

America

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Christmas 2009

OF MANY THINGS

It's beginning to look a lot like Christmas. And it's starting to bug me just a little bit.

I like Christmas as much as the next Christian. By that I mean the feast of the Nativity. Even if you have seen your share of yules, you'll be able to discover something new in the Gospel readings, in the idea of the Incarnation or in the image of Jesus "dwelling among us." What's more, Advent, the wonderful windup to Christmas, is a spiritual banquet, offering myriad ways of tasting God's grace. Just think of the "O antiphons" sung at evening prayer and as the Gospel acclamations in the days preceding Christmas. "O Wisdom," "O Lord," "O Root of Jesse" and the rest date back to the ninth century. It takes a stony heart not to be moved by those ancient words. That Christmas I like.

The Christmas I don't cotton to is the one you probably don't like either: the commercial one. This year what irked me most were the hackneyed slogans companies deployed in their December campaigns, which tried to have it both ways: using religious themes without actually being religious. Call it faith-based advertising. (Incidentally, it's not as if you have to go searching, like the Wise Men, for these catalogs, magazine ads and commercials; they are all but inescapable in December.)

Some aren't half bad. This year J. C. Penney's ads featured the slogan "The Joy of Giving." (Giving, needless to say, is laudable.) On the other hand, the store's standard ad slogan seems an unlikely one for a department store: "Every day matters." Every day matters? When did Deepak Chopra start writing ad copy for J. C. Penney?

By the way, if you examine their flyers, you'll discover that "Every day matters" is a registered trademark. This means, I suppose, that the next time you say to a friend, "Every day matters," you owe J. C. Penney a few pennies.

Try *Carpe diem* instead. That's still free.

Some advertisers seemed unable to decide how religious their ads could be. Many stores want to glom onto the Christmas angle without being Christian, which would be a challenge even for Don Draper and his "Mad Men" copywriters. The cover of my Land's End catalog, bursting with prep-py families who divide their time evenly between laughing dementedly and petting horses, says, "Make it Merry!" Make what merry? Celebrating Christ's birth or petting a horse?

Magic is another popular word on Madison Avenue. Pier One's catalog said, "Make Christmas Magic!" All I can think of is Mary and Joseph standing around Harry Potter in a manger.

The winner of this year's most unfortunate catch phrase is a tie between Macy's and Eddie Bauer. Macy's shopping bags say, "A million reasons to believe!" In what? What does Macy's want us to believe in? That God became fully human? (Imagine that on a bag.)

Just as silly was the cover of the Eddie Bauer catalogue, which says, "We believe." As with Macy's, I was curious to find out just what Eddie Bauer believed in. The indwelling of God? The two natures of Jesus? Well, not exactly. Page three had their creed: "We believe in the world's best down!" I just hope they've heard about the new Mass translations. In two years, they'll have to say, "I believe in the world's best down."

I know this is the way marketing works, using anything to hawk a product. And I'm sorry to be a stickler, but it's strange seeing the Christian faith being used and denied at the same time.

Nonetheless, I try not to get too upset about it, because I don't want commercialism to ruin my Christmas Day. Or any day. Because I believe that, as that great spiritual master J. C. Penney once said, "Every day matters."

JAMES MARTIN, S.J.

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Cover: "Madonna della Strada," in the Chiesa del Gesù in Rome, after the painting was restored in 2006. Photo: Zeno Colantoni

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ON THE WEB

Video art reflections on the Christmas season, and an interview with Rev. Larry Snyder, president of **Catholic Charities**. Plus, Thomas Massaro, S.J., discusses the popular Harvard course "**Justice**," taught by Michael Sandel, right. All at americamagazine.org.



CURRENT COMMENT

Mind the Gap

Efforts to lessen the difference in opportunities available to men and women have made significant progress in some regions of the world. The World Economic Forum reported in October that of the 115 nations studied, representing 90 percent of the world's population, over two-thirds have shown gains. The greatest have taken place in developed countries of the North: Sweden, Norway, Finland and Iceland, with Iceland ranking first. But in some respects, progress regarding equality of the sexes has been lagging. The co-author of the forum's report, Saadia Zahidi, director and head of constituents at the World Economic Forum, said that the nations examined had closed about 90 percent of the gap in education and health but only 50 percent in economic participation and opportunity and just 15 percent in political empowerment.

Scandinavia received special commendation in the latter category for women's active participation in politics. Sweden, for example, has an equal number of male and female politicians. In economic terms, too, Scandinavia ranks high, with women holding a majority of professional and technical jobs. Much poorer countries have also made gains. Thus South Africa and Lesotho are among the top 10, at the sixth and tenth positions, respectively. The Philippines, for the first time in four years, did not make progress, but it remains the leading Asian country in the rankings. Disappointingly, given its unparalleled resources, the United States fell from 27th place to 31st place. As Melanne Verbeke, the U.S. ambassador at large for global women's issues, has observed, "We have a long road to go no matter where we live."

