the nuclear agreement with India, Congress has rewarded a country that once used U.S. nuclear technology provided for strictly civilian



energy production to build nuclear weapons. And India has made the same promise again.

The message the agreement sends the world, said Senator Byron L. Dorgan, Democrat of North Dakota, is this: "You can misuse American nuclear technology and secretly develop nuclear weapons, you can build a nuclear arsenal in defiance of the United Nations resolutions, and you will be welcomed as someone exhibiting good behavior with an agreement with the United States of America.... What message does that send to others who want to join the nuclear club?"

## Who Benefits?

Iran is working diligently to become a nuclear power. Not surprisingly, the Iranians see the U.S.-India deal as a diplomatic boon, expecting that it will help them gain international approval for their own nuclear program, which many believe includes the development of a nuclear arsenal.

Pakistan also expects to benefit from the U.S.-India deal. Like India, Pakistan is a nuclear weapon state that has not signed the N.P.T. Nevertheless, Pakistan believes that the U.S.-India agreement will serve as a model for gaining international acceptance of its status as a non-N.P.T. nuclear weapon state.

**Previous page: U.S. President George W. Bush and India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at Hyderabad House in New Delhi in March 2006.**

Israel is still another non-N.P.T. nuclear weapon state that expects to profit from the U.S.-India agreement. The Israelis argue that the deal establishes a precedent for the lifting of nuclear trade restrictions imposed on their country by the Nuclear Suppliers Group, which regulates international nuclear trade. In September, buckling under pressure from the United States and other countries eager to sell India nuclear materials, the group voted to lift its restrictions on nuclear trade with that country.

Some fear that eventually Russia and China will also use the U.S.-India agreement to justify their own sales of nuclear technology to non-N.P.T. weapon states, like Pakistan and North Korea.

In short, the Bush administration punched a hole in the international nuclear nonproliferation dike by concluding the nuclear-trade deal with India. It is a hole that threatens to undermine the whole nonproliferation structure.

There is still another way the U.S.-India agreement threatens to undermine the international nuclear nonproliferation effort. Although India has promised that U.S. assistance to its civilian nuclear energy program will not benefit its nuclear weapons program, some experts believe that India could use imported nuclear fuel for its civilian reactors, thereby freeing its own domestic nuclear fuel supplies to build more nuclear weapons.

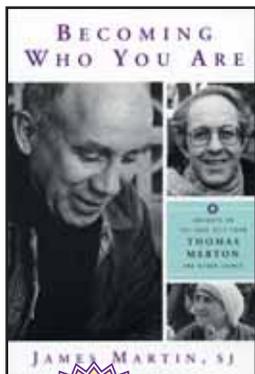
To repeat, this would not be the first time that India broke a promise to the international community concerning its nuclear activities. For years, India claimed it was using nuclear technology for civilian purposes, right up until its first nuclear weapons test in 1974. Needless to say, Pakistan and China would probably not sit by idly while India augments its nuclear arsenal. The U.S.-India agreement threatens to ignite a new and dangerous nuclear arms race in eastern Asia.

## Repairing the U.S.-India Agreement

David Albright, president of the Institute for Science and International Security, is among several nonproliferation experts who insist that additional measures are required to ensure that a real barrier exists between India's military and civilian nuclear programs. Without them, Albright believes, the agreement "could pose serious risks to the security of the United States."

One way to fix the U.S.-India nuclear deal would be to tighten the terms of the agreement that India concluded with the Nuclear Suppliers Group in September. Among the measures that have been recommended is an N.S.G. resolution stating that nuclear exports to India will be cut off automatically if the Indians again test a nuclear weapon. Another suggested measure would ban the transfer to India of sensitive nuclear technologies that can be used in the manufacture of nuclear weapons.

BY BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
**JAMES MARTIN, SJ**



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Whether or not these other measures are enacted, however, will depend to a great extent on the attitude of the new U.S. administration. Fortunately, President Obama appears to be committed to ridding the world of nuclear weapons, a commitment he personally expressed to India's Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, in a letter on Sept. 23, 2008. In fact, as a senator, Obama was responsible for adding an amendment to the U.S.-India agreement requiring India's supply of nuclear fuel to be maintained at a level "commensurate with reasonable operating requirements." The Obama amendment, in effect, would prevent India from stockpiling enough nuclear fuel to undercut a U.S. threat to re-impose sanctions if India violates any of the conditions of their agreement.

Nevertheless, the challenge a nuclear India poses for President Obama will be resolved only by bringing India fully into the nuclear nonproliferation regime. This task could be accomplished by persuading India to sign not only the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty but also the Comprehensive (Nuclear) Test Ban Treaty, as well as a yet-to-be completed international agreement cutting off the production of fissile materials—primarily plutonium-239 and, secondarily, uranium-235—for nuclear weapons.

## The U.S.-India agreement threatens to ignite a new and dangerous nuclear arms race in eastern Asia.

First, Obama will have to convince the Indians that the United States is serious about ending its own reliance on nuclear weapons, which the United States and the other weapon states promised to do when they ratified the N.P.T. One way he could display U.S. sincerity in this regard would be to resume strategic arms reduction talks with Russia, a step he promised to take.

Another way Obama could demonstrate his commitment to nuclear disarmament would be to persuade the Senate to approve the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which President Bill Clinton signed in 1996 but a Republican-controlled Senate refused to approve three years later. In addition, if there is to be a fissile material cutoff treaty, the United States will have to take the lead in bringing it about.

Obviously, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to bring India fully into the international nonproliferation regime if the United States continues to be irresolute about ending its own reliance on nuclear weapons. Yet if President Obama is as serious about ridding the world of nuclear weapons as he appears to be, he will have to tackle the U.S. nuclear weapons complex before he challenges India's. **A**

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# Happiness Examined

What can the social sciences tell us about the good life?

BY SIDNEY CALLAHAN

**T**he Declaration of Independence proclaims the pursuit of happiness to be an inalienable human right. But Thomas Jefferson might be surprised at today's expanding crowds of seekers. A host of social science researchers and allied practitioners are developing a "science of happiness." Among other projects, researchers are compiling happiness "indexes" and comparative happiness scores for countries and individuals. The new study of happiness, or subjective well-being, is a growing interdisciplinary field; college courses are offered that explore the why and wherefore of human flourishing—complete with homework assignments and happiness exercises. Any monopoly that religion or political philosophy once held as the preferred guides to Eden is over.

Outside of academia, multidisciplinary conferences offer seminars, workshops, self-help books and therapeutic programs ranging from the substantive to the suspect. Care to sign up for a series of expensive sessions guaranteed to help you achieve happiness in three months? Serious economists are also using "felicific calculi" to research and measure "utility," an economic description of happiness. Policy makers in developed and undeveloped countries are drawing on happiness research to increase the "gross national happiness" of their populations.

Such government efforts are justified in light of the ecological threats that arise when increasing consumerism is identified as a major component of happiness. Other health researchers seek alternatives because they worry about growing rates of depression or languishing. Are there not social interventions that can increase the general level of well-being that go beyond pain relief and the cure of disease?

## Defining Happiness

Researchers have worked to achieve appropriate definitions of happiness. On one level, happiness arises from surges of



positive joy—those instantaneous, intuitive emotions that seem to be hard-wired in us by evolutionary selection processes. Such moments of high emotional intensity arise, then fade, since they would be exhausting to sustain continually. Calmer experiences of happiness and satisfaction complement "peak experiences" and produce a broader sense of overall well-being. Every person will encounter negative experiences, like grief or loss, but for happy persons these are outweighed by a preponderance of positive experiences.

How relevant are moral evaluations in understanding happiness? From Plato and Aristotle to modern-day virtue theorists, the happy life has been defined as the morally good life, as judged by some larger objective standard of worth. Without a transcendent dimension or objective standard of goodness, happiness becomes completely subjective and relative. There would be no bar to accepting as happy the euphoric sadomasochist, or the manic psychotic, or an intoxicated individual.

