

America

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Generation Text

Are new media ruining our kids?

MARK BAUERLEIN



OF MANY THINGS

I came home from a recent trip to London with a renewed sense of the cost of democracy and the contours of an old transatlantic friendship.

At the Globe Theatre I saw a new play by Trevor Griffiths, a British playwright known for political theater and screenplays. "A New World: A Life of Thomas Paine" highlights the British citizen-turned-American revolutionary whose *Common Sense* mustered vital support for the war among the colonists. He also opposed slavery and urged Thomas Jefferson to write freedom for slaves into the Declaration of Independence.

My visit coincided with the eighth anniversary of 9/11. A day earlier, while crossing Grosvenor Square, my companion and I came upon a memorial for the British victims—a patio and a wall on which the names are inscribed. My friend found a name she recognized, the British husband of a colleague. Taken aback, we spent a moment in prayer for all the dead and felt close to Britons.

That week I observed on the television news how the British embrace the most recent of their fallen soldiers. They broadcast photos of them, display the return of their caskets and film their funerals live from St. Paul's. The fallen soldiers are esteemed as national treasures. The country's children brought home is an occasion of public, not merely private, mourning. Britain has lost more than 200 soldiers in Afghanistan, and many Britons are rethinking their nation's ongoing participation in the war. Local journalists expect the Conservative Party to win the next election, not least because the Labour Party has seemed overly supportive of the United States in its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Things were different between the two allies 70 years ago. I spent a day underground at the Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms, where the

prime minister, his wife and a skeleton crew (including clerks, trusted aides, the war cabinet and the central core of the military command) lived and worked during the London blitz and at times thereafter. This secret headquarters has been restored for public viewing. Faced during World War I with the aerial bombing of cities, the British built this bunker to protect the government in case of another such attack.

The rooms are small and basic. One can see the "Churchill suite" where Winston and Clementine slept and dined; the map room that served as the government's hub; the cabinet room where the prime minister met, often late at night, with his cabinet and chiefs of staff; and the transatlantic telephone room, an old broom closet wired to become the original "hotline" between Churchill and F.D.R., who were friends. At the museum, you can hear Churchill deliver speeches and listen to the recorded memories of ordinary citizens who worked there as young people.

During my visit, an album by Vera Lynn, now 92 and now honored with the title "Dame," overtook the Beatles at the top of the British music charts. She was the BBC's songbird of comfort during World War II. Yet not everyone was supportive of that war either—not in the United States and not in Britain. As Vera Lynn sang "White Cliffs of Dover," some Britons rioted in the street over the conduct of the war. And in London during the blitz, controversy dogged Churchill's efforts to protect St. Paul's. He thought the church was a national symbol of hope that could inspire the people not to give up. So as German bombs destroyed the residences surrounding St. Paul's, Churchill directed firefighters to save the church. Asked why her album topped the charts this time, Dame Lynn linked it to current events: "Our boys are away again and the music is significant again."

KAREN SUE SMITH

America

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Oprah and Uwem

When a book is chosen for Oprah Winfrey's Book Club, both author and publisher rejoice. Selection by Oprah, whom many credit with helping to reshape American reading habits, guarantees stratospheric sales. With her most recent selection, *Say You're One of Them*, a collection of short stories by Uwem Akpan, S.J., there was rejoicing in Jesuit circles as well. Ms. Winfrey announced the surprise pick—the first time she has chosen a book of short fiction—during a recent taping of her show in Central Park in New York City. When the Nigerian Jesuit's book was published last year, it became an immediate bestseller, garnering enthusiastic reviews (among them *Am.* 8/15/08). Ms. Winfrey said the book made her “gasp.”

Father Akpan wrote for *America* all the way back in 1996, with a short article entitled “A Nigerian Roman Catholic Something.” There he deftly described navigating among a welter of different cultures and backgrounds: his own Annang ethnic group, his Nigerian nationality, his Catholic faith and his Western-influenced education. “It is my hope,” he wrote by way of conclusion, “that I will reconcile my African and Western inheritance, my histories.” He has already helped others move toward that reconciliation. His luminous stories, some of which have also been published in *The New Yorker*, have helped many Westerners begin to understand the challenges faced by young Africans, as well as their remarkable resilience. After Ms. Winfrey made her announcement, *Entertainment Weekly* caught up with Father Akpan. Was another book in the offing? “Not yet,” he said, “My parish has been very busy.”

Dialogue With the Stars

“In this place, I see almost a metaphor of the observatory's mission: In the church, close to the pope, but on the border with the world, open to dialogue with everyone, with those who believe and those who don't believe,” said José Gabriel Funes, S.J., on the occasion of the Vatican Observatory's move from the papal residence at Castel Gandolfo to new premises at the edge of the papal villa.

For Father Funes “everyone” includes even aliens. Although establishing contact with aliens may be very difficult, Father Funes explained that there is no opposition between belief in the existence of aliens and belief in God. He added that the science of astronomy can be at the service of dialogue in many ways. It helps us understand that “all the people of the earth are under the same sky and gaze upon the same heavens.” The Argentinean astronomer

explained that “it is obvious that today you cannot do research without collaboration. One country on its own cannot build a huge telescope: it is necessary to work with other people, and with other religions and cultures as well.”

In order to mark the International Year of Astronomy, an exposition on telescopes will open at the Vatican Museums on Oct. 15. In addition, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences will host a congress on astrobiology from Nov. 6 to 11 that will examine the search for life in the universe.

Grim Subject, Good News

Finally some good(ish) news to report for a change. Ten thousand fewer children are dying each day than were perishing in 1990, according to a report from Unicef released last month. Unicef says the number of children who succumb to disease, hunger or contaminated water before they reach the age of 5 has declined to “just” 24,000 each day. That may not seem cause for much celebration, but the figure represents a 30 percent reduction over 20 years, an achievement that offers a glimmer of hope that the somewhat parsimonious investments made by industrialized powers so far as part of the Millennium Development Goals are paying off and saving lives.

The new figure brings the world closer to its M.D.G. target of reducing the 1990 level of under-5 mortality by two-thirds by 2015, but this progress can be reversed by the stroke of a budget-cutting pen. And it cannot be ignored that thousands of children are still dying every day from an array of preventable causes, including common afflictions like diarrhea. Every year 4 million newborns die within 28 days of birth, and maternal mortality in pregnancy and childbirth has improved only slightly in two decades.

Save the Children argues that the next step toward dramatically lower childhood mortality would be the eradication not of disease but of health service “user fees.” These tiny charges, introduced in the 1980s and 90s, often in response to International Monetary Fund and World Bank lending requirements, are as little as \$1 or \$2 per clinic visit, but they are still high enough in the developing world—where those figures represent a day's income—to block young mothers from prenatal services and keep children from basic care that can prevent life-threatening conditions. On Sept. 23 a \$5.3 billion U.N.-administered financing package was approved to roll back user fees in Malawi, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nepal and Burundi. Now such fees need to be eliminated in the rest of the developing world, a small investment from the West that promises a big payoff in reduced childhood mortality.

In the Service of Peace

The Catholic Church in Africa is experiencing the fastest growth in the 2,000-year history of Christianity. In 1900 there were perhaps 1.9 million Catholics in sub-Saharan Africa. Now there are an estimated 160 million. Twenty percent of the world's seminarians are studying in Africa. Since the First Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops in 1994, over 250 new bishops have been installed and 70 new dioceses created.

This numerical growth is spectacular and parish life in many places is robust, but any assessment of the quality of church life must also look at the impact Catholics are having on society. That is what the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops will be doing during its meeting in Rome from Oct. 4 to 25 under the theme "The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace." As the synod's preparatory document recommends, "[the church] ought not to retire into herself.... She is to venture forth...carrying out her mission *ad gentes*."

The preparatory document for the synod points to political and social progress in a number of nations, like Ghana, Liberia, Rwanda and South Africa. The overall desire for democracy and better government remains strong, it notes, even if in many nations the reality remains far off. Instability and conflict, it reports, persist in Zimbabwe and Sudan, in the tribal conflicts in the eastern Congo, and in Somalia, where a fragile government still holds on. Africa's most populous nation, Nigeria, suffers from unrelenting violence in the Niger Delta area and from ineffective national government everywhere. Economically the global recession has added to the burden of Africa's poor. Their numbers increasingly include environmental refugees fleeing the desertification apparently caused by global warming. Finally, China is Africa's new investment partner, but it operates according to an economic model that exploits natural resources and cheap, local labor.

One positive sign of the times is the Catholic involvement in peacemaking. Many African bishops have led local and national peacemaking initiatives. In addition, international agencies like Catholic Relief Services and Caritas Internationalis have added peacebuilding to their historic work in relief and development. The Sant'Egidio Community, which helped bring a civil war to an end in Mozambique in 1992, is now at work in Darfur and eastern Congo. Successful peacemaking, however, requires that the church's initiatives reach down to the grass roots. It needs

effective justice and peace commissions in parishes and dioceses to address human rights problems—particularly those of women—to prepare for and oversee free and fair elections and to oppose corruption in government and business.



The conviction is growing worldwide that Africa must solve its own problems, and there is increasing resistance to outside intervention. The solutions to Africa's problems, the bishops believe, must come from Africa. On the one hand, continued reliance on the international community, the United Nations and international nongovernmental organizations to solve Africa's problems results in a crippling dependency. On the other, African governments have been increasingly suspicious that the Responsibility to Protect, a principle articulated by the United Nations and by Pope Benedict XVI, invites big-power meddling in African affairs. But, truth to tell, peacekeeping troops from the African Union have had only limited success in responding to crisis situations. These missions have been under-resourced in equipment and personnel, and narrow mandates and rules of engagement have hampered their effectiveness.

In addition, in a number of cases, notably Zimbabwe and Sudan, African leaders have shown an appalling lack of will to police trouble in their own neighborhood. In addressing the needs of peace in the region, it would be wise for the synod to remind African leaders of Pope Benedict XVI's teaching in his latest encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*, that the Responsibility to Protect begins with governments' responsibility to the common good in their own countries. It is only failure to fulfill that duty that invites outside intervention, whether regional or international. At the same time, the international community needs to be reminded of its duty to support humanitarian interventions with ample supplies and adequate legal authority to protect the innocent, curb violence and establish peace.

In the words of the synod's working document "The mission to serve peace will consist in building peace in each member of the body of Christ, so that everyone might become new men and women, capable of being engaged in the peace process in Africa." As the number of Catholics continues to grow sharply in Africa, so must the church at the same time intensify its efforts in service to reconciliation, justice and peace.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

AFRICA

Synod to Address Ethnic and Religious Divisions

As Catholic leaders gather in Rome for the Second Synod of Bishops for Africa, the chief concern of the African bishops is that the ethnic disputes that have divided the continent for generations threaten the unity of the church today.