Christmas Commerce

Christmas is coming. Is your goose about to be cooked if you cannot find the right present for everyone on your list? Take a breath and step back this season. You can give yourself and some craftspeople and farmers in the developing world a break by taking your Christmas list online to shop on fair-trade networks. We know many of the articles of clothing, toys and other gifts that will be happily handed over to loved ones around the tree on Dec. 25 have origins that are significantly less joyful. They come from sweatshops and barracks-style factories, where workers have been treated badly by subcontractors for major labels in the United States and where child labor is not unknown.

An easy way to circumvent that system is to shop at fair-trade sites like Serrv International (www.serrv.org) or Sweat Free Communities (www.sweatfree.org). You can buy goodies, toys and clothing through these alt-commerce networks that get closer to a Catholic ideal of matching ends with means in a just economy. It is a system that protects human dignity and encourages the authentic development of people while promoting relationships instead of alienation between consumer and producer. And for that person on your list who already has everything? Why not just get them nothing—except a donation to a worthy charity like Catholic Relief Services, Heifer International or Oxfam? A contribution in their name toward mitigating human misery outside the Western comfort zone will do a lot more to add the meaning to the season than the quickly lost or broken gizmo of the day.

Original Altruism

"A baby is God's opinion that the world should go on," said Carl Sandburg. The presence of an infant in a stroller brings instant smiles to pedestrians or riders on the subway. Yet in the Catholic tradition we read that the infant is "born in a fallen world and tainted by original sin" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1250). Hence the necessity of infant baptism.

Some biologists and psychologists are now uncovering evidence to support more optimistic judgments concerning the infant. They affirm that infants show signs of altruism, charity and concern for others even before they are taught this. Such conduct seems not to be motivated by a desire for some reward. They describe babies as innately sociable and helpful to others. One boldly states that children are altruistic by nature. Frans de Waal, a primatologist, writes, "We're programmed to reach out. Empathy is an automated response."

Doesn't this make sense and conform with our experience? We affirm that we are born in the image of God, and that God is love. Still, there is no denying children are born into "a fallen world" tainted by sin. Now, instead of setting forth a doctrine on Limbo, the catechism more kindly says that "as regards children who have died without baptism, the church can only entrust them to the mercy of God" and allow "us to hope there is a way of salvation for children who have died without baptism" (No. 1261).

The church itself is beginning to balance its teaching on original sin with a touch of original altruism.

A Simple Contemplation

In 1223, in the Italian village of Greccio, St. Francis of Assisi constructed the first crèche (from the French word for “cradle” or “crib”), to encourage Christians to enter imaginatively into the scene of the Nativity. After filling a manger with hay and tying an ox and an ass nearby, St. Francis attended Mass before the crib along with villagers. Three centuries later St. Ignatius Loyola invited believers who were making the Spiritual Exercises to imagine Mary and Joseph as they made their way to Bethlehem. “See in imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem,” wrote Ignatius. “Consider its length and breadth, whether it is level or winds through valleys and hills. Similarly, look at the place or cave of the Nativity: How big is it, or small? How low or high? And how is it furnished?”

The Nativity is among the most familiar of images for Christians: The beautiful young virgin cradles her newborn child in her arms as her doting husband (not to mention the placid animals and astonished shepherds) look on lovingly. But it is also an image that can grow stale as a person grows older, so it is easy to overlook the scene as a possible source of fresh and even surprising spiritual insights. It is also easy to forget that while the person at the center of the story was fully divine, each member of the Holy Family—including Jesus—was fully human. In these difficult times, what might the experiences of these three individuals, as they make their way through the days surrounding the Nativity, say to us in our world—particularly to those who are unemployed, ill or in any way struggling?

Jesus. First of all, an infant is entirely dependent on others for every physical need, starting with nourishment. In these difficult times, many adults begin to feel they are becoming more and more dependent on others, perhaps even for nourishment. Can we see that dependence as something holy, rather than as something to be rejected? An infant is also trusting, looking to the parent to do the right thing. Can this be our stance toward God? A child is vulnerable to a host of things—illness, pain, frustration. Can we let ourselves be vulnerable with one another, sharing our frustrations and pain? But despite its helplessness, every dependent, trusting and vulnerable infant is the repository of almost unlimited promise and potential. Even in dark times there is always the hope of something new.

Mary. It is commonplace to aver that Mary was trusting, faith-filled and holy. Most likely she was also confused. This is evident from her words to Gabriel at the

Annunciation: “How can this be?” In confusing times, can we permit ourselves feelings of holy confusion without the normal attending guilt? Mary was tired. The arduous months of pregnancy, the grueling journey to Bethlehem and the unanesthetized labor would have been severely taxing. We are not at our best when we are physically tired. Finally, Mary also relies on her own experience of God, incommunicable to others, which fills her with the confidence to carry out her mission boldly in the face of confusion and weariness.



Joseph. Given no words to speak in the Gospels, Joseph did little that is known to us; even the details of his death remain unknown. Thus, his life, like those of so many around us, is one of hiddenness. Can we see our actions as holy if they are not known by others? Can our deeds be, in Henri Nouwen’s phrase, “known by God but hidden from the world”? Joseph works. He provides the wherewithal for the care and feeding of his wife and child. Any honest labor is noble, no matter how much it pays. And Joseph worries: his initial fears for his family most likely did not subside. Like many Americans, he was caught under the heel of powers far beyond his control and was still required to struggle for his family. Can we allow ourselves worry from time to time, as even the saints did?