Those in the positive psychology wing of the happiness movement find moral values and virtues essential for defining human happiness. Martin Seligman, the American founder of positive psychology and author of *Authentic*

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**SIDNEY CALLAHAN**, a frequent contributor to *America*, is the author, most recently, of *Created for Joy: A Christian View of Suffering* (Crossroad, 2007). She gratefully acknowledges research support from the Center for Study of Law and Religion at Emory University and the John Templeton Foundation.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/R. ANDRES

*Happiness*, endorses traditions of morality. Seligman and his colleagues developed a compendium of moral virtues derived from the cross-cultural and religious inheritance of humankind. His list of core virtues consists of wisdom, courage, temperance, love, justice and spirituality. The movement's aim is to recognize and enable human strengths and capacities for growth and resiliency. These positive opti-



Without an objective standard of goodness, happiness becomes completely subjective and relative.

mistic therapists are retrieving the concept of free moral agency, through which persons can develop moral character with new attitudes and behaviors. They admit that there are limits from inherited genetic temperament, but they find happiness to be more dependent on willed choices to achieve new habits than on external social circumstances.

Positive psychology advocates are faith-friendly and advocate spirituality, especially the brand of Buddhism brought to the West by the Dalai Lama. Many happiness researchers, however, show much less knowledge of Christianity. People are instructed to savor present joys, practice meditation and deepen their commitments. Practice and perseverance lead to happiness.

### **Who Is Happy?**

This recent turn to the new “science of happiness” or “subjective well-being” arises from many sources, including empirical research. Repeated cross-cultural studies, show that happy people are optimistic, realistic and socially engaged with supportive families and friends. Happy people report high levels of self-esteem, spirituality and religious faith; they are committed to transcendent meanings in their lives.

Money is of secondary importance to them, if there is enough income to meet needs and to live without shame—along with access to rest and recreation. Ironically, happy individuals find high levels of happiness without strained, conscious efforts. Forgetting the self while serving the larger goals of love and work brings happiness. When self-reported happiness data are compared across occupations, persons in helping professions are happier than other people.

Populations and groups score higher on happiness measures if they possess a cohesive culture with high levels of mutual trust, inclusiveness and democratic equality. Happy nations may be affluent or poor or in between, but their populations adhere to common moral values, even if these are not overtly or traditionally religious. Iceland, Denmark and Switzerland—three secular countries—lead the world in happiness scores. More depressed societies, at the bottom of the life-satisfaction scales, show a lack of cultural identity and meaningful purpose, even though they may be rich in, say, oil. Apathy and hopelessness come from prevailing civic corruption. Relative deprivation breeds resentment, and attitudes of envy and distrust effectively decrease a population's happiness. Here again, on the collective stage the science of happiness appears to confirm the importance of moral values, particularly justice, inclusiveness and mutual trust.

Another crucial scientific foundation for the new happiness movement can be seen in evolutionary psychology and neuropsychology. These new disciplines reveal the importance of positive emotion in human functioning. Evidence is accruing that altruistic acts provide positive emotional rewards to the altruist. Moreover, positive emotions of love, empathy, attachment and religious faith are universally found to increase physical health, longevity and mental functioning. Joy and happiness, cooperation, forgiveness and trust, which have contributed to human survival over the evolutionary past, are now regarded as essential to human flourishing. Of course, negative emotions like fear, envy and anger remain omnipresent and potent in human groups, but there is new recognition of the importance of the universal positive characteristics of humankind.

Again and again empirical studies find most people in the world are fairly happy, with the obvious exception of the clinically depressed, the impoverished and those caught up in civil wars or natural disasters. When it comes to happiness, it seems that income, gender, age and class matter less than personal attitudes and cultural cohesion.

### **A Religious Critique**

In the newly emerging happiness boom there is plenty of room for secular and religious critiques. Should the happiness business be dismissed as just the latest self-help fad? Perhaps the “happiologists” deserve this disdainful British comment, “We don't do happiness here.” But then, intellectuals are often aller-

gic to self-help programs, seeing them as either simple-minded or fraudulent hokum. Influential Western “happiness pessimists” have shaped cultural elites. Think of Freud or Sartre as instances of secular skeptics, and recall religious giants like Augustine, Calvin and Pascal. The latter thought humanity was doomed to sin, sadness and misery.

Current secular critics will doubt whether happiness researchers have been able to avoid the problems of self-report, self-deception, response bias and social framing effects. Are the results and experimental interventions of happiness research reliable or valid by standard scientific norms?

In evaluating the psychological intervention strategies for individuals, skeptics will question the degree to which people can carry out the required self-assessments and then muster the effort of will necessary to achieve positive new habits of mind, emotion and behavior. If the subjects do achieve measured change, will the improvements be sustained without group or institutional support? Moreover, a self-help focus on individual personal happiness can also slight the problem of empathetic responses to others’ unhappiness. Social contagion is always a factor in our hyper-social human species.

Other psychologists will wonder whether the happiness therapists give enough weight to nonconscious elements of personality that may sabotage rational, intentional efforts to change one’s behavior. Does everyone want to be happy? There may be deep entrapping sources of unhappiness that cannot be overcome without an intense interpersonal relationship with another, or with supportive others in a group. To be transformed, persons may need to experience therapeutic empathy, love and altruism from permanent fellow players. The detachment necessary to achieve self-control and mastery in such interventions may not be possible for most people.

A moral and religious evaluation of the evolving happiness enterprise will be an ongoing project. So far the moral theological underpinnings of the positive psychology movement have been unsystematic and full of ad hoc rationales. The empirical sources of the categories of virtues and strengths result in theoretical looseness. After all, the researchers are psychological innovators, not trained philosophers, ethicists or theologians taking care to avoid inconsistencies or syncretism. Yet the emphasis on individual moral agency and effective acquisition of virtues as habits is promising. Happiness programs can seem to resemble a secularized, stripped-down version of traditional virtue ethics.

Happiness exercises embody familiar Christian spiritual practices such as encouraging love, gratitude, hope, kindness, forgiveness, tolerance, commitment, perseverance and good works. A Catholic reading some “how to be happy”

books might ask whether any fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit have been left out?

And here we come to the theological crux of the matter. Is it possible to become positively transformed and virtuously happy without being empowered by God’s Holy Spirit given in, with and through Christ? Happiness and joy are promised to the virtuous followers of God’s precepts and to those who become Christ’s disciples through faith. But does

happiness seen as our loving relationship with God make other ways to happiness impossible, invalid or incomplete?

Traditional Christian pessimists maintain that only those who worship the Lord and explicitly affirm Christ as lord

and savior will find joy in this world and eternal happiness in the next. Augustine argued that the philosophers of his day could not confer full happiness because they could not empower the will of fallen humankind or give assurance of the conquest of death through Christ’s resurrection. Therefore all hearts are restless and sad until they rest in God. Full and eternal happiness can be found only in Christian faith.

More optimistic believers, however, will think it possible that nonbelievers or adherents of other faiths can be happy, even if they do not now possess the fullness of joy that Christ bestows. This argument is based on the trust that God is present in all things; the Holy Spirit works always and everywhere—albeit anonymously. Has not the promise been given: “A bruised reed he will not break or a flickering wick extinguish.” In my judgment the emerging psychosocial movements toward human happiness are valuable and should be encouraged. A critical Christian dialogue with psychology is long overdue, and happiness is a good place to begin. 

#### ON THE WEB

From the archives, Sidney Callahan on Mary and the feminist movement.  
[americamagazine.org/pages](http://americamagazine.org/pages)

#### Read All About It

*Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*, by Martin E. P. Seligman (Free Press, 2002)

*The How of Happiness: A Scientific Approach to Getting the Life You Want*, by Sonja Lyubomirsky (The Penguin Press, 2007)

*The Geography of Bliss: One Grump’s Search for the Happiest Places in the World*, by Eric Weiner (HachetteBookGroup, 2008)

*Why Good Things Happen to Good People: The Exciting New Research That Proves the Link Between Doing Good and Living a Longer, Healthier, Happier Life*, by Stephen Post and Jill Neimark (Broadway Books, 2007)

See also Web sites of the World Database of Happiness or the new Journal of Happiness Studies.