"Our ethnic differences are a good and beautiful thing, which God bestowed to show how his image can be seen in many ways," Cardinal Peter Turkson of Cape Coast, Ghana, said during a visit to the United States from Sept. 19 to 22. "Yet they have become a great stumbling block hindering the cohesiveness that needs to exist in the church." Cardinal Turkson cited tribal violence in Uganda, Rwanda, Nigeria and Kenya that has resulted in the deaths and forced resettlement of millions of people.

"Politicians have made use of this to further their own ends and to cause division, creating a tremendous challenge to our efforts as Catholics to be part of one great family in the strong tradition of African families," said Cardinal Turkson, who has been charged with preparing two major papers for the synod.

The official theme of the synod, which begins on Oct. 4 and continues through Oct. 25, is "The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace." Participants will hear reports on the continent's many simmering conflicts. In this sense, the synod will spotlight the "forgotten wars" that are no longer on the media radar but cause daily suffering.

The working document for the synod calls on the church to be a mediator among parties in conflict. Yet as Pope Benedict XVI has emphasized, the church cannot be a healing and reconciling force in society unless it is a "community of persons reconciled with God and among themselves."

The bishops also plan to discuss relations between Muslims and Christians. Cardinal Turkson, who at age 61 is Africa's youngest cardinal and will serve as the synod's recording secretary, said relations between the two religions in his own nation are cordial, and he anticipates they will remain that way. Still, he and other bishops are concerned about the grow-

ing tendency to politicize religious affiliation, especially in regard to Islam.

"The last few decades have brought to some places a type of Islam different than what we're used to," said Cardinal Turkson. "This is a more aggressive form, one which seems to have more of a spirit of competition than cooperation."

Among the other issues the synod will address are:

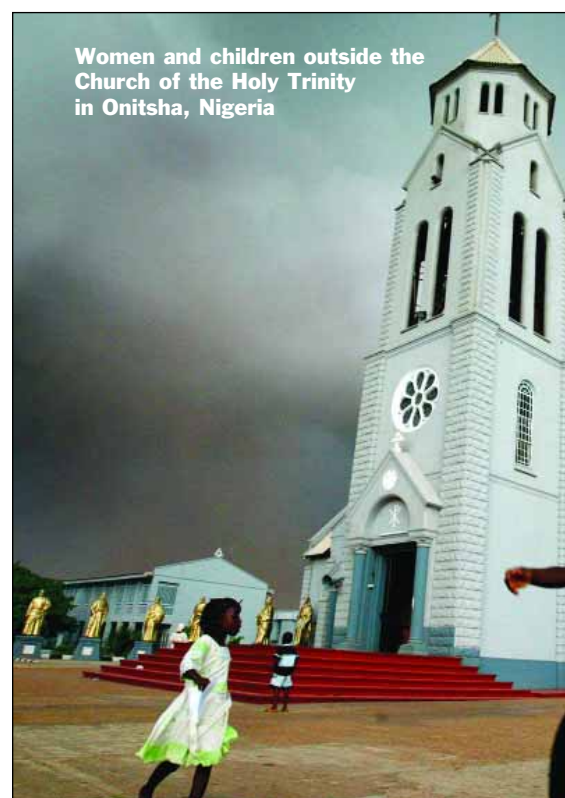
1) *Inculturation*. The synod is expected to take up the debate started at the first synod for Africa in 1994 about the inclusion of local traditions in liturgical celebrations. That synod allowed for some flexibility in this regard as long as the essential elements of the liturgy were not altered.

2) *The family*. The bishops will likely hear criticism of development programs that promote contraception and abortion. The synod's work-

ing document also calls upon the church to come up with creative responses to the spiritual and moral needs of families.

3) *Strengthening the role of the laity*. The synod preparatory council called for the African laity to take a greater role in politics, the armed forces, the economy, education, health and the media. The bishops are also expected to discuss strategies for improving religious education among the faithful and making better use of the continent's 400,000 catechists.

4) *Economic justice*. The effects of globalization and the current economic crisis will be addressed, along with the importance of continued international aid to Africa. At the same time, the synod's working document has also argued for greater economic self-sufficiency by local church communities and cautioned against dependency on outside assistance.



Women and children outside the Church of the Holy Trinity in Onitsha, Nigeria



HONDURAS

Bishop Meets With Ousted President

Days after the deposed leader of Honduras returned to his country, church leaders met with both parties involved in the political standoff, and the country's acting foreign minister said the Vatican might help mediate a solution to the crisis.

On Sept. 24 Auxiliary Bishop Juan Pineda Fasquelle of Tegucigalpa spoke with both Manuel Zelaya, the former president who returned to Honduras on Sept. 21, and Roberto Micheletti, who heads the de facto government that ousted Zelaya on June 28.

After meeting with Zelaya on Sept. 21 at the Brazilian Embassy, where the

former president has sought asylum, Bishop Pineda said he hoped the visit would be a "first step" toward dialogue. The overtures came after several days of protests in which at least one person was killed and others were injured or arrested.

Carlos López Contreras, the country's acting foreign minister, announced on Sept. 24 that Micheletti was willing to begin talks with his opponents. When asked who might participate in the dialogue, López mentioned the Vatican. According to church sources, Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga of Tegucigalpa had spoken about the matter with Pope Benedict XVI earlier in the week.

Peace talks mediated by the church could restore the church's credibility among the Honduran community. Observers say that a statement by the bishops in July that was widely seen as supporting the coup has damaged the church's reputation. Retired Bishop Real Corriveau of Choluteca said the statement was misinterpreted and that the bishops found fault with both sides in the conflict. Unlike the Organization of American States and many governments, the bishops did not insist on Zelaya's return to office.

Grassroots church workers, however, have been critical of the political takeover. Radio Progreso, a radio station sponsored by the Jesuits, was closed briefly after the coup in June, and its director, Ismael Moreno, S.J., received a death threat. At one point, police surrounded the station, but local people occupied the building to keep authorities from closing it. The station has been covering political protests organized by Zelaya's supporters.

Moreno said Bishop Pineda's visit to Zelaya was an "acknowledgment

that during these nearly three months, the church hierarchy has not taken a well-refined position" and that the church was interested in leading "along the road to reconciliation."

Nevertheless, Moreno recommended that a Vatican representative take part in mediation because some bishops are seen as supportive of "sectors that are close to the de facto government." One exception is Bishop Luis Santos Villeda of Santa Rosa de Copán, who publicly criticized the bishops' statement in July. On Sept. 24 his diocese issued a statement questioning the legitimacy of the Micheletti government and urging a return to "constitutional order."

Despite positive signs, hurdles remain to bringing the parties together.



A supporter of Honduras's interim president, Roberto Micheletti

er. Leaders of other governments have insisted on Zelaya's return to office, but Micheletti has said he would not hand over power. The parties also disagree about a proposal for a referendum on a constitutional assembly. It was Zelaya's attempt to put the question on the November ballot that triggered the coup.

Pope Visits Czech Republic

Commemorating the 20th anniversary of the peaceful revolt that brought down the country's Communist regime, Pope Benedict XVI urged the people of the Czech Republic to rediscover the spiritual and moral values that sustained their struggle for freedom. In a series of gatherings from Sept. 26 to 28 with political and religious leaders and the Catholic faithful, the pope delivered a message of hope meant to inspire both the country's majority of nonbelievers and the minority Catholic community. Central to his message was the assertion that no society, no matter how democratic, can maintain a healthy and ethical sense of freedom without guidance from the truth found in God. "Far from threatening the tolerance of differences or cultural plurality, the pursuit of truth makes consensus possible, keeps public debate logical, honest and accountable," the pope said. Pope Benedict's trip was his 13th trip abroad and his seventh to Europe, a sign of his deep concern for revitalizing the continent's Christian heritage.

Catholic Students Resist Dress Code

Christian girls in the Gaza Strip are under pressure to wear Islamic dress in public schools. An unofficial dress code mainly for high school girls calls for them to wear the full "jilbab," which is a long traditional robe, and a headscarf, said the Rev. Jorge Hernández of Holy Family Parish in Gaza. "For most of the schools it is an absolute condition for admittance," Father Hernández said. Most Christian children in Gaza attend church-run schools, but there is a tiny minority of Christian students in the government-

NEWS BRIEFS

Carl A. Anderson, the supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus, has been named by Pope Benedict XVI to a council that supervises the Vatican bank. • Catholic leaders in India said their faith in the country's judicial system was renewed after five people involved in the killing of a Baptist pastor last year in **Orissa** were sentenced to life in prison. • A resolution passed by the U.S. House of Representatives on Sept. 22 "honors and commends **Catholic sisters** for their humble service and courageous sacrifice throughout the history" of the nation. • Priests should not be limited to sacramental ministry but must assist lay Catholics in their attempts to solve "the massive problems" facing the world, Cardinal **Roger M. Mahony** of Los Angeles said at the University of Notre Dame. • On Sept. 14 the U.N. General Assembly adopted its first resolution on the **responsibility to protect**, agreeing to hold further discussions on the duty of the international community to intervene to stop atrocities. • Pope Benedict XVI said that he is pleased that his encyclical *Charity in Truth* has prompted increased debate on the moral shortcomings of the world's economies.



Carl A. Anderson

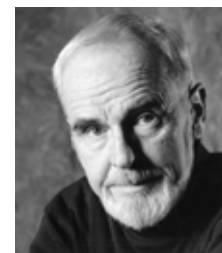
run schools. At the start of the school year, rumors circulated in Gaza that the Hamas-run Ministry of Education would impose a dress code. In mid-September the ministry said it had not officially authorized the policy. According to one Christian girl, her teacher tried to convince girls to wear the jilbab by quoting verses from the Koran saying that it is the best way for a woman to dress, but most of the Christian girls refused to acquiesce.

Sierra Leone Struggles After Civil War

Nearly eight years after a brutal civil war in Sierra Leone, many people who fled the country have returned, although they struggle to survive amid a shattered economy, Archbishop Edward Tamba Charles of Freetown

and Bo said. In an interview on Sept. 21, the archbishop described a country that is still recovering from a war that left tens of thousands of people dead and displaced hundreds of thousands more. Among the surprising results of the war's end is the growth of the Catholic Church, in part because of the conversions of people who relied upon the church for assistance during the war. "The church stood by them," Archbishop Charles said, "and the experience of war brought some people to their faith." Although Catholics make up only about 8 percent of the population in Sierra Leone, rebels considered the church a threat during the 11-year civil war. Priests and religious were expelled from the country, and church property was looted and vandalized.