The world, finally, into which Jesus was born was, like our own, riven with competing religious factions, roiled by political controversies and marked by great economic disparities. Luke’s Gospel situates the story of Jesus’ birth in a real place with real problems. The Messiah was born in occupied territory. Nazareth, where Mary and Joseph were planning to raise Jesus, was considered a backwater town. Galilee itself was seen by other Jews as an inferior place because of the continuing presence of Gentiles there. In his book *Jesus: A Gospel Portrait*, the New Testament scholar Donald Senior, C.P., notes that this gave the region a “demeaning reputation in the eyes of mainline Judaism.” In short, from the beginning, the Holy Family had to deal with problems relating to politics, economics and religion—like most of us.

This year, for many Americans the Christmas story may take on greater meaning and import as they look to the real-life struggles of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Entering into the scene means entering into the lives of fully human people, whose experiences can enable us to deepen our relationship with God, who is near us, with us and one of us: Emmanuel.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

COPENHAGEN

Conflict Quickly Heats Up U.N. Climate Conference

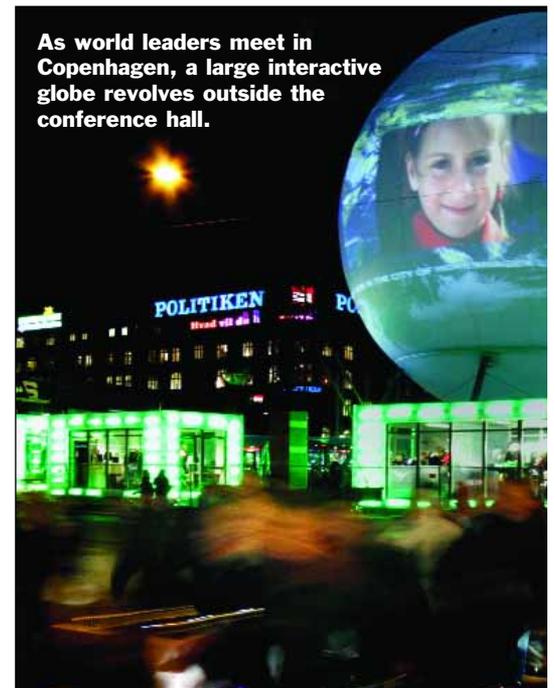
The underlying tension between the world's largest producers of greenhouse gases and small developing countries quickly surfaced on the first day of the U.N. conference on climate change (Dec. 7-18) in Copenhagen, Denmark. Outrage among negotiators from small nations was generated when a leaked agreement that proposed generous per capita minimums for greenhouse gas emissions by industrialized nations circulated at the conference.

In smaller gatherings, after Danish Prime Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen opened the global summit with the remark that "a deal is within our reach," the Alliance of Small Island States said it would accept nothing less than a legally binding pact to limit greenhouse gases. A less demanding but more politically appealing agreement would do little to protect its countries from rising sea levels, said the alliance, a coalition of 42 small island nations, low-lying coastal countries and territories.

Two officials from the U.S.-based Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns said the position taken by the alliance serves as a call to the world to ensure that developed countries take definitive steps to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions significantly.

"The real debate is over a political versus a legally binding document," said Ann Braudis, a Maryknoll sister who co-chairs the U.N. N.G.O. Committee on Sustainable Development. She said the

United States promised, during an afternoon news conference on Dec. 7, to seek meaningful reductions in greenhouse gas emissions while working to make the expected political agreement a legally binding one. The same day, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency



As world leaders meet in Copenhagen, a large interactive globe revolves outside the conference hall.

announced it had determined greenhouse gases are endangering people's lives and must be regulated. The announcement was timed to send a message to the U.N. conference that the White House was ready to act on global warming, even without congressional action.

PAKISTAN

Amid Rising Violence, Catholics Plan Quiet Christmas

Catholics in northern Pakistan are preparing for quiet, scaled-back Christmas celebrations as militant attacks continue to terrorize the country.

"Most of the scheduled programs are canceled due to this situation," said Archbishop Lawrence Saldanha of Lahore, the capital of Punjab Province, on Dec. 7. Celebrations will be more of a family affair with little "pomp and display outside," he added.

"This will be a silent Christmas.

We shall discover the meaning of Christmas in a quiet way and hope for the return of harmony and peace," the archbishop said. But that evening, just hours after he spoke, two bomb blasts ripped through a busy market in the center of Lahore. Forty-nine people were killed and scores injured.

A wave of deadly bombings has rocked the country since the Pakistani army launched an operation in mid-October against Taliban militants in the neighboring North-West Frontier

Province, which borders Afghanistan. Another blast on Dec. 7 outside a district courthouse in that province's capital, Peshawar, killed at least 11 people and injured 44 others.