# A Sorrowful Joy

The first in a series for Lent

BY JAMES MARTIN

**T**he Gospel reading for Ash Wednesday, taken from the Gospel of Matthew (6:1-6, 16-18), includes these lines: “When you fast, see to it that you groom your hair and wash your face. In that way no one can see you are fasting but your Father, who is hidden....”

What do Catholics do every year in response? They approach the altar to have their foreheads dirtied with a black smudge, more or less guaranteeing that everyone “can see.” Non-Catholic observers may find this paradoxical. But this is only one of several paradoxes surrounding the day that marks the beginning of Lent, which this year falls on Feb. 25.

The celebration (Dies Cinerum, “Day of Ashes”) appears in the earliest existing copies of the Gregorian Sacramentary, dating from the eighth century. But the Christian practice of applying ashes is much older; fourth-century penitents donned sackcloth and were publicly dusted with ashes to show their repentance, as sanctioned by the Old Testament.

Traditionally, the ashes distributed are made by burning the leftover palms from Palm Sunday of the previous year. The remains are then pulverized to make the dense, slightly oily powder that even the most lapsed of Catholics readily associate with Lent.

Paradoxically, many disparage rather than celebrate some Catholics who attend Mass or receive ashes on the day. “CAPE Catholics” is a term for those

who appear in churches only on Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Palm Sunday and Easter. “A&P Catholics” attend on Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday. Both terms are humorous but faintly derisive.

The long lines outside churches show that sacramentals speak to many people in ways that it would be foolish to ignore. Rather than looking askance at CAPE Catholics, one might ask: What calls so clearly to those whose regular practice of the faith has waned? Is it the earthy symbolism of ashes? Is it the public identification with the church? More simply, is the desire for conversion something to be revered, not mocked, and something upon which parishes can build creatively?

Ash Wednesday, then, is a day with a surprising Gospel reading and a controverted reputation. It highlights the paradoxes not only of our faith (we die to live; in weakness we are strong) but also of the season that we are about to enter.

Lent is a time of penance, but not just penance. The Second Vatican Council’s “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy” spoke of the twofold character of this liturgical season: it “recalls baptism or prepares for it,” and it “stresses a penitential spirit.” Catechumens, preparing for baptism, joyfully anticipate the Easter Triduum, as do the rest of us. Paradoxically, this sorrowful season is also about desire and hope.

Another paradox is that the approach to this season of traditions has recently moved in some refreshing-

ly untraditional directions. Whereas in the past many Catholics were encouraged to “give something up,” more common today are invitations to “do something positive.” And while many past exhortations focused on individual sin, Vatican II underlined



the idea of “social sin.” Where, for example, do you participate in structures that perpetuate sinful practices? Perhaps instead of giving up chocolate, you could help your company pay a fairer wage.

A final paradox of Lent: Christ is risen. As with Advent, when it can seem odd to pretend that baby Jesus has not yet arrived (Keep him out of that crèche!), it may be disconcerting to hear homilies that make it seem as though Jesus has not yet been crucified, died and risen from the dead.

Nonetheless, it is important to enter into his story once again. While Jesus Christ has undergone his passion, death and resurrection, his story takes place in our lives every day. We are called to take up our crosses, to die to ourselves, to search for signs of the resurrection in our lives and, paradoxically, to remember the story that we are still living. 

**JAMES MARTIN, S.J.**, is culture editor of *America* and editor of *Awake My Soul: Contemporary Catholics on Traditional Devotions* (Loyola Press).

# In Praise of Winter

BY STEPHEN MARTIN

**M**y chapped and bleeding knuckles are the first sign that maybe he is right. “Cold days and nights make prayer easier,” James Martin, S.J., once wrote. It was a passing sentence in a column not at all about the weather. But those words came to me as I glanced down at my hand, surprised by the smears of red across two leathery fingers.

As always, my hands tell the story of the season: calloused from digging in the spring, speckled with poison ivy in the summer, now cracked and creased like an old man’s. Prayer has never been particularly easy for me. But when I do pray, it is with these hands. Winter is the only time I do not take them for granted. They sting and they ache just enough to be noticed. They heal just enough to turn raw again. The days and the weeks creep along. The cold toys with my patience. The cold keeps me wide awake. Discomfort and alertness: they make prayer possible.

## Praising God in Ordinary Things

The desert fathers worshiped in the scorching heat of the midday sun. But I am most drawn to believers who found God in the freezing cold. Take Brother Lawrence. I had washed a lot of dishes and cooked a lot of pasta and never seen a dime’s worth of value in any of it, until I read *The Practice of the Presence of God*. “Lord of all pots and pans and things,” wrote this obscure

cook in a 17th-century French monastery, “make me a saint by getting meals and washing up the plates.”

Brother Lawrence writes about praising God with every motion. It is a simple premise, and it has been changing lives for nearly 400 years. Prayer, he concluded, did not need to be so hard. We should just do what we have to do anyway and think of God as we are doing it. “We can do little things for God,” he said. “It is enough for me to pick up but a straw from the ground for the love of God.”

There was a time when Brother Lawrence was just like you or me—an ordinary Catholic trying his best. Then one cold day he spotted a bare tree and could not stop staring at it. He thought about how dead it looked then, about how it would miraculously bloom with life when spring arrived. The knowledge overwhelmed him; it made him a believer. We have his book as proof. Here is another fact: without winter, we would have none of this.

## With God in Russia

Without the ripping, roaring winds of the Arctic, we would not have Walter Ciszek, S.J. Without Ciszek, we would not have *He Ledeth Me*. This is a rather obscure book with a clunky title. It is also the best how-to manual on prayer I have ever read. Ciszek, an

American Jesuit priest, was captured by the Russians during World War II and fingered as a spy. He endured 23 years of confinement in the Soviet Union—most of it in the brutal gulags of Siberia—before he was abruptly shipped back to the United States in 1963. Bleeding fingers were the least



of his problems. “Frostbite and stomach rumblings, swollen feet, running eyes, chapped lips and battered knuckles, sprains and cramps, and aches and bruises—all these the body patiently endured through the long, long days of labor in the driving snow or freezing rain or spring muck of the Far North,” Ciszek wrote of his experience in Russia.

This, in a nutshell, is what he learned from those hellish years: “God’s will was not hidden somewhere ‘out there’ in the situations in which I found myself; the situations themselves were his will for me. What he wanted for me was to accept these situations as from his hands, to let go of

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STEPHEN MARTIN has written for *Commonweal* and *U.S. News & World Report*. He lives in Greensboro, N.C.

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the reins and place myself entirely at his disposal." Doing that, Ciszek acknowledges, is excruciatingly tough: "What this means, in practice, is spelled out as always by the poor old body. It means getting up each morning and going to bed exhausted. It means the routine, not the spectacular. It can mean drudgery, pain, putting aside pleasures, happiness, or the love the human heart craves until another time, so that what is necessary at the moment can be done."

### Breathing Thanks

Winter helped make a saint of Walter Ciszek. Maybe it can help me, too. My life in suburbia is free of gulags and firing squads. Yet I do know a little about snow and sleet and slicing winds. I know they call me back to my poor old body like no other season can. Winter sends illnesses that make my throat throb and my arms and legs shake. It chases me from my car to my office and back again, head bowed, shoulders bunched. It hammers home what is out of my hands, rudely reminds me that I have hands at all.