From CNS and other sources.



Proofreading the Pope

The Tablet of London reported in early September that George Weigel has been bringing to Polish Catholics his criticism of the “incoherent sentimentalism” of Pope Benedict XVI’s new encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate*. Apparently Weigel claims that since the encyclical does not represent the pope’s views, Catholics should remain faithful to the “pro-capitalist teachings” of their countryman Pope John Paul II.

Weigel, of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, is the author of a massive biography of Pope John Paul II titled *Witness to Hope*. Though widely researched and respectfully praised, the book does not very successfully establish the “pro-capitalist teachings” of the pope who, as a *Fortune* magazine editor complained in November 1982, was “wedded to socialist economics and increasingly a sucker for third world anti-imperialist rhetoric.” Weigel acknowledges the harsh reaction of pro-capitalists to John Paul II’s encyclical *On Social Concern*, six years later, but in this case he proposes that the sections of the encyclical that clash with his own interpretation of John Paul were the result of committee work and Roman Curial politics.

Weigel uses the same tactic in dealing with Pope Benedict’s new encyclical letter on charity, truth and social justice. But this time he is less gracious. With a conspiratorial tone worthy of Dan Brown’s novel *The Da Vinci Code*, Weigel suggests in an article in *The National Review* online edition of July 7, subtitled “The Revenge

of Justice and Peace (Or So They May Think),” that some liberal virus has infected the encyclical. We are advised to read it armed with a gold marker and a red marker. The gold should highlight those passages that are authentically Benedict’s (that is, they agree with Weigel); the red is for the passages inserted by the pope’s evil peace-and-justice twin. Otherwise we are stuck with “an encyclical that resembles a duck-billed platypus.” The good Benedict is lucid and moving; the bad Benedict is “incomprehensible” and marked by “confused sentimentality.” Are these the passages that refer to world governance and the common good, the strategic importance of unions, the redistribution of wealth and governmental restraints on capitalism?

One not familiar with Weigel might think the disrespect, even ridicule, is intentional. One might even think, upon reading Weigel’s analysis, that Benedict apparently has not read his own encyclical or that he has signed on to something he does not believe. Whatever the case, Weigel tells us that the pope, “a truly gentle soul, may have thought it necessary to include in his encyclical these multiple off-notes, in order to maintain the peace within his curial household.”

So that is what Weigel thinks of this pope: He is a gentle soul who signs his name to a document that misrepresents his own theology and its application.

This is not the case. If anything, the present pope is an astute and intelli-

gent man, not the pawn of some interest group. Rather, as was the case with Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict has an integrative vision of our faith. His notion of “gratuitousness” or “the gift” in human existence is a frontal rejection of our myths of “self-made” men and women. The gift of our shared existence as a human family is grounded, for Benedict, in the Gospel that brings all things under Christ.

George Weigel thinks that some liberal virus has infected the encyclical.

“All things” means everything: our political, social, economic, personal, sexual, familial and professional worlds. Any encyclical that tries to address such integration of our faith will be complex and wide-ranging, from the far reaches of theology to the immediacy of our daily lives. Some people will reject the connections among love of the earth, the common good of all humanity, the integrity of sexuality, the Gospel imperatives concerning the use of power and money and the defense of human life at every stage. But in selecting what we want to affirm and rejecting what we do not affirm out of our own proclivities, we mutilate the Gospels and fragment the truth. Benedict himself cautions us against such selectivity, by which we lose sight of the integrated teaching.

So apply, if you must, your gold pencil to things you agree with, whether in Pope Benedict’s writings or the Gospels, and mark in red what does not fit your prejudice. You may then be pleased with yourself. But you will also be stuck with yourself.

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



Confessions of

THE VATICAN VISITATION PROMPTS



a Modern Nun

REFLECTION ON A RELIGIOUS DIVIDE.

BY ILIA DELIO

Religious life among women is undergoing a massive evolutionary change that can only be described as cataclysmic. The Vatican's apostolic visitation of congregations of women religious in the United States and the recent investigation of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious indicate that Rome is unhappy with so-called post-Vatican II nuns who have donned secular clothes and abandoned traditional community life. The current statistics show a trend. The number of religious sisters and cloistered nuns in the United States was almost 180,000 in 1965. In 2009 there are just over 59,000, according to the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University. A steady decline in the number of women religious, together with the fact that their median age is 75, is a sign that religious life in the United States is a dying institution. Yet new communities have sprouted up in which women religious don a traditional habit and follow a daily schedule of prayer and service. These communities are attracting youthful, vibrant vocations. On the surface, the future of religious life seems to be on their side.

Those who have taken off the habit and those who are putting on the habit mark two distinct paths in religious life today. What is happening? Did most women religious misinterpret the documents of the Second Vatican Council? Is what some see as a rebellious streak taking its toll? Have women defied the church? Some interpret empty novitiates and an aging membership as evidence that women religious have made the wrong choice—for secularization. Others maintain that their intent was to live more authentically as women religious in a world of change.

The chasm between traditional and progressive religious life was made evident in 1992 with the publication of *The Transformation of the American Catholic Sisterhood* by Lora Ann Quiñonez, C.D.P., and Mary Daniel Turner, S.N.D.deN. The book impelled Cardinal James Hickey, bishop of Washington, D.C., at the time, to travel to Rome to fight for the establishment of a congregation of women religious that would be

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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/PAVEL LOSEVSKY

more faithful to the church. Hence the Conference of Major Superiors of Women Religious was formed with membership based on wearing the habit, communal prayer, eucharistic adoration and fidelity to the church. Meanwhile, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious continued in the spirit of Vatican II to be open to the world, exploring avenues of liberation theology, feminist theology and the plight of the poor, among others. Although dialogue was sought between L.C.W.R. (to which the majority of women religious communities still belong) and C.M.S.W.R., that desire for dialogue was not mutual. Rome has thrown its weight on the side of C.M.S.W.R., giving its members top ecclesiastical positions.

While the two groups of women religious seem to oppose each other, they form what Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., the former master general of the Dominicans, calls in *What Is the Point of Christian Life?* two different theologies based on different interpretations of Vatican II. Members of the Leadership Conference embrace modernity and the work of the council as the Holy Spirit breathing new life in the church. They fall under what Father Radcliffe identifies as the Concilium group, who focus on the Incarnation as the central point of renewal. Members of the Conference of Major Superiors, by contrast, are Communio Catholics, who emphasize communion through proclamation of the faith, a clear Catholic identity and the centrality of the cross. Members of the Conference of Major Superiors, by contrast, are Communio Catholics, who emphasize communion through proclamation of the faith, a clear Catholic identity and the centrality of the cross. (Concilium and Communio are the names of two periodicals founded in the postconciliar era. The first stressed conciliar reforms; the second stressed the continuity of the council documents with the community of the faithful through past centuries.) Thus, one group focuses on doxology and adoration (Communio), the other on practice and experience (Concilium). One sees Christ as gathering people into community (Communio); the other sees Christ as traversing boundaries (Concilium). The C.M.S.W.R. recently held its eucharistic congress under the title "Sacrifice of Enduring Love," while the L.C.W.R. continues to work on systemic change. The former sees religious life as divine espousal with Christ; the latter sees Christ in solidarity with the poor and justice for the oppressed.

As Father Radcliffe states, this is not a conflict between those who are faithful to the council and those who would return to a preconciliar church. Nor is it between those who are faithful to the tradition and those who have succumbed to

the modern world. Rather, the conflict is about two different understandings of the council and how to carry its work forward. While I appreciate Father Radcliffe's thoughtful distinctions, my own experience of women religious tells me that the root of the differences between the two associations is fear of change. I say this not by way of judgment but from personal experience.

My Journey to a New Theology

When I entered religious life in 1984, I had a newly minted Ph.D. in pharmacology and an opportunity for a postdoctoral fellowship at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. Yet I

had discovered Thomas Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain* and could not let go my desire to renounce the world and live for Christ. My understanding of theology, church and religious life then was rudimentary. I flourished in the 1970s as a budding scientist, writing manifestos of liberation. Though I attended

Mass weekly, I did not appreciate the liturgical changes of Vatican II. Instead I longed for the mystical ritual of the Latin Mass I knew as a child, even though I had never understood a word the priest said. When I made the decision to enter religious life, I sought an austere community where I could make a lifetime sacrifice to live for God alone. Wearing a habit was important to me because it represented holiness and religious identity. I entered a Carmelite cloister of nuns who wore a long, traditional habit and followed a set schedule of daily prayer, silence, adoration and the rosary.

My idealized view of religious life began to collapse in the cloister. Day in and day out I recognized how far I was from any noble aspiration of sanctity. I lived with women who suffered manic-depression, came from alcoholic families or were widowed early in life. There was little personal sharing and little contact with the world. The God to whom I had once felt so drawn began to melt into the darkness. I wondered whether I had chosen solitary confinement. I asked for a leave to discern my path and was sent to a Franciscan community near a university where I could resume my research. This community also wore a habit and followed a similar daily schedule, but the sisters' openness to the world was liberating. I studied theology at Fordham University, wearing a full habit and feeling separate from my classmates. On weekdays, I lived in the Bronx with Ursuline sisters.

My first conversion in religious life centered around the final examination in a New Testament course. I had no computer or place to work until an Ursuline sister offered me her office and computer—and a cooked dinner. Sister

The conflict among women religious is about two different understandings of the council and how to carry its work forward.

Jeanne's attentiveness to my needs, which included waiting up with me until after midnight, opened my eyes to the meaning of Incarnation. For the first time I saw God humbly present in jeans and a sweatshirt. Next I saw God in frail Sister Catherine, who carried out an extensive outreach to the local poor, and in Sister Lucy, whose 40 years as a missionary in Alaska gave me more than just the entertainment of her fascinating dinnertime stories. In the simple common life of the Ursuline sisters, I saw God fully alive. I saw the same God among the Allegany Franciscans who provided me a home where I could write my doctoral dissertation. They drew me out of my study cell, took me to the park and out to eat and listened to my woes. By graduation, I had resided at three different motherhouses among sisters whose congregations were all members of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

Through the study of theology I began to reflect on the Incarnation and the two different ways of religious life I had experienced. I realized that Jesus practiced Jewish customs and rituals, lived the humble life of a carpenter and felt called to public ministry around age 30, but he did not separate himself from others by dress or occupation. Engaging in the sociopolitical and economic struggles of his day, he reached out to the poor and showed compassion for the sick and dying. Jesus proclaimed the reign of God and gave his life as witness to the fidelity of God's love. For that he died the public death of a criminal, without honor or glory. The early Christians who experienced the risen Lord were empowered to proclaim it. They had to be: until the conversion of Constantine, living as a Christian was a recipe for martyrdom. Today, too, Gospel life means giving witness to God's goodness in Christ. In 2005 Dorothy Stang, of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, gave her life as a martyr for the impoverished people of the Amazon.