A catechist who did not wish to be identified said that two Catholic churches in Peshawar, the city worst hit by militant attacks in Pakistan, have canceled Christmas celebrations. "Masses will be conducted but not the traditional fairs. We are praying every day for the improvement of the situation and peace in the country," he said.

The outdoor Christmas fair at the Cathedral of Sts. Peter and Paul in Faisalabad also has been called off. "The annual diocesan choir event for-



Sister Braudis's Washington-based colleague, Kathy McNeely, said that the broad network of faith-based non-governmental organizations on hand in Copenhagen, including Caritas Internationalis and the Catholic International Cooperation for

Development and Solidarity, are pressing the need for a legally binding climate agreement because the future of the world's poorest nations is at stake.

Nearly three dozen representatives of Catholic aid and development organizations were in Copenhagen to deliver a common message: Action must be taken immediately to ease the impact of global climate change on poor and vulnerable people because they already are being adversely affected by drought, flooding and rising sea levels brought on in part by the high levels of greenhouse gas emissions from more developed countries.

"Our message is a moral message," McNeely said. "The United States has very smart people negotiating for them, as do some of the other countries of the North, and they should be able to figure out how to best protect the most vulnerable countries."

Before the world gathering, religious leaders offered their prayers and called for responsible actions on behalf of the earth. Pope Benedict XVI,

speaking at his noon blessing at the Vatican on Dec. 6, said protection of the environment requires more sober lifestyles and a rediscovery of the "moral dimension" of development.

He also said he hoped the Copenhagen conference would identify policies that "respect creation and promote a cooperative development founded on the dignity of the human person and oriented toward the common good."

"The protection of creation demands the adoption of lifestyles that are sober and responsible, especially toward the poor and future generations," the pope said.

At an ecumenical prayer service in London, Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Westminster said the needs of the world's poorest and most disadvantaged people must be at the center of the worldwide debate on climate change. The archbishop urged people to consider their own lifestyles when thinking about climate change and called upon people to simplify their lives rather than be dominated by the demands of a consumer society.

merly attended by thousands in the open cathedral compound will now be limited only to the cathedral building," said the Rev. Khalid Rashid Asi, vicar general of the Diocese of Faisalabad. "We are very cautious, and all programs are being organized...on a low scale."

On Dec. 4 an explosion at a mosque in Rawalpindi killed 40 people and injured 83 others. Rawalpindi houses the headquarters of the Pakistani army, and among those killed were high-ranking army officers. Meanwhile, prominent Muslim clerics have issued a religious edict declaring suicide attacks and bomb blasts "un-Islamic."

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan called the series of bomb attacks "devastating." "Children and women have been most vulnerable to the excesses of militants."

The commission also expressed concern that the Pakistani military was committing human rights violations as it responded to the unprecedented violence and in continuing operations against Pakistan's Taliban and its sympathizers. "The so-called counter-insurgency operations carried out by the military and paramilitary

forces have used heavy artillery, killing an unknown number of civilians," the group alleged.



A man runs past a blaze after a bomb explosion at a market in Lahore, Pakistan, Dec. 7. The suicide bombing killed at least 49 people.

How Much Are Health Execs Worth?

Thirty Catholic and other faith-based institutional investors are using their shareholder clout to urge 21 health-related companies to disclose publicly the compensation packages for their top executives and their lowest-paid U.S. employees, including the costs of health care. Shareholder resolutions filed by the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility are seeking reports comparing total compensation packages of highest and lowest paid employees in 2000, 2004 and 2009. The report would analyze any change in the relative size of the gap between the two; evaluate whether top executive compensation packages should be modified; and decide whether the corporate board should continue to monitor the results of the comparison. "Given the historical lack of transparency in the health care industry related to costs, this [information] is not something that shareholders know today," said Margaret Weber, who chairs the board of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility and represents the Basilian Fathers of Toronto.

District Votes For Same-Sex Marriage

The Archdiocese of Washington pledged continued dialogue with the District of Columbia's City Council to seek "a balance of interests in the legislation" after the council gave preliminary approval on Dec. 1 to a bill to legalize same-sex marriage. By an 11-to-2 vote the council passed the Religious Freedom and Civil Marriage Equality Amendment Act of 2009. The bill will eventually be sent to Washington's Mayor Adrian Fenty, who has said he will sign it. District laws also are subject to congressional

NEWS BRIEFS

Christians conducted a vigil service in Bhopal, India, to remember victims and survivors of the **world's worst industrial accident** when 3,000 people died on Dec. 3, 1984, after deadly gas escaped from a Union Carbide chemical plant.