Come late October, when the temperature drops below freezing and it is pitch black at 6 a.m., I used to suspend my early morning outdoor jogs. The treadmill in my cozy house seemed so much more appealing. I mentioned this one day to my boss, an avid runner and retired U.S. Navy admiral. In his estimation, I was a pansy. "I lived in upstate New York and that never stopped me! Just put on a jogging suit and go!" he proclaimed. So now I do. My favorite moment always comes at the end, after three miles on the roads. I am walking up the driveway toward the back door, gloved hands on my hips, looking into the woods behind my house. Everything is cold and clean and still. I stop for a moment at the back gate to take it all in. I exhale, and my breath swirls up toward the trees. It is possible to thank God without even trying. A

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# BOOKS & CULTURE

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## SAN FRANCISCO GIANT

*Gus Van Sant's 'Milk'*

Two minutes into director Gus Van Sant's moving account of the life and death of Harvey Milk, the gay activist turned politician, Sean Penn, in an amazingly accurate portrayal of the man, begins to tape-record a message that he says, "is only to be played in the event of my assassination." "I fully realize," he says, "that a person who stands for what I stand for makes himself a target." The tape was made on Nov. 18, 1978. Nine days later, Milk's prediction came true. Along with Mayor George Moscone, Milk was shot and killed by Dan White, who had been elected at the

same time as Harvey Milk to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

Using newsreel footage from the day of the shooting, Van Sant shows Dianne Feinstein, then the president of the Board of Supervisors, announcing the killing. The film uses similar news coverage from the period, enhancing the authenticity of the story, which has also been fully documented in Randy Shilts's book, *The Mayor of Castro Street* (1982). The film also gains accuracy by its similarity to the Academy-Award-winning documentary "The Times of Harvey Milk" (1984), which provided copious

footage and a full account of his political career, his death and the reaction of the gay community and others at the time. Adding to the film's realistic feel is the use of over-saturated color and dark shadows to evoke the urban realism of "Taxi Driver," "Kluge," "The French Connection" and other films of the 1970s, such that one is sometimes unsure whether the shots of street life in the Castro District are taken from archival footage or have been re-created by Van Sant.

While the narrative often delves into Milk's personal and sexual life, the film focuses on his arduous rise to political power in San Francisco. Beginning as an advocate for the rights of the gay community in his neighborhood, Milk evolves into a representative of many other neglected groups,



PHOTO: ONISFOCUS

Sean Penn, center, in "Milk"

like the elderly and members of labor unions; he wins over others to his support by his bold rhetoric and self-deprecating wit. Open about his sexual orientation but aware of many people's discomfort with his lifestyle, he develops a teasing opening line for his speeches: "I'm Harvey Milk, and I'm here to recruit you." His greatest victory comes in early 1978 when he leads a campaign against Proposition 6, a ballot initiative that would have mandated the firing of homosexuals, and anyone who supported them, from teaching jobs in California.

The film documents the strength of support for the measure with footage of anti-gay-rights celebrity Anita Bryant speaking for the measure on national television and Walter Cronkite, Tom Brokaw and others reporting on the success of similar measures in many other municipalities across the country. Despite such moves elsewhere, and against all expectations and predictions,

Proposition 6 is defeated and Harvey Milk emerges as a political force to be reckoned with. As the film's Milk says to Mayor Moscone: "A homosexual with power. That's scary."

Indeed, his success and influence pose a threat to Dan White, a retired police officer and, to all appearances, a clean-cut Irish Catholic family man, who feels intimidated by his fellow supervisor's political popularity and media coverage. Eventually White begins to suspect that Milk has betrayed him in political maneuvering. Josh Brolin's low-key but occasionally creepy portrayal perfectly conveys White's frustration, confusion and anger, making this man's story almost as fascinating as Milk's and hinting at a dark labyrinth of motives that drove White to commit murder in broad daylight in the City Hall.

**ON THE WEB**  
A discussion of this year's Oscar nominees  
[americamagazine.org/podcast](http://americamagazine.org/podcast)

The film presents Milk's life and brutal death as another all-too-familiar story of someone who dares publicly to challenge the status quo and to battle the ingrained fears and prejudices of his time, which leads to an almost inevitable conclusion of martyrdom for one's cause. Yet it also vividly documents the overarching message of hope that Milk proclaimed, even on several occasions when he encounters political

defeat or witnesses anti-gay violence on the part of the San Francisco police and others. When the inhabitants of the Castro neighborhood in 1977 threaten to riot after hearing that a gay-rights ordinance has been defeated in Anita Bryant's Dade County, Fla., Milk grabs a bull-horn and shouts, "I know you're angry! I'm angry!" He leads them in a march to the steps of City Hall. In his speech from the steps, he declares, "Anita Bryant did not win tonight. Anita Bryant brought us together." He speaks of the need to "create a national gay force." He then refers to "the young people...who are hearing her on television telling them they are sick, telling them that they are wrong, that there is no place in this great country for them.... I say, 'We must give them hope.'"

"You gotta give them hope" becomes the slogan of Milk's subsequent political and social battles, framing the gay community's struggle for equal rights firmly within the tradition of the American promise of freedom and opportunity. At one rally in 1978, describing the struggle as "a fight to preserve your democracy," he repeats Jefferson's declaration that "all men are created equal" and Emma Lazarus's words about the "huddled masses yearning to breathe free," concluding, "No matter how hard you try, you can never erase those words from the Declaration of Independence...or the Statue of Liberty." Appropriating even

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the conservative mantra of the times to his own purposes, he concludes, "That's what America is. Love it or leave it." His crusade is ultimately about freedom and hope for everyone.

Meeting the challenge of portraying a man whose physical appearance and speech patterns have been fully documented, Sean Penn departs completely from the brooding, macho persona he projected in "Dead Man Walking," "Mystic River" and other films. Instead he assumes Milk's high-pitched voice and sometimes fey gestures and mannerisms as a gawky, self-conscious and occasionally flamboyant crusader while revealing an inner life that alternates between anger and grief, defiance and celebration, paranoia and hopefulness. It is a complex

portrait of one extraordinary man who, in life and in death, offered hope to millions of men and women.

"Milk" is likely to enter the ranks of the few outstanding films that have chronicled the life—and often the death—of history's heroes, everyone from Mahatma Gandhi and St. Thomas More to Erin Brockovich, Karen Silkwood and the freedom riders of Mississippi. Thanks to the film's director, Gus Van Sant, its screenwriter, Dustin Lance Black, and most of all to the extraordinary artist Sean Penn, the story of Harvey Milk is likely to inspire hope, understanding and courage for many generations to come.

**MICHAEL V. TUETH, S.J.**, is a professor of communication and media studies at Fordham University in New York City.



Dev Patel and Anil Kapoor in "Slumdog Millionaire"

## RICHARD LEONARD CASHING IN

### *Danny Boyle's 'Slumdog Millionaire'*

It comes as a surprise to some people to discover that the Hollywood film industry is not the biggest in the world. Since 2004 Bollywood holds that title. Centered around Mumbai (Bombay), this film community produces more than 1,000 films a year, with worldwide ticket sales of over three billion. Hollywood, on the other

hand, produces around 500 films a year, with a worldwide audience of 2.6 billion. This is where the comparisons that favor the subcontinent end, however. In terms of revenue and cultural influence, Hollywood seems almost unassailable.

Indian films are an acquired taste. Most Westerners have neither the

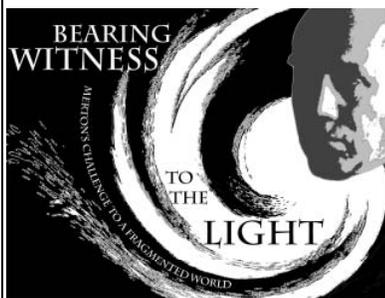
background nor the patience to develop their palate for them. So what Bollywood has been searching for in recent years is a crossover film.