Both contemporary groups of women religious—the Conference of Major Superiors of Women Religious and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious—witness to the Gospel revealed in Jesus Christ, but their trajectories differ. The former primarily seeks to be espoused to Christ; their focus is a heavenly nuptial union. The latter group primarily follows Christ the liberator, witnessing to Christ amid the struggles of history. In both groups one can find idols, secrets and dysfunction as well as saints, prophets and mystics. Both groups are sinful and redeemed. Both follow canon law; both maintain health insurance, car insurance, retirement funds and plots for burial.

Teilhard's Evolutionary Vision

What difference does religious life make to the world? Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., brought light to this

question by understanding Christianity in an evolutionary universe. What we do and the decisions we make in history, Teilhard said, influence the genesis of Christ. Christ is the goal of the universe, the new creation, the future of what we are coming to be. We who are baptized into Christ must let go in love and descend into solidarity with the earth. Teilhard noted that there is nothing profane on earth for those who know how to see. Adoration means seeing the depths of divine love in ordinary reality and loving what we see. This universe is holy because it is grounded in the Word of God. It is Christ, the living one, who is coming to be.

For many years I wondered whether women religious had misread the signs of the time. Yet as I have pondered the mystery of God, I have come to believe that the evolutionary universe is moving forward in part because women religious are working in the trenches of humanity among those who are poor, oppressed and forgotten. Today world religions are playing a greater role in the synthesis of a new religious consciousness. The women of L.C.W.R. have risked their lives in the pursuit of authentic Incarnation and have proclaimed prophetically that the love of God cannot be exterminated or suppressed. They continue to fight for systemic change on behalf of oppressed people. Congregations may die out, but the paths inscribed in history by the women religious of Vatican II are nothing less than the evolutionary shoots of a new future.

As Teilhard noted, suffering and sacrifice are part of the evolutionary process. Isolated structures must give way to more complex unions. To live with an evolutionary spirit is to let go of old structures and to engage new structures when the right time comes. The new heaven and earth promised by

God will not come about by cutting ourselves off from the world or forming Catholic ghettos. It will not unfold through the triumph of ecclesiastical power. It will come about as we follow the footprints of the crucified one, descending into the darkness of humanity and rising in the power of love. This is the path to a new creation symbolized by Christ.

We believe that what happened between God and the world in Christ points to the future of the cosmos. That future involves a radical transformation of created reality through the unitive power of God's love. To be a Christbearer is to focus on the inner depth of love. It is love that puts flesh on the face of God, love that makes Christ alive; love is the power of the future and the unfolding of Christ. History will not remember what we wore, where we lived or how we prayed, whether as Concilium or Communio Catholics. In the evening of life we all shall be judged on love alone. **A**

ON THE WEB

Mary Luke Tobin, S.L., on "Women in the Church Since Vatican II."
americamagazine.org/pages

When Silence Is Betrayal

Justice for the people of Gaza

BY DONALD J. MOORE

It was a pivotal moment in the nonviolent struggle for civil and human rights. Speaking at Riverside Church in New York City on April 4, 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. uttered words that would profoundly influence the course of America's involvement in the Vietnam War: "A time comes when silence is betrayal." He was taking a public stance against the war that would place him in opposition to his government in Washington. He had agonized over this decision. In "this dreadful conflict," he admitted, there is always a danger of being "mesmerized by uncertainty," but he would not let the uncertainty still his voice: "We must speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak."

During a celebration of Martin Luther King's birthday last January, Michael Ratner, a lawyer and president of the Center for Constitutional Rights, applied King's words to the silence that had engulfed many in the United States regarding the plight of the people of Gaza. For too long American Jews, including himself, along with most other Americans had stood by silently or with marginal protests in the face of the "massive violations of Palestinian rights carried out by Israel." One reason for the silence is a hesitation to criticize a people who for centuries had been victimized by anti-Semitism, culminating in the horror of the Shoah, who have been assaulted by suicide bombers in the Holy Land and who are now the targets of random rocket attacks from Gaza. In addition, public criticism of Israel often leads to accusations that the critic is anti-Semitic or a "self-hating Jew." Yet as long as the silence continues, so will the brutal and inhuman treatment of Palestinians continue, especially of the people of Gaza.

A recently released report by the United Nations fact-finding mission that investigated the three-week war in Gaza that began in late December 2008, called Operation Cast Lead, has found strong evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by both Israel and Hamas. It also points to the complicity of the international community in repeatedly extending impunity to the actions

of Israel's military forces. The commission was led by Richard J. Goldstone, an internationally respected South African judge. In an op-ed piece in *The New York Times*, Judge Goldstone, who is Jewish, described his reluctance to accept the U.N. role, though he finally accepted "because my fellow commissioners are professionals committed to an objective, fact-based investigation." The report gives detailed analyses of dozens of possibly criminal incidents, in keeping with one of Goldstone's stated aims: "to show the human side of suffering and give a voice to victims so they are not lost among statistics."

Now it looks as if the report itself may be "lost among statistics." Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, Gabriella Shalev, said Israel has mounted a campaign to show that the report is "biased, one-sided and political." Daniel Ayalon, deputy foreign minister of the Yisrael Beiteinu Party, insists that Israel was correct in refusing to cooperate with the mission because some of its members believed the Gaza operation "was not one of self-defense, but an Israeli aggressive action," and now Israel must make "the report dissipate." Similar comments have come from Washington. Susan E. Rice, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, characterized the report as "unbalanced, one-sided, and basically unacceptable," and Congressman Gary L. Ackerman, Democrat of New York, asserted that its authors were living in a "self-righteous fantasy land." Should the U.N. report be passed over in silence, it would indeed be a betrayal.

An Economy Destroyed

In the last several months I have visited Gaza a number of times as part of a nongovernmental organization that assists nursery schools there. Several times I have toured the northern Gaza Strip, where most of the factories of Gaza were located. Every one of them had been completely leveled. Wherever we looked there was scarcely a building standing that had not been severely damaged by shelling, including mosques and homes and schools. Herds of farm animals lay dead in the fields, agricultural lands were ruined, chicken farms bulldozed. Gaza's productive capacity, limited to begin with, was completely destroyed. Over the months when I visited, the debris has been cleaned up and the peo-

DONALD J. MOORE, S.J., *emeritus professor of theology at Fordham University, is director of interfaith relations at the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Jerusalem.*



A Palestinian girl stands in front of a destroyed house in the northern Gaza Strip in January 2009.

ple whose homes were destroyed and who were unable to find space with relatives had moved to tent villages. They are still there. No reconstruction has taken place because no building materials can be brought into Gaza.

None of our nursery schools were destroyed, but classes were doubled in size because other nearby schools lay in ruins. I noticed one youngster just staring at his desk while his 48 classmates worked at different projects. A teacher explained that he had not spoken in the four days since classes resumed. During the fighting he had been clinging to his father who was running to a safer neighborhood, but his father was shot dead. The screaming youngster had to be literally pried away from his dead father—he did not want to let go. Israel shelled some areas of Gaza for more than 20 consecutive hours. What does such violence do to people, especially to children?

I asked Sabah, the N.G.O.'s contact person in Gaza, whether the Israeli incursion had led to greater or lesser support for Hamas. She was hesitant, then as she started to answer she broke into tears: "It makes no difference. It is all so hopeless. No matter what kind of face we put on to the outside world, within us there is no hope—nobody cares."

Few people see the price the ordinary Gazan is paying to live through such pervasive violence.

Reduced to Destitution

Some people do care and do speak out. The Jewish academician Sarah Roy, senior research scholar at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard, cites Gaza as an example of a society "deliberately reduced to a state of abject destitution," its proud and productive population reduced to "aid-dependent paupers." The almost total destruction of Gaza's economy has caused the poverty rate to soar. Well over 90 percent of Gazans are dependent on humanitarian aid for basic needs. Israel may be the primary agent of this subjugation, but it has acted with the implicit consent, if not approval, of the United States and much of the international community.

Only one-quarter of the food needed to meet Gazans' basic nutritional needs is permitted to pass through the siege implemented by Israel. Many commodities are banned by Israel, like refrigerators, washing machines, needles, candles, matches, sheets, blankets, cutlery, tea, coffee, light bulbs and shoes. The siege has conveyed to Gazans that

PHOTO: ONS/JERRY LAMPEN, REUTERS

they do not count in the eyes of the world.

Avi Shlaim, professor of international relations at Oxford, relates poignantly: "I write as someone who served loyally in the Israeli army in the mid-1960s and who has never questioned the legitimacy of the state of Israel within its pre-1967 borders. What I utterly reject is the Zionist colonial project beyond the Green Line. The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of the June 1967 war had very little to do with security and everything to do with territorial expansionism." He describes the situation in Gaza not as a case of economic underdevelopment but rather as "a uniquely cruel case of de-development" in which the vast majority of the population lives in "abject poverty and unimaginable misery." These living conditions are "an affront to civilized values, a powerful precipitant to resistance and a fertile breeding ground for political extremism."

In January 2006, despite all the obstacles, the Palestinian people held a fair democratic election that brought Hamas to power. Nevertheless, led by Israel and the United States, most of the world refused to recognize the Hamas-led government, branding Hamas as nothing more than a terrorist organization. This campaign has demonized the group so effectively that economic sanctions are imposed, in Shlaim's words, "not against the occupier but against the occupied." Israel's public relations programs have successfully conveyed

the notion that Palestinians, especially Hamas, are terrorists who reject coexistence with Israel, whose nationalism is a form of anti-Semitism and whose Islamic faith is incompatible with democracy. In fact, most Palestinians are people with normal aspirations, no better and no worse than other national groups, who want to live in freedom and dignity in a land they can call their own.


Hamas is by no means innocent. With the fruit of its electoral victory snatched from its grasp and having few other alternatives, it resorted once again to the weapon of the weak: terror. The launching of Qassam rockets with the hope of striking civilian targets cannot be condoned. It is also a foolish, self-defeating strategy. The killing of civilians and the intent to kill civilians are wrong. These norms apply, however, not only to Hamas but also to Israel. Operation Cast Lead was basically a war against a civilian population. Shlaim describes Israel's treatment of the inhabitants of Gaza as "one of unbridled and unrelenting brutality."