Bhopal vigil

• Pope Benedict XVI met Cardinal Sean Brady of Armagh, Northern Ireland, and Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin on Dec. 11 to discuss "the painful situation of **the church in Ireland**" following a report detailing the church's failures in addressing clerical sexual abuse. • European Union ministers have called for **Jerusalem** to serve as the capital of both Israel and a future Palestinian state as part of a negotiated peace. • The **San Francisco Archdiocese** said it was confident a civil court would rule in its favor over a unanimous determination by a city tax appeals board on Nov. 30 that the archdiocese owes \$14.4 million in unpaid property transfer taxes. • Ireland's Sisters of Mercy have joined other **Irish religious orders** in pledging compensation to victims of abuse, now totaling 417 million euros (\$621 million). • U.S.-born **Kristina Kerscher Keneally**, a University of Dayton graduate, was elected premier of New South Wales, Australia, on Dec. 3.

review under the Home Rule Charter. "As the legislation moves forward, the Archdiocese of Washington will continue its dialogue with the council," Susan Gibbs, spokeswoman for the archdiocese, said in a statement on Dec. 1. Archdiocesan officials have expressed concern that the bill as written would severely limit the ability of its local Catholic Charities USA office to work with the city in serving the poor. But they also have emphasized that the agency will continue to serve the city's poor regardless of the outcome of the same-sex marriage bill.

Mixed Feelings On Afghan Plan

Catholic groups were alternately hopeful and dejected by President Obama's plan to add 30,000 troops to the war effort in Afghanistan. "I think he's

making a tragic and horrible mistake," said David Robinson, head of Pax Christi USA. "The irony of him announcing this fateful escalation the week before [receiving] the Nobel Peace Prize, this is Greek tragedy." Mary Ellen Gallagher, a Maryknoll sister who is on the staff of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns in Maryknoll, N.Y., said she hopes and prays that this strategy works. "But after eight years of this war, with the toll it takes on our own soldiers, the toll it takes on the people in Afghanistan, the lack of training in these eight years for the Afghani soldiers: Where have they been in all these eight years? Why have they not been trained to protect their own people? These are the questions that we have," she said.

From CNS and other sources.



Another War President?

As President Obama begins to sell Congress and the American people on his plan for a time-limited U.S. troop surge in Afghanistan, genuine military and national security experts, flanked by prime-time pundits posing as experts, will parse and debate the commitment.

While we all (I hope) do our best to tune in the former and tune out the latter, we also need to recognize that the 44th commander in chief's first major war-making decision raises two overarching sets of questions, one constitutional, the other Catholic.

The cardinal constitutional question concerns the president's authority to commit blood and treasure to combat abroad without a formal declaration of war by the Congress. Of course Congress has not declared war since it passed six separate war declarations (Japan, Germany, Italy, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania) in the 1940s. Instead, since the Korean "police action," Congress has issued eight "resolutions" broadly authorizing U.S. military actions abroad, including one in 1964 regarding Vietnam and one in 2001 regarding Afghanistan.

I am more hawk than dove, and I accept President Obama's case for upping the military ante in Afghanistan. But being constitutionally nonchalant about making war is a post-1945 presidential habit that he ought to break, not repeat.

As events in Vietnam (1964–75) demonstrated, an undeclared war can become a quagmire and stretch by

presidential prerogative into ad hoc military actions (invasions, espionage, bombings) against nearby noncombatant peoples and nations.

As both Afghanistan (2001 and 2009–?) and Iraq (1991–92 and 2002–?) have shown, one round of military action against unspecified enemies, waged without well-defined strategic or tactical objectives, often leads to another undeclared war.

Since World War II, presidents, Democrat and Republican alike, have invoked "national security" to justify warring in places (President Bill Clinton's congressionally unauthorized actions in Yugoslavia in 1999) or in ways (President George W. Bush's nods to torture-type interrogation methods after 9/11) that overstep their authority and violate constitutional or human rights.

The National Security Act of 1947 established the Department of Defense in conjunction with the Truman Doctrine and a bipartisan "containment policy" centered on Soviet- or Chinese-backed Communism. But nothing in that act or in the subsequent amendments to it, and nothing in controlling Supreme Court decisions dating back to the Youngstown case in 1952 (the famous judicial rebuke to President Harry S. Truman's claim that he had the authority to seize steel mills for "national security" reasons), authorizes a president to wage war per the so-called Bush Doctrine.

As articulated in the "National Security Strategy" proposal submitted to Congress on Sept. 20, 2002, and in

related 2002–8 presidential documents and speeches, the Bush Doctrine holds that because post-9/11 America is "vulnerable to terrorism of catastrophic proportions," and because the global "war against terror" and the need for ever-expanding "homeland security" is a "permanent condition," the president is authorized to use military and other resources largely at his discretion, including use in pre-emptive major military or other actions

against foreign groups and nations that he believes threaten the United States.

President Obama will never say so, but thus far on Afghanistan he is retracing the Bush Doctrine, not only strategically, which might or might not be defensible, but also con-

stitutionally, which crosses this dangerous presidential-powers Rubicon for a second time and gives it bipartisan legitimacy.

Furthermore, declared and duly constitutional or not, is this likely to prove a just war? That, of course, is the cardinal Catholic question here.

In broad outline, to be just, a war must be waged to stop the lasting, grave and certain damage being done by the aggressor (here the Taliban and its allies); and there must be no other practical or effective means to stop the damage, a serious prospect of success in stopping it and a prudent hope that the killing in order to stop killing will not beget even greater evils.

I trust President Obama to wage a tolerably just, if barely constitutional, war in Afghanistan.