"Salaam Bombay" (1988), "Mississippi Masala" (1991), "Monsoon Wedding" (2001) and "Bend It Like Beckham" (2002) proved that there was a Western audience for an Indian story, albeit an expatriate one. But, made for \$10 million and with a worldwide gross of nearly \$100 million so far, "Slumdog Millionaire" is the film that mirrors best the voracious Western appetite for Indian literature. It helps, of course, that it has been nominated for and has won several prestigious international film awards, including 10 Oscar nominations. Referring to social welfare programs in a number of cities in India, the film's producer, Christian Colson, said, "A portion of the box-office proceeds will be donated to the Slum Welfare." Within the year I would like to know who has seen the loot and how much they received. And I hope the real slum dwellers were not just extras.

I was distinctly uncomfortable watching what is supposed to be a feel-good film. Why? First the story.

Set in Mumbai, India's most populous city, "Slumdog Millionaire" offers insight into the complexity of modern India, with its simmering religious tensions and social inequities. It begins in a windowless room in a police station, or perhaps a military headquarters, where Jamal Malik (Dev Patel), a slightly built 18-year-old slum dweller, is being slapped and tortured by waterboard by two men in uniform. The attack on Jamal that confronts the viewer is disorienting. Who are these men? What do they want to know? What is Jamal's crime that he is being tortured in this way?

Jamal, it turns out, is one answer away from winning 20 million rupees (US \$415,000) on India's phenomenally popular television



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quiz show, "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" But neither the quiz show host, Prem Kumar (Anil Kapoor), who is responsible for Jamal's arrest, nor the police inspector (Irrfan Kahn) who supervises the torture is prepared to believe that Jamal has won his money fairly. How could a lowly slumdog win millions of rupees without cheating?

The answer is contained in the film's structure, in which each of the 12 multiple-choice questions answered correctly by Jamal becomes the occasion for a series of flashbacks that tell the story of Jamal's short but extraordinary life and the key moments that have brought him to where he is now.

Jamal (played by three different actors at ages 7, 13 and 18) and his older brother Salim (Madhur Mittal) are Muslim street urchins who scavenge the mountainous rubbish dumps and steal in the streets to support their meager existence, finding joy in evading the police, who search the canals, markets and rooftops for them on mopeds and on foot.

The two brothers are very different. Jamal is openhearted and dreamy, not street-savvy like Salim, who subordinates his better self to the needs of survival. Sometimes they attend school. But when their mother is killed by religious fanatics who raid their shantytown, the boys are forced onto the streets to live by their wits. There Jamal befriends an orphaned girl, Latika (Freida Pinto), whom he cares for and later comes to love.

Like Dumas's three musketeers, the children are one for all and all for one. But this is tested when they are inveigled into joining a predatory, Fagin-like gang of soulless thieves. Only Salim's quick thinking saves them.

Salim becomes hardened by what he has seen, and he hungers for wealth and power. As they grow older, conflict and rivalry between the two brothers leads to betrayal, and Jamal

becomes separated from both Latika and Salim. Like Orpheus searching for Eurydice, Jamal finds Latika only to lose her again, this time apparently forever. In defiance of fate—or perhaps in pursuit of it—Jamal tries his luck on India's most watched television show, in search of a miracle.

In this adaptation to the screen, by Simon Beaufoy ("The Full Monty"), from Vikas Swarup's novel *Q&A*, the cinematographer Anthony Dod Mantle ("Dogville," "The Last King of Scotland") plunges the viewer into a depiction of modern India that is stylistically novel. Mantle's camera zooms in and out, creating mosaics of faces and places. But the emphasis is on the unfolding drama, moving backward and forward in time, grounded excitingly in cutting-edge photorealism, farce and fable.

This is Danny Boyle's best film since "Trainspotting"; it marries the conventions of music video clips with the best of modern Indian cinema. During the end credits we even have the obligatory Indian dance sequence.

There are two major problems with "Slumdog Millionaire." The first is the conceit of the story. I could never properly relax into a tale about a boy who can barely read moving through the rounds of a quiz show because almost every question plays into an experience out of his incredibly tragic past. I like my fantasy served straight up. And the narrative structure is too episodic, cutting between the torture scenes, the quiz show and Jamal's life story.

While it is visually transfixing and often emotionally powerful, I found the film too busy. Some of the dialogue in English is not easy to understand, which matters in a crossover piece.

My most serious concern, however, is the way in which the deprivation in Jamal's life is presented as entertainment. Elements within "Slumdog Millionaire" made me feel as I were watching "poverty pornography." I use

the term pornography here in its strictest sense. Derived from the Greek *porni* (prostitute) and *graphein* (to write), it originally referred to the description of a sex act with a prostitute. The word prostitution itself has come to mean the giving of one's time and talent to a demeaning activity. Danny Boyle visually describes the tragedy of the Indian underclass, the rapaciousness of the Mumbai underworld and the brutality of the Indian police force without any moral voice stating how evil all this is within the story.

Boyle has been stung by such criticism. "Slumdog Millionaire" is not a documentary," explains Boyle, adding that it "should be seen as a film which

salutes Mumbai's breathtaking resilience, a city in which poverty is never seen as a curse and the poor hardly ever resent it." Neither reason can justify the human tragedy we see on the screen, especially in a country whose economy has grown so dramatically in the last 20 years.

Social inequity and humiliating poverty should be a springboard for all countries to have a good, long, hard look at the world we have created, not something to which we dance along at the end.

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**RICHARD LEONARD, S.J.**, is the director of the Australian Catholic Office for Film & Broadcasting and the author of *Movies That Matter: Reading Film Through the Lens of Faith* (Loyola Press).

**BOOKS** | RICHARD M. GULA

## THREE-PART HARMONY

### WHY GO TO CHURCH?

#### The Drama of the Eucharist

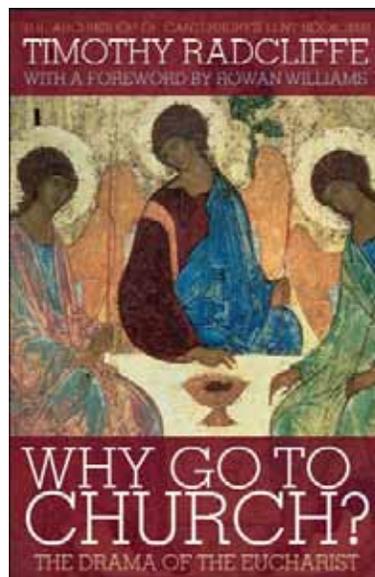
By Timothy Radcliffe  
Continuum. 224p \$16.95 (paperback)  
ISBN 9780826499561

Is there a reason beyond obligation for going to church? For Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., former master general of the Dominican order, we go to church to receive a gift—a share in God's life through faith, hope and love; and to be sent forth to live by what we have received.

The major thesis of this book is that the Eucharist enacts the drama of what it means to be alive, for the dramatic structure of the Eucharist is the fundamental pattern of every human life searching for God. A sub-

text of this thesis is that participating in the Eucharist forms us as a people who believe, hope and love and so transforms the way we see the world and belong to each other. The spiritual practice of going to church, Radcliffe maintains, works on us so quietly and gradually that we might think nothing is happening to us at the Eucharist.

To illustrate his thesis, Radcliffe divides the eucharistic drama into three acts. Act I, from the confession of sins to the prayers of intercession, expresses our faith: Through faith we know the goal of human life—namely, happiness with God. Act II, from the preparation of gifts to the end of the eucharistic prayer, gives us hope to reach this goal. In Act III, from the Our Father onward, our



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hope culminates in our loving communion with God and with one another.

The book's literary form is hard to nail down. The author does not develop his thesis in the form of a discursive argument that would lay out a theology of the Eucharist, though he treats various interpretations of the meaning of the Eucharist. Nor is this book an exercise in apologetics that would appeal to those who lack a fundamental commitment to the Eucharist and do not go to church. Radcliffe writes as a believer, for believers. This is especially evident in the way he uses various biblical stories to explain what believers do and think about the various parts of the Mass. Liturgists will not find here any commentary on the parts of the Mass, though the reflections on the confession of sins, the homily and the greeting of peace, for example, certainly inspire creative thinking on how to express the spirit of these parts.