Breaking the Silence

In assessing the conduct of Israel over these years, Shlaim comes to the difficult conclusion that Israel has become a rogue state, a state that "habitually violates international law, possesses weapons of mass destruction and practices terrorism—the use of violence against civilians for political purposes." For Shlaim, Israel's real aim with Palestinians has never been peaceful coexistence but military domination. The brutality of Israel's military is matched by the eloquent spin of its public relations experts. The core messages handed out to the media are that Hamas broke the cease-fire agreements, that Israel's objective is the defense of its population and that its forces take the utmost care not to hurt innocent civilians. The military incursion into Gaza belies the statements of the Israeli government. The testimony of many Gazans, the investigations by independent human rights groups, the stories circulated by the Israeli group Breaking the Silence (Israeli soldiers who speak about their actions)—all indicate that serious war crimes were committed.

Yet the siege continues. Each week a group of officers in the Israel Defense Forces meets to decide which foods to allow into Gaza. The list of items can change from day to day. The quantity is strictly monitored and allows for a very slim margin of error for maintaining basic nutrition. The officers insist that their calculations are statistically accurate, provided there is an equal division of the food supplies sent to Gaza. Yet they assume that the food distribution is not going to be equal. The result? Many Gazans are receiving less than the required minimum calories. The officers meet regularly with humanitarian organizations and listen to their complaints and requests but deny there is a humanitarian crisis. A senior officer insists that this is not a siege policy but a restriction of "luxury" products to Gaza. Yet the

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list of luxuries changes regularly. Pasta and beans and pumpkins have all been classified as "luxury" items.

The Israeli journalist Hadas Ziv asks why the Health Ministry's recommendation for Israeli infants and toddlers (soft fruit like bananas and avocados, cooked chicken and beef and cheese cubes) does not apply also to Palestinian infants and toddlers. These items are all banned from entering Gaza. In the view of many observers, this policy of Israel is tantamount to either starvation or collective punishment, both violations of international law. More important, it forces Gazans, especially children, to work in the tunnels under the southern border at Rafah to bring in what they need. It is dangerous work but also lucrative. Hamas controls the tunnels and takes a percentage of the profits. Once again the siege is strengthening the ones it was intended to weaken.

A Call to Action

What can be done? I offer two brief suggestions.

Join the Jewish Fast for Gaza, a group begun by two American rabbis calling on all Jews and people of conscience to fast for Gaza on the third Thursday of each month. (www.fastforgaza.net). Its goals are: to lift the blockade of civilian goods and services into Gaza; to provide humanitarian and developmental aid to the people of Gaza; to call on Israel, the United States and the international community to engage in negotiations without preconditions with all

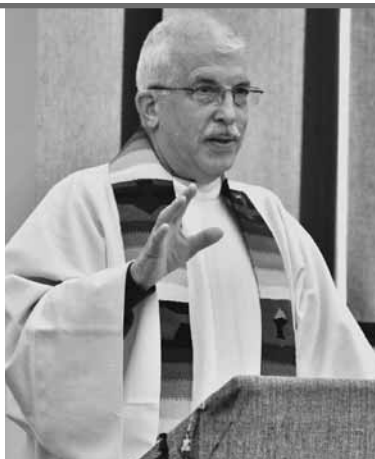
relevant parties, including Hamas, to bring an end to the siege; and to encourage the American government to engage Israelis and Palestinians vigorously in negotiations for a just and peaceful settlement of the conflict.

Get involved in a sustained nonviolent campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions. As one Israeli activist put it: Convince your friends, your churches, your mosques and your synagogues to boycott products from Israel, especially from the settlements. This program is not anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish. It is a program to support the many Jews and other people of conscience who oppose the oppressive policies of the State of Israel. Speak to your politicians and to local government officials. Write letters to your local newspaper. Be alert when shopping in your local supermarket, or have a talk with its manager. Sanctions and divestments from corporations like Caterpillar and Motorola have made headlines, but you do not have to wait for decisions of the stockholders or for President Obama to implement a new policy on Israeli settlements.

Israel pays far too little heed to international law unless it is under pressure to do so. Such pressure should come from you and me, from anyone who cares about truth and justice, about peace and reconciliation, about a future for the State of Israel. There comes a time when silence is betrayal. We will always be mired in uncertainty and our vision will always be limited, but we must speak out and we must take action. **A**

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Power Vacuum?

Canon law and the continuity of papal leadership

BY PETER SCHINELLER

It made a dramatic headline. “Pope Leo Now in a State of Coma” preceded an article that appeared in The New York Times on July 30, 1903. Just a few days later, Pope Leo XIII died. Today, by contrast, with advanced medical procedures that can prolong life, the possibility of a pope lingering in a coma or some other unconscious state has increased. And the last days of Pope Pius XII and of Pope John Paul II raise yet another possibility: that of a living pope, fully conscious but too ill to lead the church for extended periods.

The pope is not only the vicar of Christ but also the chief executive officer of the largest institution in the world, the leader of over one billion persons, one-sixth of the world’s population.

Pope Benedict XVI, now 82, is in relatively good health. A fall in mid-July that resulted in a fracture of his right wrist did not cause serious injury. But if he were ever to sustain brain damage, fall into a comatose state, suffer from advanced Alzheimer’s or otherwise become enfeebled or impeded (*sede apostolica impedita* is the technical term), what would happen?

It is possible to be comatose for years. If that were to happen to the pope, no new dioceses could be created (or old ones suppressed), no bish-

ops appointed, no saints canonized or major documents written or approved. If a pope were enfeebled for several years, his voice would be silenced.

A Serious Legal Vacuum

What provisions are currently in place to replace a pope if he could no longer function in that role? Who evaluates the pope’s health and declares whether he is capable of continuing as bishop of Rome? If the pope lapses into a coma,

Since canon law has a
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then who would run the church? The shocking fact is that currently there are no provisions in canon law to cover such exigencies, no way to replace the pope if he is impeded while living. Several canon lawyers told me that, as far as they know, this is a serious lacuna in the law.

Canon law shows an awareness of the problem: “When the Roman See is vacant or entirely impeded nothing is to be innovated in the governance of the universal church; however, special laws enacted for these circumstances are to be observed” (Can. 335). Until now, however, these special laws have neither been enacted nor promulgated.

Since canon law does have a procedure to replace bishops, surely a procedure for replacing the bishop of Rome also should be put into place.

The only way a pope can be removed is by death or resignation. Our concern here is not the resignation of a pope. Provision is made in Canon 332.2 for that possibility. In order to resign, the pope must be of sound mind and resign freely.

But if, as we are emphasizing, the pope were to become comatose or senile, he could not resign, and the problem of how to replace him would arise. Who decides whether to discontinue a pope’s life support systems or to use extraordinary means to prolong his life? Who would dare pull the plug on a pope?

Many hope that Pope Benedict has prepared written instructions on what to do were he ever to become incompetent (instructions that also include advance medical directives). But it is not known for certain that he has done so. No regulation requires that a pope leave such instructions. Even if Pope Benedict has left instructions, those might not settle canonical questions that could arise about their implementation.

This is not the first time **America** has explored the question of a comatose pope. The magazine raised the issue as recently as 2005; it published several articles in 2000 recommending that actions be taken. Especially comprehensive was an essay by the late Rev.

PETER SCHINELLER, S.J., is an associate editor of *America*.

James Provost titled "What If the Pope Became Disabled?" (7/30/00). Father Provost, a canon lawyer, answered that there is no clear solution to this dilemma. This "serious vacuum in the church's constitutional law," as he described it, remains to this day.

Another Option

What might be done? One other Catholic leader holds office for life, the General Superior of the Society of Jesus. He too can freely resign, as Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., did in 2008. But a procedure was established in 1995 to replace any incapacitated superior general. In a general congregation, four general assistants are elected; they gather every third month to examine whether "the superior general ought for a grave reason to resign his office." If he cannot faithfully fulfill his office because of health and there is no hope of improvement, it is their duty to ask him to resign. If he is unwilling or cannot resign, then the vicar previously named by the superior general is installed as temporary vicar general. If no one was named, such a vicar is elected. He in turn convokes a general congregation to replace the general who is declared incapable of governing. Could not a similar procedure be put in place for the bishop of Rome? (Of course, only the pope himself can make or approve such provisions in canon law for the bishop of Rome.)

Bishops, priests and all the faithful should know what would happen if their spiritual leader were to become incapacitated. This is only fair, right and just. While trusting in the guidance of the Spirit, the faithful should be at peace, assured that canonical procedures (the "special laws" called for in canon law) are in place to ensure continuity if a pope were to become incapacitated. It is the responsibility of church leaders working with canon lawyers to formulate the procedures that cover such a difficult and undesirable situation. **A**

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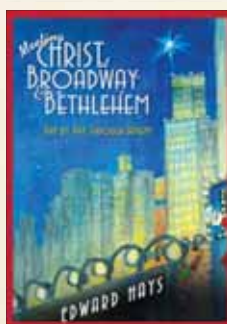


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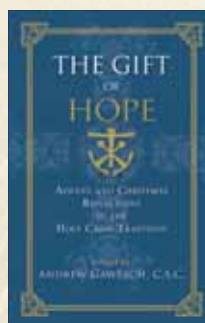
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NEW MEDIA | MARK BAUERLEIN

GENERATION TEXT

The dark digital ages: 13 to 17

Children between the ages of 13 and 17 who have a mobile phone average 1,742 text messages each month, according to a report by the Nielsen Company in September 2008. That comes to nearly 60 per day. They also make 231 voice calls each month, close to eight per day. They play games on the device as well, and browse the Web, take pictures and log hours of social networking.

No wonder so many of them consider the cellphone (for some it is a BlackBerry or an iPhone) an essential part of their lives. Half of all young people between the ages of 8 and 12 own one such device, according to a Harris Interactive poll conducted in July 2008. The rate rises to around four out of five for teenagers; that's a 36 percent increase over the previous three years, which means that these tools have swept into young people's

lives with the dispatch and coerciveness of a youth fad (like Pokemon and Harry Potter). The devices are more than just consumer goods. They are signs and instruments of status.

The age-old force of peer pressure bears down hard. Indeed, 45 percent of the teens that sport one agree that "Having a cellphone is the key to my social life"—not just helpful or useful, but "the key." If you don't own a cellphone, if you can't text, game, network and chat, then you are out of the loop. It is like not being picked to play kickball back in the primitive days of neighborhood sandlot gatherings. If a 16-year-old runs up 3,000 text messages in one month (and does not have



Are new media ruining our kids?