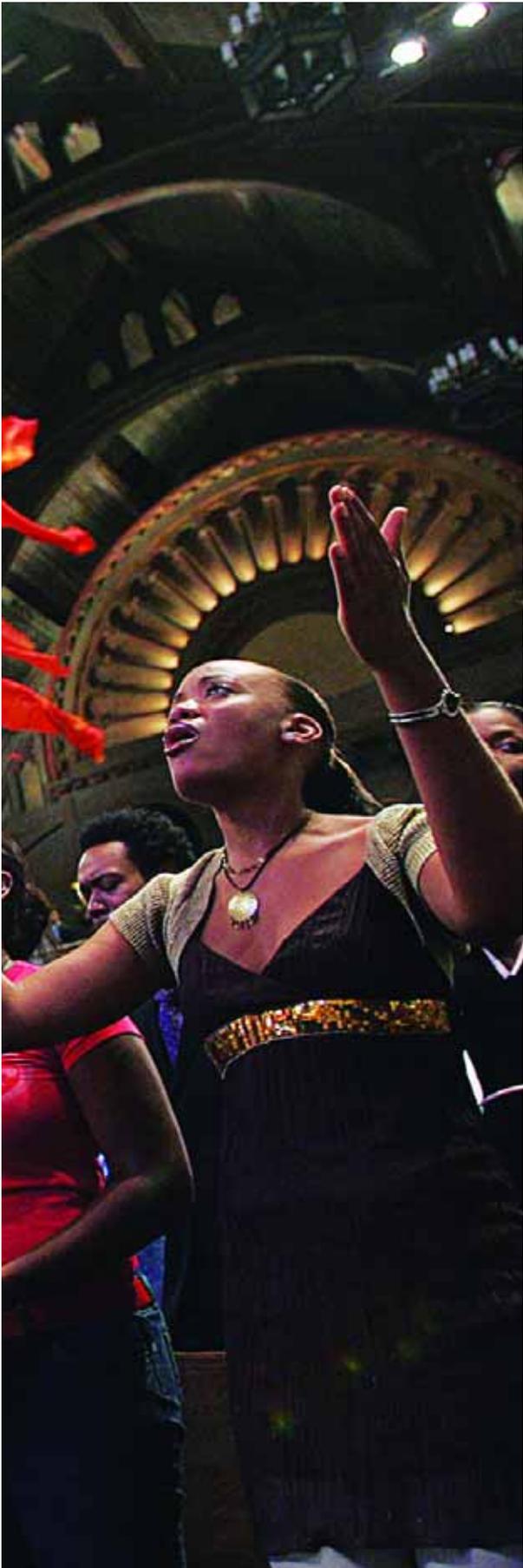
On Afghanistan, President Obama is retracing the Bush Doctrine.

JOHN J. DIJULIO JR. is the author of *Godly Republic: A Centrist Blueprint for America's Faith-Based Future* (Univ. of California Press, 2007).

Christ Church in Montclair, N.J., holds five services every Sunday to provide for more than 5,000 members.



ART: REUTERS/SETH WENIG



WHAT CATHOLICS CAN LEARN FROM PROTESTANT MEGACHURCHES

Parish Revival

BY BRUCE CECIL

A few years ago my uncle asked, half in jest, “Do you know which is the largest Catholic church in town?” When I pleaded ignorance, he answered with a smile, “Southeast Community Church!” He pointed to a Protestant megachurch just off the expressway and explained, no longer in jest, that many Catholic families who used to attend his parish on the east side of Louisville, Ky., were now attending Southeast Community Church. National studies indicate that 40 percent of Protestant megachurch members are former Catholics.

Why are Protestant megachurches successful in attracting Catholics? A frequent explanation is that megachurches provide “entertainment”—lively music, glitzy videos, coffee shops, food courts and more. While that may be true, such reasoning demeans the spirituality of former Catholics (and others who attend these churches) by implying they are superficial in their faith. The answer must lie deeper. Perhaps these megachurches truly minister to those who attend them, including former Catholics. Maybe they spiritually empower people. Perhaps entertainment and spiritual depth are not antithetical, but can go hand in hand.

I started to explore such ideas 10 years ago when I became pastor of Our Lady of Soledad Parish in Coachella, Calif. The 5,000-family parish is 98 percent Hispanic and relatively poor. Before my arrival, the parish already had very active laypeople and 100 or more small faith communities meeting in homes each week. An active retreat center next door contributed greatly to the spiritual dynamism of the parish. Still, the parish served as a revolving door or “sacramental machine” for many families, who came for a baptism, marriage or first Communion but vanished after having received the sacrament. The pastoral staff encouraged parishioners to make a three-day Missionary Encounter retreat next door, but each retreat could accommodate only 50 candidates. Since so many more

BRUCE CECIL, C.S.C., is pastor of Our Lady of Soledad Parish in Coachella, Calif.

people wanted sacraments, I began to study the outreach of Protestant megachurches.