*Why Go to Church?* is a mix of Eucharistic theology, commentary and spiritual reflection stimulated by the various parts of the Mass. Overall, it is more an extended meditation than a theological treatise. It shows the subtle art of a seasoned preacher who knows how to invite his audience into the happenings of grace by telling a story, reciting a poem, relating an experience or making a point with humor or a well-chosen quote. In this way, the book shows that those who may have a problem with going to church may really be facing a crisis in their language of faith. When we try to talk about God, where do we find the right words that are neither sentimental nor moralistic? Radcliffe finds them less in the words of classic theology and more in the words of modern novels, films and poetry.

The subtext of this book, that participating in the Eucharist is transformative, requires a note of caution: there is no guarantee that if we go to church we will acquire the virtues of

the eucharistic drama. If we claim too much for the transforming potential of going to church, we risk creating a theological version of “Field of Dreams.” In the film by this title, the motivation to build the baseball field is the advice, “If you build it, they will come.” The theological version would be, “If you go to church, you will be transformed.”

But the link is not so automatic. The connections between the Eucharist and the virtuous life are complex, not simple. While participating in the Eucharist may give us a new way of seeing the world (a theme that Radcliffe repeats frequently), it takes the habit of moral practice to implement our new vision. Spiritual practices are not the way to acquire virtue. Graham Greene’s novel *A Burnt-Out Case* provides a good example of how our moral practices can outrun our spiritual ones. In Greene’s story, Querry, who has not been to Mass for more than 20 years, and Dr. Colin, who has lost his faith in any God the priests and sisters who run the leprosarium would be able to rec-

ognize, are the greater moral models of humility and unselfishness. We misunderstand our freedom and our finitude, along with the multiple influences on our character, if we think that there is an easy and sure connection between going to church and being virtuous.

Given this caution, Radcliffe’s meditation on the Eucharist can be inspiring reading for preachers and teachers. His interpretations of the confession of sins, intercessory prayers, the role of the doctrines in the Creed, the eucharistic prayer, the sign of peace and the dismissal inform a eucharistic spirituality that can nourish moral conversion by giving us not only a new way of seeing the world but also a new way of being in the world. The great difference between the vision of life enacted in the Eucharist and what we experience in life tells us how much we are in need of conversion personally, socially and institutionally.

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**RICHARD M. GULA, S.S.**, is professor of moral theology at the Franciscan School of Theology, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, Calif.

EMILIE GRIFFIN

## THE QUEST FOR CERTITUDE

### HELP MY UNBELIEF

By William J. O’Malley  
Orbis. 152p \$15 (paperback)  
ISBN 978-1570758034

This peppery work of apologetics is brief but covers a lot of ground. William O’Malley, S.J., is shaped by 40 years of teaching at the high school and college level and currently teaches at Fordham Preparatory School in New York City. His approach reminds me of C. S. Lewis’s observation that all the great questions are raised before the age of 14. And the author does deal with the great questions of faith. But unlike Thomas Aquinas, he does not attack them exclusively through

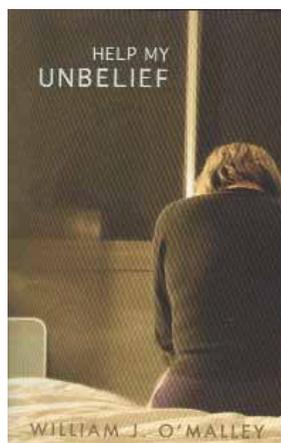
pure reason, or even head-on.

*Help My Unbelief* seems to acknowledge the impoverishment of today’s catechesis, in which answers are handed down from on high with a view to forming new generations of Catholics. O’Malley questions the effectiveness and teaching power of the updated catechism and accompanying directives from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on how to transmit Catholic teaching to those of high school age. What he is apparently

advocating is a real, on-the-ground wrestling with the most fundamental religious questions. This, he says, is how genuine conversion happens. Obviously the catechism does not preclude this, but it takes a good teacher and genuine tussling with issues to help doubters over their hurdles and into belief.

Though the author’s insights are likely born of classroom experience, they apply across the generations. There is the question, for example, of biblical disenchantment. What happens when we begin to fear that biblical stories are simply “made-up stories”? This is a doubt that may afflict us at any age. In order to deal with it, O’Malley begins from the doubter’s angle, pointing out problems in the biblical narratives: the Magi are mentioned in just one Gospel and are probably symbolic; Thomas probably would not have said, “My Lord and my God!” because that was an understanding of the later community. He takes the view that Jesus and Peter probably did not walk on water but that the story serves to give meaning to Peter’s actual crucifixion, the full and final sign of his conversion. “That,” O’Malley writes, “is a real miracle.” His discussion offers us ways to move beyond literal interpretation of texts.

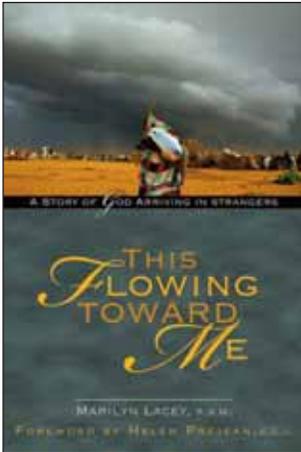
In one of the most engaging parts of the book O’Malley first acknowledges the authenticity of non-Catholic Christianity. He also recognizes the many flaws of the Roman church, although he states clearly from the outset his commitment as a Roman Catholic—and the reasons why. First, “The Roman Catholic Church seems to be the original from which the others branched.” Second, “The pope is, for me, a father who unites all disparate views with a reassuringly single voice



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and direction." He clearly is comfortable with papal authority. And third, "A critical issue for me is the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament." Oddly, he finds his faith confirmed by the fact that both Martin Luther and Henry VIII believed this teaching, too. Finally, though he has been born into the faith and some of his comfort level is cultural, he describes a deep friendship that has developed between him and God.

From this vantage point, as a loyal son of the church, O'Malley explores some areas of real difficulty for modern believers, especially Americans. One is that many American Catholics have difficulty with *Humanae Vitae* and most specifically its teaching on artificial birth control. In reflecting on this question, O'Malley makes clear how and why a large number of American Catholics have come to see the question differently from the hierarchy. "In 1993 Peter Steinfels conducted a survey for *The New York Times* and found that eight out of ten Catholics disagreed with the statement, 'using artificial means of birth control is wrong'; nine out of ten said that 'someone who practices artificial birth control can still be a good Catholic.'" Other surveys suggest that 75 percent (even 80 percent) of American Catholics use artificial birth control.

I have been aware of these figures for a long time, but I am still not sure what they mean. O'Malley seems to be arguing for the virtue of latitude and the primacy of conscience, though he does not do it in so many words. Instead he quotes *Gaudium et Spes* (1965): "The parents themselves and no one else should ultimately make this decision in the sight of God." I found myself marveling that couples who cannot strictly follow the teaching had mostly remained within the Roman Catholic fold.

The book ends with two sharp discussions of major challenges to

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Christian and Catholic belief. One chapter is on science, and deals with the kinds of taunts often hurled by Richard Dawkins and his crowd. But within this chapter the author admits to regretting at least one argument he has offered in previous books. When his earlier conviction turns out to be false, that the human eye (a splendid thing) could not have been the product of evolution, he is embarrassed by his overconfidence and says so. "Foolish. Neither avid creationist...nor defender of intelligent design, zealous to insert God at every chancy juncture, I was just confidently ignorant." Father O'Malley's

#### ON THE WEB

A selection of America articles  
by William J. O'Malley, S.J.  
[americamagazine.org/pages](http://americamagazine.org/pages)

candor is refreshing. He mentions his chagrin at learning the eye not only can evolve but has done so more than once. Arguments such as these, he seems to be saying, are not needed to sustain our belief in God.