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/SUPRI SUHARJOTO

a flat payment plan), mom and dad take the phone away. It's just a silly, expensive toy, they think. But the 16-year-old thinks, "You have destroyed my life!" And for them, this seems true. Digital tools are the primary means of social contact. When they lose them, kids feel excluded and unpopular, and nothing hits a 16-year-old harder than the disregard of other 16-year-olds. They do not care what 40-year-olds think, and they do not worry about what happened at Thermopylae or what Pope John Paul II said about the "splendor of truth." They care about what other students in biology class think, what happened last week at the party and what so-and-so said about them.

It is an impulse long preceding the advent of the microchip, but digital devices have empowered that impulse as never before. Think about the life stage of adolescence. Teenagers stand at a precarious threshold, no longer children and not yet adults, eager to be independent but lacking the equipment and composure. They have begun to leave the home and shed the influence of parents, but they don't know where they are headed, and most of them find meager materials beyond the home out of which to build their characters. So they look to one another, emulating dress and speech, forming groups of insiders and outsiders, finding comfort in boyfriends and girlfriends, and deflecting more or less tenuously the ever-present risk of embarrassment.

Everyone passes through this phase, but this generation's experience marks a crucial change in the process. In the past, social life proceeded intermittently, all day at school and for a few hours after school. Kids hung out for an afternoon over the weekend and enjoyed a movie or party on Friday or Saturday night. Other than that, social life pretty much ended. They went home for dinner and entered a private space with only a "landline" as a means

of contact (which appears to young people today a restricted connection—show them a rotary phone and watch them scowl). Teenage social life and peer-to-peer contact had a limit.

Teenagers did not like it. I certainly didn't want to listen to my parents when I turned 16. But the limit was

healthy and effectual. Adolescents needed then and need now a reprieve from the tribal customs and peer fixations of middle school and high school. Wounds from lunchroom gossip and bullying, as well as the blandishments of popularity and various niche-crowd memberships, disable the

A Digital Defense

Not since 1972, when Richard Nixon ran against George McGovern, have so many 18- to 30-year-old Americans voted in a presidential election as they did last November. Young adults did more than vote in November 2008. Many of them campaigned for Barack Obama, harnessing the power of the Internet to cultivate new online communities and to disseminate the message of change that he espoused and many of the young embraced. Just before delivering his acceptance speech in Chicago's Grant Park, president-elect Obama sent bulk e-mail to his young-adult supporters, a fitting communiqué for this technologically advanced generation. "We just made history," he wrote, not just for helping to elect the first African-American president, but also for capturing the hearts and minds of young adults and mobilizing them for a larger cause.

Eboo Patel, director of the Interfaith Youth Corps and author of *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation*, is another person who believes in the potential of young adults and uses new media to reach them. Patel's organization brings together young people from many different faith traditions to do charitable work,

build relationships and inspire peaceful dialogue among organized religions. But such programs can work only if the younger generation is open-minded. Modern information technologies help young people learn about the diversity of faith traditions and move away from the natural suspicion of the "other." The I.F.Y.C. Web site, for example, hosts an online community called Bridge Builders, a forum where young adult interfaith leaders can connect and share stories of success.

Technology does not make people smarter, but it can help them to connect and rally around a cause in which they believe. We who are age 35 and older cannot simply blame younger generations if they are not interested in the things we deem important. We need to share the blame for not giving them more of what Barack Obama and Eboo Patel have managed to offer them: a cause that transcends their individual needs and that is worth working, even suffering, for. Yes, video games, YouTube and Wikipedia can provide anesthetic brain candy, distractions and easy answers; but if used for a larger cause, technologies like these become tools that can encourage intellectual growth as well as personal, social and ethical development.

DAVID E. NANTAIS, director of the Leadership Development Institute at the University of Detroit Mercy, has written for *America* about young adults.

maturing process. These form a horizon of adolescent triumphs and set the knowledge of history, civics, religion, fine art and foreign affairs beyond the pale of useful and relevant acquisitions. If a sophomore sat down on a

bus with the gang and said, "Hey, did you see the editorial on school funding in *The Times* this morning?" the rest would scrunch up their faces as if an alien being sat among them.

Youthful mores screen out such things, which is all the more reason for parents to offer an alternative. A home and leisure life separate from teen stuff exposes youths to heroes and villains that surpass the idols of the senior class, to places beyond the food court and Apple Store, to times well before the glorious day they got their driver's license. It acquaints them with adult duties, distant facts and values and truths they will not fully comprehend until much later. They don't like them and rarely find them meaningful, but in pre-digital times teens had nowhere else to go after they entered the front door. They had to sit at the dining table and listen to parents talk about grocery shopping, vacation plans, Nixon, gas prices and the news.

No longer. In 1980, when an angry parent commanded, "Go to your room—you're grounded!" the next few hours meant isolation for the teen. Today, the bedroom is not a private space. It's a social hub. For many kids, the bedroom at midnight provides a rich social life that makes daytime face-to-face conversations seem tame and slow. Amid the pillows with laptop or BlackBerry, they chat with buddies in 11th grade and in another state. Photos fly back and forth while classmates sleep, revelations spill forth in tweets ("OMG, Billy just called Betty his —"), and Facebook pages gain flashier graphics.

In this dynamic 24/7 network, teen activity accrues more and more significance. The events of the day carry

greater weight as they are recorded and circulated. The temptation for teens to be self-absorbed and self-project, to

consider the details of their lives eminently memorable and share-able, grows and grows. As they give in online, teenagers' peer consciousness expands while their historical understanding, civic awareness and taste go dormant before they have even had

much chance to develop.

This is the hallmark of what I have called the Dumbest Generation. These kids have just as much intelligence and ambition as any previous cohort, but they exercise them too much on one another. They are building youth culture into a ubiquitous universe, and as ever, youth culture is a drag on maturity. This time it has a whole new arsenal.

MARK BAUERLEIN is a professor of English at Emory University and author of *The Dumbest Generation: How the Digital Age Stupefies Young Americans and Jeopardizes Our Future* (Tarcher/Penguin).

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PAPAL REVIEW

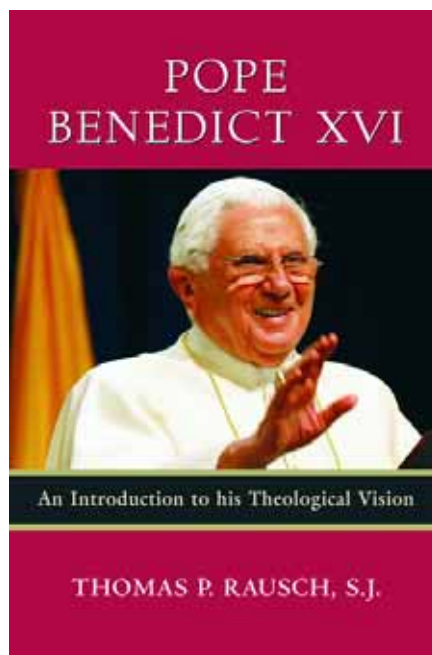
POPE BENEDICT XVI

An Introduction to His Theological Vision

By Thomas P. Rausch, S.J.
Paulist Press. 195p \$22.95
ISBN 9780809105564

Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., a professor of theology at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, is an insightful and perceptive theologian, whose writing is blessedly straightforward and clear. He brings these gifts to bear in a new book that offers "a respectful exploration" of the "theological vision" of Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI.

An opening chapter, "From Professor to Pope" traces some of the biographical details of Joseph Ratzinger's life and ministry, from his "Bavarian roots" to his somewhat surprising election to succeed John Paul II in the Chair of Peter. Though the facts are familiar, Rausch's keen theological eye sees beyond the merely journalistic, as when he writes: "Even [Benedict's] controversial address at Regensburg in 2006 managed to lift up these ques-



tions of reason and faith, and thus of human rights and religious authority in Islam, as well as Islam's attitude toward violence done in its name."

The succeeding chapters of the book proceed in systematic fashion, beginning with an overview of the pope's theological vision, especially the influences that helped shape it. Here Rausch examines the young

Joseph Ratzinger's debt to the theologies of St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure, the subjects of his earliest scholarly works, and sketches their continuing influence upon him, both as theologian and as pope. Next come chapter-length discussions of the pope's views on Scripture, his Christology (with special attention to his book *Jesus of Nazareth*), his teaching on church and his theoretical and pastoral convictions regarding liturgy. Rausch concludes with a helpful epilogue that provides an insightful summary and voices some cautious "concerns."

Chapter Three, "Pope Benedict and Scripture," is of particular importance. In it Rausch gives a helpful summary of the pope's longstanding views, from his youthful commentary on the Second Vatican Council's "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" to his intervention during the deliberations of last fall's Synod of Bishops on *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*. Rausch captures well the pope's persuasion:

Ratzinger's insistence that the Christian faith itself with its Christological center is the hermeneutic that allows the Bible to be itself is one that needs to be acknowledged today. He insists on the unity of the biblical tradition, even if this is a theological principle, not "an immediate historical datum." If the Bible is to be understood as God's word, it must be read and reread within the context of the life and liturgy of the church from which it originated. Only in this way can it be for the church a revelatory text.

In many respects Pope Benedict's reflections on Christology, church and liturgy represent the unfolding of the fundamental principles summarized in the foregoing excerpt. His

Christological hermeneutic appropriates a Johannine perspective upon the ultimate identity of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is not merely a prophet who speaks God's words; his person is the Word whom God speaks.

The church itself is not any people, but the pilgrim people of God, whose identity can be done full justice only in explicitly theological and Christological terms. And the Christian community's most proper realization as church occurs in eucharistic celebration and communion, where the body recognizes its head in the breaking and sharing of the bread. For Ratzinger, as Rausch perceptively states, "the Eucharist becomes both the origin of the church and its center."

What is especially striking in the book, however, is not so much the exposition of the pope's theology as the author's appreciative and critical engagement with it. Thus the book is as revelatory of Rausch as it is of Ratzinger, and it impels the reader also to enter into the stimulating conversation.

The author seriously and fairly engages the pope's theological vision, but the reader cannot help sense a certain reserve. Thus phrases like the following dot the presentation: "While there is a certain truth here...;" "While of course there may be some truth to what he says...;" "This is not entirely wrong." At times Rausch seems to ascribe some of the pope's stances that he finds problematic to Benedict's "Augustinian" propensities. (It must be noted, though, that Rausch, in more careful mode, rightly concedes that "the contrast between Augustine and Aquinas can be overemphasized.")

Perhaps the more telling contrast is between Ratzinger and Rahner. Rausch's reservations seem to be, in the main, "Rahnerian" in nature. They include the pope's supposed neglect of "experience," of "historical consciousness" and of "pneumatology."

Now each of these categories, as Rausch well knows, requires much clarification and elaboration—much more than can be realistically accommodated in an "Introduction." Where the conversation would become most fruitful, therefore, would be in engaging these issues at considerably greater length and with sustained depth.