I read Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose-Driven Church*. Warren pastors one of the largest megachurches in the United States, Saddleback Community Church in Orange County, Calif. His recipe for church development is simple and straightforward, and it works with many people, including former Catholics. Since Warren's materials came in Spanish and his methods work among Latinos, I thought it reasonable to assume that some of his strategies might work in Coachella.

Our parish staff developed a three-pronged strategy that 1) focused on enhancing the worship experience of parishioners, 2) developed five mini-retreat workshops to help people grow spiritually and 3) allowed other ministries to flow organically from the structural "skeleton" created in the first two steps.

Step One: Worship

Sunday Mass is the doorway through which most Catholics pass regularly to experience God and the church. Consequently, the quality of Sunday worship is of utmost importance. The parish emphasizes hospitality: everyone receives a greeting at the door, and before Mass worshippers are invited to offer a handshake or a hug to those nearby. Members learn that their first ministry is to be friendly and

welcoming. After the announcements the presider welcomes visitors, recognizes wedding anniversaries and birthdays and blesses newborn babies.

To encourage congregational singing, the parish uses PowerPoint to project the words of songs onto a big screen. Songs sometimes involve clapping or movement. PowerPoint is also used to integrate photos, videos and music into the preaching. Our Mexican-American congregation responds well to visual aids, so this strategy is especially effective. Upon entering the church, the parishioners receive a homily outline, which they are encouraged to take home as a message reminder or to share with someone else.

The parish encourages inclusion and participation, especially of children and youth. At some Masses, the children's Liturgy of the Word includes skits, games, puppets and music. At Communion time, those children who have not yet received the sacrament form a separate line and both receive and give a blessing. The priest makes a sign of the cross on the forehead of the child, and the child reciprocates by tracing a sign of the cross on the priest's forehead. If there is a deacon, he sometimes takes on this role. Teens serve as ministers of hospitality, run the computer for the music and homily, help in the children's program, sing in the choirs and more. The staff and parishioners also take special care to accommodate seniors and persons with disabilities.

Parish leadership also promotes stewardship of time and



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of talent, not just of finances. Cards placed in the pews allow worshippers to request prayers or information on programs and ministries. A follow-up team calls anyone who fills out a card. The parish gives away 10 percent of the weekly collection to a charity; naming the charity among the prayers of petition reminds parishioners of the importance of tithing.

Step Two: Discipleship

Sunday Mass is primary and central, but it is not enough to sustain Catholics. Our parish also provides a step-by-step process to help parishioners deepen their faith, so they don't just enter the front door only to drift quietly out the back door later. The discipleship program mirrors the process developed by Warren. It consists of five mini-retreats. A baseball diamond serves as a visual help to remember the strategy. Each retreat is one of the three bases, the pitcher's mound or home plate. Parishioners run the bases and become "home-run Catholic Christians."

Each mini-retreat includes prayer, ice breakers, talks, faith sharing and food. Each is also user-friendly. Held on a Sunday when most parishioners are off work, the first session begins at 3 p.m., late enough to allow for both Sunday Mass and family time. Retreats end at 8 p.m., early enough for participants to be rested for the next day. The parish provides child care. Each mini-retreat is self-contained; no one must return to complete it. This practice eliminates

absenteeism and distinguishes the retreat experience from a class. Lay teams lead the mini-retreats, which are offered in English and Spanish and repeated frequently throughout the year.

Each mini-retreat focuses on a different aspect of spiritual growth:

Mini-Retreat 101, "Catholics Alive!" begins with the question, "What does it mean to be a follower of Christ?" Retreatants discuss the difference between a relationship-centered faith and a rules-centered faith; consider the importance of church as a family, instead of a privatized, Lone-Ranger Christianity; and note similarities and differences between Catholic and non-Catholic Christians. The group discusses the importance of serious commitment to the Catholic faith, as well as the commitments asked of parish members. Participants are asked to sign a simple membership covenant if they wish to join the parish as registered members.

Mini-Retreat 201, "Alive and Growing Spiritually!" focuses on maturation in the Catholic faith. Retreatants discuss prayer, Bible study and the importance of belonging to a small faith community. There is also a presentation of Catholic moral teachings.

Mini-Retreat 301, "Alive and Gifted!" helps retreatants discern how to serve God in ministry. The activities follow the acronym Shape, as developed by Warren, where "S" is



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for spiritual gifts; “H” represents the “heart” or passion and desire to serve; “A” stands for natural abilities; “P” is personality; and “E” represents life experiences. This mini-retreat helps participants discover how God has uniquely shaped them for ministry. Parishioners take up a ministry based on their gifts, not just on parish needs.

Mini-Retreat 401, “Alive in the World!” helps participants live as witnesses for Christ, as contagious Catholic Christians. The group discusses evangelization, as distinguished from proselytizing. Retreatants learn how to defend the Catholic faith. They also discuss Catholic social justice teachings and specifically how this parish is active in community organizing.

Mini-Retreat 501, “Alive to Praise God!” focuses on Catholic worship and the sacraments. It begins with a Taizé-style prayer, followed by a guided tour of the church during which sacred spaces, vessels and vestments are explained. Next, retreatants rotate through four workshops on the sacraments, the liturgical year and church traditions. The retreat concludes with a shortened Seder-like meal that leads into an explanatory Mass.