And his last chapter, on suffering, is a winner. If you are wrestling with questions of unbelief do not hesitate to take this slender, provocative book as your guide.

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**EMILIE GRIFFIN**, of *Alexandria, La.*, writes about the spiritual life. Her latest book, a collection of 47 daily meditations for Lent, the Easter triduum and Easter Sunday, is *Small Surrenders: A Lenten Journey* (Paraclete Press).

GEORGE W. HUNT

## RESTRINGING THE HARP

### GALWAY BAY

By Mary Pat Kelly  
Grand Central. 576p \$26.99  
ISBN 9780446579001

Perhaps the stellar Shakespeare misemphasized a bit when writing, "A sad tale's best for winter." For there are other tales—like the novel *Galway Bay*, for instance—that range from the joyous and funny through the sad and on to the bittersweet, but are also meant to be read over a couple of long winter evenings in a comfy chair with a high foot rest, alongside a cup of tea or hot toddy ready at hand.

Setting aside a few winter evenings is necessary because *Galway Bay* is both a family saga and a historical epic, replete with much romance and rigor, spanning the years 1839 to 1893 in both Ireland and America. In a novel that is Irish both in sensibility and circumstance, not unexpectedly the Catholic faith provides buoyant ballast in adversity; the

humor throughout is by turns gentle or sardonic; the characters exhibit a toughness both resolute and wily, their confidence placed in pluck, not in luck.

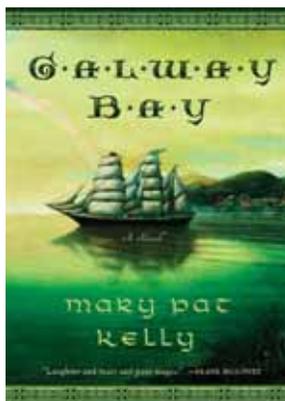
The family's saga is narrated by Honora Kelly (née Keeley), whom we first meet in 1839 as a virginal 17-year-old preparing to enter the Sisters of the Presentation community three months hence, when, as in a Celtic legend, a handsome stranger suddenly emerges from the waters of Galway Bay and wins her heart immediately. Their branch of the Keeley-Kelly trees takes bud soon after.

As in all family histories, the characters are humanly universal and yet diverse individuals, as is the succession of events in their lives: first love, marriage, childbirths, first home, success

and contentment, followed by horrific intrusions: the Great Famine of 1845-8, the shocking deaths of family and friends, the desperate voyage to "Amerikay," arrival in an unwelcoming Chicago, the American Civil War, the Irish Fenians' raid on Canada, and ending at the Chicago World's Fair and a visit to its ersatz Irish village exhibit, providing an ironic looping to their story. Throughout, these public events coincide in memory with the dates of those in the Catholic Church's calendar of feast days—Christmas especially but also Epiphany, the midsummer night of John the Baptist and others—thereby dramatically joining the Catholic sense of time passing with a family's own rituals and experience.

Interwoven with the "real" history of the Kellys is the history of bitter Irish memories (the invasions of Cromwell and William of Orange, the Protestant Plantation), complemented by the recalling of happier Celtic myths of ancient warriors in all their ferocious glory. But such stories of broader public scale remain subordinate to the countless stories the novel's characters tell each other by way of pointed example or moral fable. (Whenever a character begins with "Fádo"—Irish for "once upon a time"—the audience grows hushed and expectant, as does the reader.) One is reminded of the old woman from Cork who, when asked if she believed in fairies, replied tartly, "Of course not. But they're there."—itself a mini-story illustration of the Irish tilt toward skepticism and credulity simultaneously.

For Mary Pat Kelly, *Galway Bay* represents the capstone of an already distinguished career. She is a former screenwriter at Columbia and



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Paramount Pictures and associate producer at “Good Morning America” and “Saturday Night Live,” and has written five non-fiction books (two on the filmmaker Martin Scorsese) and one semi-autobiographical novel, *Special Intentions*. In an afterword, she reveals that, though fiction, this novel is the result of 35 years of research in both Ireland and the United States and, more specifically, research into her own family’s history, especially the recorded recollections of her great-great-grandmother, the original Honora Kelly.

In dire times, the Irish would encourage each other to hope for Ireland’s restoration by saying, “the Harp will be re-strung.” Mary Pat Kelly has done precisely that.

**GEORGE W. HUNT, S.J.**, former editor in chief of *America*, is the director of the *Archbishop Hughes Institute on Religion and Culture at Fordham University in New York City*.



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## LETTERS

### The Greater Good

I read with eagerness the 10 letters and memos addressed to Barack Obama ("Mister President," 1/19). I read them in the light of Ignatian spirituality, namely, the discernment not only of good things that need to be done but also of what is the "greater good" that shouts out to be done.

All the writers suggested many good things that Barack Obama might do as president, but only one mentioned the environment. None of them mentioned what is the greater good of the 21st century: stopping and reversing the diminishment and destruction of the world's life systems, systems upon which our human adventure utterly depends.

JOHN SURETTE, S.J.  
*La Grange Park, Ill.*

### The Blame Game

Your analysis of "The Roots of Terrorism" (Editorial, 1/19) offers anti-U.S. rhetoric and feel-good proposals about everyone getting along if only the United States would stop being the bully. But the United States has not cast the struggle against terrorism (as you say) "exclusively in terms of a crusade against religious fanatics." Rather, hateful world factions (religious and otherwise) are anti-American, for a variety of reasons.

A viable United Nations could and should be a counterbalance to the terrorist destabilization of societies. Unfortunately, the United Nations has lost its political force because it has become a far left-leaning entity, corrupt and therefore ineffective. Witness the debacle of the United Nations refusing to act on its own resolutions against Iraq, leaving the United States with no choice but to act.

Put your focus on the United Nations and insist on political balance and integrity there; then you will begin to see the "greater international cooperation" you hope for. Perhaps that will

allow you to move on from your constant and tiring "blame America" rhetoric.

JOHN J. VAN BECKUM  
*Brookfield, Wis.*

### Food Fight

Re Bob Peace's criticism of farm subsidies in "The Food on Our Tables" (1/19): Farm subsidies are indeed likely the single largest injustice in the world today, though very few people realize it. The program was started with good intentions (to help small farmers compete), but while subsidies help the U.S. agricultural industry, they hurt not only other countries (particularly those with agriculture-based economies) but also many other

sectors of the U.S. economy.

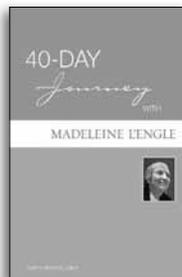
But removing subsidies will not be simple. Politicians from farm-heavy districts depend on subsidies to keep them in office. Voting against subsidies would be suicidal for any rural Midwestern politician.

More plausibly, subsidies might be gradually curbed, while leaving some support for small farms in the face of huge agribusiness. Any solution must also address the issue of the effect on food prices, which have been kept artificially low through subsidies. Eliminating them will raise food prices significantly and will disproportionately affect the poor.

EDWARD VISEL  
*Winnebago, Ill.*

To send a letter to the editor we recommend using the link that appears below articles on America's Web site, [www.americamagazine.org](http://www.americamagazine.org). This allows us to consider your letter for publication in both print and online versions of the magazine. Letters may also be sent to America's editorial office (address on page 2) or by e-mail to: [letters@americamagazine.org](mailto:letters@americamagazine.org). They should be brief and include the writer's name, postal address and daytime phone number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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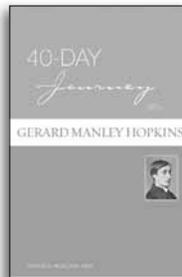


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### Another Country Heard From

"A Virtual Church," by Greg Kandra (2/2), was very interesting; but why did Kandra have to quote the old, stale canard of the "brawling drunken Irishmen"? Why insult the very people who helped the fledgling American church and Catholic schools so much with priests and sisters over so many decades? Shame on **America's** editors for letting this pass. *Siochaimn libh!*

EAMON MURPHY  
Thousand Oaks, Calif.