Such conversation might begin where Rausch ends his book. He acknowledges that "there is an essentially 'conservative' dimension to [Pope Benedict's] ministry in the best sense." But his very last sentence reads: "But to be a good pastor of the universal church he must also be able to read what Vatican II called 'the signs of the times' (GS 4)." The discernment pressing upon us, then, concerns precisely which "signs of the times" are most exigent for the Christian community 40 years after Vatican II.

Those who find Pope Benedict's theological vision compelling hold that experience, historical consciousness and even pneumatology must be measured by the norm of Christ, for "not every spirit is to be trusted" (1 Jn 4:1). Many of my students find in Pope Benedict's magnificent homilies, largely neglected in Rausch's book, a Christological mystagogy that seeks to "bring all thoughts into captivity to Christ" (2 Cor 10:5). From this vantage, Benedict's theological "method" is, perhaps, less "Augustinian" than it is "Pauline," recapitulating all in Christ, the center in whom all things hold together.

Impelled and guided by this conviction, the conversation Rausch has helpfully initiated in this book can lead to a spirited and indeed urgent exchange—one whose importance for the life and mission of the church can scarcely be emphasized enough.

REV. ROBERT P. IMBELL, a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, teaches systematic theology at Boston College.

SALLY CUNNEEN

THE MAKING OF A GLOBAL ICON

MOTHER OF GOD

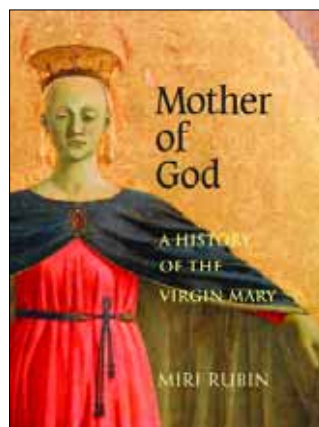
A History of the Virgin Mary

By Miri Rubin
Yale Univ. Press. 560p \$35
ISBN 9780300105001

As a 13th-century French poet once said, Mary is “the sea that no one exhausts.” Yet the remarkable cultural history that the medieval historian Miri Rubin has assembled from worldwide resources seems to challenge that claim. In some 500 pages she unrolls the diversity as well as the continuity of meanings that different ethnic, national and religious groups have continued to find in the Jewish mother of Jesus.

The question that interests the author is how a poor, Jewish, little-known woman became a global icon.

To answer it, she draws on extensive global research of recent years. A professor at Queen Mary’s College, London University, whom Anglican Archbishop Rowan Williams considers “one of the most interesting and original of British medieval historians,” Rubin approaches her task with zest and formidable credentials both as scholar and writer. Written for a wide audience, *Mother of God* is rich and readable, with clear explanations, poems and prayers, and is illustrated with many lesser-known images of Mary, particularly from the British Isles. It is astonishing how many still exist



despite the wholesale sacking of such images during the Reformation.

Rubin divides her search into six sections. The first covers the period

from the earliest mention of Mary in the Gospels and Apocrypha to her designation as Theotokos or God-Bearer (Mother of God in the West) at the Council of Ephesus in 431. She guides us through the many contradictory and hotly contested elements of devotion

to the mother of Jesus, when the Eastern Church in all its variety held much deeper reverence for her than did the Latin-speaking Roman Church.

As the royalty in Constantinople began to identify themselves with Mary, she took on imperial clothing and queenly stature. Under constant attack from farther east, the ordinary citizens of Constantinople saw in her a protector to replace the pagan goddesses Christianity was fast stripping away. The Theotokos soon became a protective mother venerated on icons just as Mary slowly absorbed the attributes and form of the nurturing, healing goddess Isis in later art. In these early centuries, the poetry and homilies of Ephrem of Syria expressed the most beautiful and influential theology in the East, raising all the mysterious paradoxes that marked Mary as poor woman and Queen of Heaven, virgin and mother, both daughter and mother of her divine father.

Educated at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem before earning her doctorate at Cambridge, Rubin also shows us that arguments with the Jews were central to the emergence of Christianity. The Magnificat, which Luke ascribes to Mary, reveals her as a true daughter of Abraham, echoing the power and compassion of God revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures. By

THE AUTHORITY OF THE ORDAINED

The authority of the ordained—a cardinal’s
calling, his mate’s answer revelatory
of where she is. Dogmatic crows. Canada geese
in a furor, make that Puritanical
furor, over some minor transgression. Whether
I’m here or not, doves in their eternal mourning
on my porch roof. The supernatural vision
of the pond’s red-tailed hawk, its claim on all below.
Fidelity made flesh in the returning great blue,
pair of swans, same migratory mergansers late March,
late November. Three cormorants on a log—each
as if hanging on a cross, drying its wings.
The cloister a hummingbird makes of the moment.

MOIRA LINEHAN

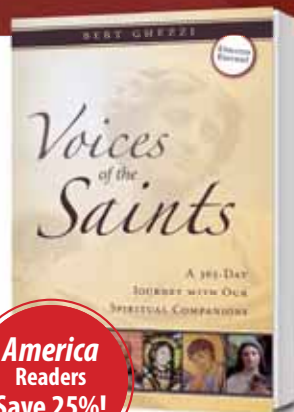
MOIRA LINEHAN, after careers as a high school English teacher and administrator in high-tech settings, now writes and leads workshops on poetry writing in the Boston area.

the late second century, however, Jews were not only questioning the virgin birth but sometimes insulting Mary as an adulteress, one who had turned on her own people. In return, when the Empire was predominantly Christian by the 5th century, various legends arose concerning Mary's Dormition and funeral procession. According to one, Jews attacked the procession and were immediately miraculously punished. They begged Mary for help, and many converted.

Rubin's next five sections follow the figure of Mary chronologically as devotion to her grew across the Mediterranean and Europe, later in Latin America and Asia, and finally back to a Europe deeply divided by the Reformation, which included disputes over how Mary should be depicted.

Rubin is strongest in her lengthy treatment of the European Middle Ages. Paying careful attention to the theology and liturgy of this period, when monasteries dominated the Christian world, she nevertheless concentrates on the human aspects of the widespread devotion to Mary that seemed to unite medieval Europe. To help the reader grasp how important the Virgin Mother was to the faith of Christians and even to their psychic health, the author provides many examples of emotional prose and poetry in praise of Mary by little-known monks and clerics, as well as by Anselm, Fulbert of Chartres and Bernard of Clairvaux (the latter two were believed to have tasted Mary's milk). We learn too of the somewhat different reactions of women religious to Mary, many eager to imitate her in their desire for the virtual experience of conceiving and birthing her son. This central medieval section abounds with revelations of the rich imagery, poetry, prayer, drama and miracle stories surrounding the woman who seemed to link heaven and earth.

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Along with the stories of compassion and healing attributed to Mary in the many miracle accounts of the period, the author also includes deeply troubling anti-Jewish stories and the actions to which they gave rise. Mary had from the beginning become the focus of Jewish-Christian antagonism. As early as the sixth century, the story was told of a Jewish boy thrown into the furnace by his father for eating leftover communion bread at the request of the sacristan. Mary saved him, and his mother and brother were converted to Christianity, while the unrepentant father was burned.

By the 12th and 13th centuries, similar stories abounded. Chaucer has his genteel Prioress share one on the pilgrimage to Canterbury, a sign of how acceptable anti-Jewish attitudes were among pious Christians. Meanwhile Jewish versions of the life of Christ inverted every claim of the Gospels, sometimes insulting both Jesus and Mary. The 13th and 14th

centuries were punctuated by expulsions and massacres of Jewish communities as the stories, especially in Italy, became more centered on the Jews as the cause of the suffering of Jesus and his mother.

As the ages unfolded, there were changes in the images of Mary in art. Rubin shares the fondness most people have for art that depicts Mary's maternal strength and compassion. She prefers expressive Gothic madonnas to the "frontal, trunk-like, static, majestic" images of Mary as Throne of Wisdom, in which the Christ child's features duplicate the mother's and the statues become visual embodiments of the Incarnation. Commenting on Piero della Francesca's fresco of the pregnant Madonna, Rubin notes obvious details but does not mention that the rows of goatskin pelts within the tent where Mary stands recall the curtains of goat hair that God

recommended to Moses for his temple. The serious young woman is announcing her pregnancy to us as she unbuttons her dress, while both angels and tent declare her to be the new ark of the

Covenant, the tabernacle of the living God. In *Pietà's* Rubin sees only the suffering mother, but Mary's appear-

ance in such statues in public places during and after the years of the Black Death was in great part to encourage the many women nursing the sick and dying to feel that they too were serving the Lord as she did.

As this book makes abundantly clear, Mary is an inexhaustible sea—from which, the 13th-century poet concludes, "The more he draws...the more he finds."

ON THE WEB

Paul Moses talks about his new book, *The Saint and The Sultan*.
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SALLY CUNNEEN is the author of *In Search of Mary: The Woman and the Symbol* (Ballantine).

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Rev. Thomas D. Stegman, S.J. is Associate Professor of New Testament and Professor Ordinarius in the ecclesiastical faculty of the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry. He earned his B.A. in philosophy from St. Charles Borromeo Seminary, his M.A., as in philosophy, from Marquette University, his M.Div. and S.T.L. from Weston Jesuit School of Theology, his Ph.D. under Luke Timothy Johnson at Emory University.

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proven experience in enhancing strong academic and faith formation programs, promoting a strong institutional advancement program, developing and implementing strategic plans, providing oversight of financial and facilities matters, and building productive and sustained relationships with all stakeholders. The next President must demonstrate strong interpersonal and communication skills and be able to speak convincingly of the role of presidential leadership and its potential for positive impact on a Catholic school community such as the Academy of the Holy Names. An applicant must be a member of the Catholic faith, possess an advanced degree and demonstrate a minimum of ten years of progressive experience in education, culminating in a significant role in educational leadership. Salary is competitive and commensurate with experience. Position is available July 1, 2010.

Interested and qualified applicants are asked to submit electronically a letter of introduction, a résumé and a statement addressing the role of presidential leadership and its potential for positive impact on the Academy, as well as the names, addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail addresses of five professional references to: Academy of the Holy Names President Search, Catholic School Management Inc., Attn: Lois K. Draina, at office@catholicchoolmgmt.com. Review of applications will begin Oct. 15, 2009, and continue until the position is filled.

Retreats

FRANCIS OF ASSISI, A SAINT FOR ALL SEARCHERS, Nov. 2–6, 2009, conference retreat with Michael Crosby, O.F.M.Cap. There will be something that appeals to everyone about the patron saint of the environment. Suggested offering: \$315. Visit www.bethanyspiritualitycenter.org, or call (845) 460-3061.

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LETTERS

Enough Grinning and Groping

One reason people sit apart during Mass (Current Comment, 9/28) is to avoid being frowned at for not holding hands and raising them during the Our Father, as if this empty pretense of community could somehow make up for the absence of a shared, vital attention to Christ's sacrifice at the altar. Avoiding the noise and chattiness that inevitably accompany the sign of peace is another reason.

At the very moment when all minds and hearts should be one in adoration of Christ, we are called on to slip on a social mask and smile warmly at the people in one's vicinity, while the mystery of our faith, Christ's sacrificial presence on the altar, is diluted into the sorry mess of a spiritual group hug.

This advice confounds the liturgical meaning of celebration with the popular usage; worse, it equates mere physical proximity and sensual exuberance with spiritual unity and force. It is one further reason the church needs to give up the Protestant practice of having priests face the congregation while offering sacrifice, get them to pay attention to the transcendent reality of priesthood and stop wondering why the faithful are not grinning and groping during the divine mysteries.

J. R. HOCHSTEDT
Scottsdale, Ariz.

The Dawn of Creation

Re: "A Fiery Gift" (10/5): Kudos to Susan Windley-Daoust for bringing to light the fundamental spiritual reality of birth. When we had our first child, admittedly a somewhat easy delivery with no medicine involved, I felt as though my husband and I were with God at the dawn of creation. Nothing in my nine years in religious life, which I continue to value highly, brought me as close to a sense of God creating and loving his creation ("and

God saw that it was good") as that morning when the air was as pure as the day after a storm and God's power and love flooded the room. It remains, along with the delivery of my second child, the most deeply spiritual experience of my life.

KATHY PESTA
Wakefield, R.I.

Touched and Yet Dejected

Thank you, Ms. Windley-Daoust, for bringing this reality so vividly to life. As a celibate male, not only will I never have this immediate experience, I do not expect to have it proximately. And that leaves me feeling "abject." I am reminded of a wonderful reflection given on a Marian feast by a married woman regarding the quickening—the first fluttering of mobility of the new life within—and how both touched and somewhat dejected I found my heart. Your writing sheds new light on bearing a child in one's womb "with love beyond all telling."

PAUL NIENABER, S.J.
Winona, Minn.

When I Am Weak, I Am Strong

What a great article by Susan Windley-Daoust! If only all women could read this after their first visit to the doctor. Having had four natural births myself, I totally agree that by working with the delivery process childbirth can be a growing personal, emotional, mental, physical and spiritual experience. But we have to take the chance and work through the experience.

By my fourth delivery, on Holy Saturday, I had a mystical experience that I would not trade for any pain-free, medically induced delivery. While I know we are all different and have different pain thresholds, I always viewed myself as weak when it came to pain, but through each childbirth God showed me how strong I can be when I unite myself to him. With God I can accomplish anything that is within his will.

SANDY SMITH
St. Charles, Ill.

We Fly to Your Patronage

As an adoptive parent, I have often said that the labor/delivery aspect of motherhood is also present in adoptive and foster parenthood, only in reverse order (the pain and labor take place after the child arrives, as the child bonds to you). I came to a fresh appreciation of the Blessed Mother (I am a recent convert from the evangelical tradition) when I saw that my foster son embraced me as mother only when he was frightened or lonely. During the day he would tolerate my feeding and dressing him, but at night I was "Mom!" This realization transformed my prayer life. God and the Blessed Mother are always patiently waiting for us to come and talk to them. Our not acknowledging them does not change this fact. The labor of motherhood and the transforming power of this role touch us regardless of how the child responds.

HEIDI SAXTON
Milan, Mich.

Missing the Point

Re "Faulty Guidance" (9/14): I think Father O'Malley is missing the point. What the bishops present in their *Curriculum Framework* is what the Catholic Church has been teaching for centuries. The *Framework* is not telling us how to teach or the methods to use in our religious education and catechetical sessions.

I disagree with the author's implication that young people today are incapable of understanding, articulating and committing themselves to the language and content of the Catholic faith and doctrine. Our young people deserve more credit.

In answer to Father O'Malley's final question, I have found many high school age men and women who have "chosen a retreat over a rock concert." What I have not found so easily are professional religious educators with the fire and conviction of an Ignatius of Loyola, who was able with word and

example to attract young people to leave all and follow Jesus Christ.

MARIA H. SEDANO
Chicago, Ill.

Harold Hill or St. Thomas?

I would like to commend the bishops for their continued efforts to work with the publishers of catechetical texts in order to bring to parishes and Catholic schools the best tools possible for communicating the fullness of faith to our young people.

This *Framework* is not a tool for direct instruction. And no textbooks could ever replace the witness of catechists to communicate their faith to others. But catechists need good tools to bring the fullness of the truth to their students. I work with many catechists who would strongly disagree with Father O'Malley's advice that they should be more like the con-artist Harold Hill. I would rather work with the saints like Thomas Aquinas.

In my opinion, Father O'Malley may have another agenda. Get a grip! The "Kum Ba Yah" days are over!

CAROLE OBROKTA
New Orleans, La.

Accident or Crime?

Re "Wheels of Misfortune" (Current Comment, 9/14): I am particularly sensitive to this issue, since my 18-year-old son was killed by a drunken driver on a summer afternoon. You are correct to write about the devastation and pain caused.

But I must advise the editors with regard to the use of the term "accident" as it related to these crashes. They are not accidents. Drunken driving crashes are the result of reckless driving and disregard of human life. It is a crime. Much to my surprise I see that even in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (No. 2290) "those incur grave guilt who, by drunkenness or a love of speed, endanger their own and others' safety on the road, at sea, or in the air." Not all sins are potential killers of other human beings, but this one is.

JANE ENGELKE
Mystic, Conn.

For Instance, Please!

Re "No Waiting Room" (Editorial, 9/28): Will you *please* make some recommendations! You continue to preach to the choir rather than offer

real reform suggestions that everyone knows are needed. Come out with it; be honest about it. You know as well as anyone that real tort reform must be accomplished, properly manned and funded; fraud, waste and abuse oversight must be established, as well as access for all citizens. If the basic problems are not truly reformed, why bother? All this nonsense about dissenters being bad people needs to be further examined by you and the politicians. These are concerned people who are fed up with a Congress that is so partisan and unresponsive to true reform that protesting seems to be their only way out.

PETER HANRAHAN
Eagle Harbor, Mich.

One Last Recommendation

If the Catholic Church is consistent in thought and action, why doesn't it require registered Catholics to fund Catholic medical suppliers with its own version of a health tax so that all Catholics can avail themselves of health services? I am certain that it would be less expensive than sending money through state and local governments, which have a tendency to drain away resources before they reach the front lines.

So, to maximize the impact of Catholic wealth for the benefit of everyone, the bishops should impose a Catholic health tax. That would be putting faith and theory and philosophy into action. The government is a lazy way out and expensive. It is time for Catholic thought to focus on Catholic action, not government mandates pretending to be social justice or medical justice.

JOHN MCSHANE
Westminster, Calif.



"Hunting and gathering doesn't sound very interesting,
so I've decided to become a consultant."

CARTOON BY HARLEY SCHWADRON

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The Throne of Grace

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), OCT. 18, 2009

Readings: Is 53:10-11; Ps 33:4-5, 18-22; Heb 4:14-16; Mk 10:35-45

"Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left" (Mk 10:37)

People can endure almost anything if they know there will be an end to their suffering and some recompense. In today's Gospel James and John have just heard Jesus speak for the third time about being handed over, mocked, scourged and condemned to death. Unlike Peter, whose response when Jesus first spoke about this was to reject such a scenario, the Zebedee brothers focus their attention on what reward they will gain if they endure such abuse. They envision Jesus enthroned in glory after his ordeal and themselves seated in the places of honor at his right and left. The other disciples are indignant with the two brothers, probably not because James and John have missed Jesus' message but because they beat the others in requesting the honored spots.

In response Jesus uses two powerful symbols. He asks whether James and John can drink the cup he will drink and whether they can be baptized with the same baptism. In the Scriptures, "cup" is frequently used as a metaphor for suffering. That meaning is clear in the Gethsemane scene, where Jesus begs God to let the cup pass him by if possible. Likewise, baptism here signifies being plunged into suffering and going through the throes of death to emerge into new life.

BARBARA E. REID, O.P., a member of the Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids, Mich., is a professor of New Testament studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Ill., where she is vice president and academic dean.

The self-confidence James and John exude is astounding.

They quickly assert that they can drink this cup and undergo this baptism. But do they really know what they are saying? Their eagerness leads us to reflect on our own ability to answer Jesus' questions. Perhaps there have been times when we eagerly said, "I do" or "We can" without fully knowing to what we were committing ourselves. Or we may know full well the demands of dedicating ourselves to Jesus' way of costly love, but the thought of a reward seems to make it worth the price.

Jesus takes the disciples another step deeper. The reward for which they hope beyond this life is not within Jesus' control to give, and it must not be their motivation. Jesus speaks disapprovingly about any who seek displays of greatness and authority over others—apparently even in the next life. The hope of reversal, of the servant becoming enthroned, is not what motivates Jesus, nor should it motivate his disciples.

The only throne Jesus has, which he shares with his disciples, is the "throne of grace" (Heb 4:16). Here one receives not places of honor alongside him, but mercy, grace and timely help (Heb 4:16). The well-

spring for this mercy is Jesus himself, who has endured all that we endure and is thus able to suffer with all who suffer.

The attempt to explain the suffering of Jesus or of any good person by assuring future reward falters. A different explanation is found in the first reading, where the servant's suffering is spoken of as a vicarious offering for sin, which sets aright the relationship of many sinners to God. In the Gospel Jesus speaks similarly about his life given as a "ransom for many." "Ransom" refers literally to the buying back of the freedom of a slave. It too is a metaphor that expresses in a limited way the freeing effects of Jesus' costly love. But this



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- How is Jesus inviting you to approach the "throne of grace"?
- Pray for the gift of mercy and trust.
- Let Jesus show you what it is to choose to be a servant, in contrast to the enforced servitude of the downtrodden.

ART: TAD DUNNE

metaphor can lead us to slip again into a "tit for tat" mentality, in which a reward can be purchased or earned.

Today's responsorial psalm captures the core of what Jesus attempts to teach his disciples: The only adequate response to suffering is to turn toward the Merciful One, in whom we place all our trust. This is not an explanation of how a merciful God can allow innocent persons to suffer, but it is the response of faith. As we immerse ourselves in God's mercy, we are baptized in a love that is stronger than suffering and death.

Truth in Numbers

No. 1

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