### The Challenge of Peace

The juxtaposition in the Feb. 9 issue of the articles by Bishop Howard J. Hubbard ("Fighting Poverty to Build Peace") and George M. Anderson, S.J. ("Roots of Genocide") raises more questions than either article answers. In spite of the lofty appeals to "humanitarian needs," "poverty reduction," "government accountability" and "fairer distribution," there is little attention paid to the root causes of poverty and genocide—tribal rivalries, political ineptitude and corruption in government, all of which are deeply rooted and largely beyond the influence of the well-meaning U.S. State Department or the jaded United Nations.

Christ came to change human hearts, not political institutions. It will take the former changes to solve the problems between the Israelis and the Palestinians, the Hutu and the Tutsi, the Serbs and the Bosnian Muslims, as well as the problems of Sudan, Haiti or Ethiopia. One could go on and on.

Bishop Hubbard suggests that we can effectively achieve peace by fighting poverty. Unfortunately, the major causes of both poverty and genocide are ethnic, racial and religious identities, none of which are amenable to change, lofty platitudes notwithstanding. It is truly said "If you want peace, fight for justice"—but don't expect miracles.

WILLIAM DORNBURGH  
Cooperstown, N.Y.

### All-American Man

The commentary by George W. Hunt, S.J., ("Rabbit at Rest," 2/16) is a fine affirmation of why John Updike was our American man of letters. Updike deeply loved America, its places and people, and, as exemplified in his Champion Award acceptance speech, its Christian character.

I would see him often in the New England village of Beverly Farms, where he resided: in the library, the bank, the little fruit and cheese shop and, especially, in the corner book store, which he visited last year to autograph his new book. With a gentle nod and a tip of his worn cap, he acknowledged those present and went about doing what he intended. There was never an aura of celebrity or importance, just the sense of a kind and gentle man who happened to drop by.

CAROL ANN ROBERTS DUMOND  
*Prides Crossing, Mass.*

### Lift Every Voice

Motown may have hit 50 ("That Motown Sound," 2/16), but its music is still fresh and will continue to influence future generations. I am a boomer, and among my ministries at my local parish is leading the children's Liturgy of the Word. When the spirit moves me and the Scriptures demand it, I lead the little ones in Curtis Mayfield's "Amen," or the Edwin Hawkins Singers' "O Happy Day" or "Let Us Go Into the House of the Lord." The children love it.

CHRIS NUNEZ  
*Santa Cruz, Calif.*

### Not So Super

Your commentary on the 2009 Super Bowl (Current Comment, 2/16) failed to note how sexist the commercials were. They were needlessly provocative and not in any way women-friendly.

DONNA PROCTOR  
*Indianapolis, Ind.*

### Abortion and Nonviolence

I found James R. Kelly's article on the pro-life movement ("Finding

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Renewal,” 2/16) disingenuous. None of the Catholic organizations or individuals noted, despite their disavowal of violence, have had any significant presence or role in the leadership of the movement to end abortion in the United States. Certainly there are members of the peace movement who are also members of the pro-life movement, but that is overlap, not identity. By self-identification, the pro-life movement has not been about war or capital punishment but about abortion and, more recently, euthanasia, crimes against innocent human life that are morally different from a personal decision for nonviolence.

While nonviolence should characterize all private struggles for justice, Catholic teaching does not demand it of public authorities, even with respect to capital punishment. Indeed, it would be moral cowardice for a public authority not to use proportional force to defend the common good when all other remedies have failed (consider World War II). The debate about the necessity of capital punishment in countries like the United States does not change the principle. Abortion and euthanasia, on the other hand, are always and everywhere gravely evil.

Yes, Catholics should defend all life values, and Catholic pro-lifers should use nonviolent means against injustice. Yet just as there are Jesuits and Dominicans and Franciscans, each community with its unique charism, there are different movements to fight different injustices. Claiming that other movements informed the original pro-life cause and thus should guide its future orientation is absurd.

COLIN B. DONOVAN  
*Birmingham, Ala.*

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# Desert Days

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT (B), MARCH 1, 2009

Readings: Gn 9:8-15; Ps 25:4-9; 1 Pt 3:18-22; Mk 1:12-15

“Repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mk 1:15)

To change one’s lifestyle can be extremely difficult. Yet many people today are faced with painful lifestyle choices as the economic crisis deepens and unemployment escalates. Catastrophic climate change, natural disasters, illness and other personal tragedies as well impose on us changes in our way of life. In today’s Gospel, Jesus invites all to choose a change in lifestyle. It is not imposed, but failure to accept it will have disastrous consequences.

Repentance, *metanoia*, is a change of mind and heart, a lifelong process of transformation. Jesus is not asking for a temporary forgoing of something pleasurable, like giving up chocolate for Lent. Sometimes such practices become simply a test of willpower. The *metanoia* to which Jesus invites us is both a turning away from whatever inhibits the full flourishing of the divine intent for creation and a turning toward the source of divine love. There is no better time to begin turning than now. Good intentions to make better lifestyle choices in the future become empty rhetoric in light of Jesus’ urgent invitation: “This is the time,” the *kairos*. *Kairos* means the opportune time, the right time, as distinguished from *chronos*, simple chronological time.

This crucial time is marked by the presence of two simultaneous forces: the divine Spirit who empowers us to choose what is of God, and Satan, the

Adversary, who pulls us in the opposite direction. In the Gospel, the Spirit drives Jesus into the desert, where choices are clearer. In biblical tradition, the desert symbolizes the place where these two opposing forces meet.

The desert can be a place of danger, where wild beasts dwell or revolutionaries hide out. It was a place of testing for Israel, where they turned on their leaders and murmured against God (Nm 10:11–21:34). In prophetic tradition, the desert wandering became romanticized into a honeymoon time for Israel, where the people could be alone with their beloved God, with nothing to distract from their heart-to-heart sharing (Hos 2:14). So too for Jesus; the Spirit is with him in the desert, but also the Adversary—all those systems and forces that are opposed to God.

Unlike Matthew and Luke, Mark does not describe in detail the precise ways in which Jesus was tempted. What Mark emphasizes is that God’s power is stronger than satanic forces. Using Greek verbs in the imperfect tense, which indicates ongoing action that began in the past, Mark says that the divine presence is always with Jesus, as angels “ministered to him” (*diekonoun auto*). The whole of Mark’s Gospel is framed by this phrase. At the close of the Gospel, Mary Magdalene and the other Galilean women who followed Jesus to Jerusalem and stood at the cross “ministered to him” *diekonoun auto* (Mk 15:40).

The good news that Jesus announces and embodies is that God’s ministering, comforting and empowering presence is at hand now, at this *kairos* time and at every moment, especially in times of crisis. Jesus does not announce that God will rescue us from experiencing bleak times of trial or of frightening chaos, as with the out-of-control flood waters in the story of Noah. The good news is that God never abandons the beloved creation and all the living beings with whom the covenant has been made.

To accept this good news is to accept the invitation to change—to conform our manner of living to God’s ways. The psalmist lists some of the characteristics of such a life: truth, compassion, love,



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- To what change in lifestyle is the Spirit leading you this Lent?
- What are the temptations you experience from forces averse to God’s plan for the full flourishing of all creation?
- What price are you willing to pay to live the good news?

kindness, goodness, uprightness, humility and justice. Even though we miss the mark, it is precisely to sinners that God makes these divine ways known (Ps 25:8).

Deliberately retreating into desert space can help us clarify the precise choices we need to make in order to live this manner of life. Like Jesus, who goes to Galilee to carry on the work begun by John the Baptist even though he knows John has been arrested, we too are not naïve about the high cost of choosing to accept and spread the good news.

BARBARA E. REID

BARBARA E. REID, O.P., is a professor of New Testament Studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Ill.