Step 3: Other Parish Activities

Like a human skeleton, which allows the body to stand and move, the mini-retreats work as a “skeleton” for the parish, giving structure to sponsored activities. But these are not the full story. Many other activities are supported by this basic skeleton as the lay parishioners become more involved. One parishioner created a parish soccer league for children; another established a program for the homeless. A profes-

sional psychologist started a parish counseling center, and a lawyer set up a legal assistance ministry. All parish ministries relate to one of the five core areas of the parish mission, each of which is highlighted in one of the mini-retreats: community as parish/family; spiritual discipleship/growth; ministry/stewardship; mission/outreach/social justice/evangelization; and worship.

...

This process works. Some 50 percent to 60 percent of the mini-retreat participants become active members of the parish. Parishioners are enthusiastic about the retreats. One night, as I waited in the drive-through lane of a local fast-food restaurant, a man in the car ahead of me got out and ran toward my car. I thought I was about to be robbed, but instead he asked, “Father, when is the next mini-retreat?”

The biggest obstacle the parish has faced is overcoming the “requirement” mentality of Catholics regarding the sacraments. The parish does require adults wishing to celebrate a sacrament for their children to attend at least the first mini-retreat. But as it begins, the leaders explain that although the parents were required to attend, the hope is that they will continue on their own to run around the spiritual baseball diamond as adult Christians who want to grow spiritually.

The process works, but it takes time to develop and requires support and perseverance on the part of the parish pastoral team. Real life is always messier than any article might imply. Every parish is different. What works in Coachella might not be as effective elsewhere. I recommend that a parish start small and add to the process gradually, one retreat at a time, although that isn’t the way we began. We started the first four mini-retreats simultaneously and added the fifth a year later. We also began only with volunteers. Now the parish staff has grown to 16. Each of our core ministries—to children, youth and adults—requires two full-time staff people.

My best advice is to jump into the water and see what works. If one strategy fails, it is possible to revise it or try something else. Ultimately, success depends on God. I am convinced, however, that God wants Catholic parishes to be alive and vibrant, full of committed, growing Christians. Pastoral leaders can learn much about this from our Protestant brothers and sisters in the megachurches across America. **A**

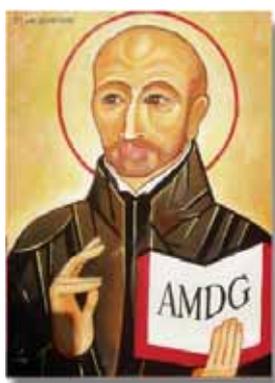
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This Boy's Life

Lessons from a Catholic childhood

BY GERALD J. SCHIFFHORST

I write at the same desk where I did my homework decades ago as a parochial school boy. This marred, mahogany desk is small, but it has indispensable drawers and cubbyholes and elegantly carved legs and a folded-back top that gives me a second tier for books and papers. It has withstood many moves and the weight of several typewriters, countless student papers, the writing of several books and, in the 1950s, my boyhood efforts to carve my name for the sake of posterity. Now, centered between my computer and a side table, it continues to play an important role in my writing life. It is where I remember.

When I was in the seventh grade and in training to be master of ceremonies at solemn high Mass at our church, I used this desk as a make-believe altar. On it I placed a votive candle, a few plastic statues and some of the “holy pictures” the nuns gave us when we did something remarkable. These little picture cards, edged in gold, were the closest thing I had to fine art; they were florid portrayals of saints with their halos highlighted and their eyes cast heavenward. I prized these pictures much more than my baseball cards because of their pious beauty and because they pointed to a vaguely understood sense that behind all such religious trappings was a reality more substantial than the everyday world around me.

GERALD J. SCHIFFHORST is the author of numerous articles on literature and spirituality as well as several books, including *John Milton (Crossroad)*. He is emeritus professor of English at the University of Central Florida in Orlando.



Off and on I would forgo games with my friends to play priest at my “altar.” Rehearsing the ceremonies Sister Noella taught me, kneeling, bowing and genuflecting, I could escape into my own private chapel and imagine I had priestly powers. This infatuation did not last long. But with it came something more enduring and valuable: a lifelong belief that prayers are not a waste of time but are somehow heard in an invisible world, mysterious yet real.

Rituals of the Heart

Over the years, I have often asked myself why I have remained a Catholic when many of my contemporaries have not. The answer is to be found in my parochial upbringing. It has nothing to do with doctrines or dogmas

but much to do with the way the church prays—that is, how the liturgy expresses a mystical core more ancient than the faith itself through rituals that still resonate in the heart, not just because of their beauty but because of their seriousness. They were (and are) reminders of the timeless present woven into the daily fabric of life. To recall them is to evoke a lost culture, a kind of Catholic *shtetl* transported from Europe to my hometown of St. Louis, to the city’s south side, where mainly German-Americans worked hard all week, scrubbed their front stoops faithfully on Saturdays and prayed earnestly on Sundays.

I grew up in a world of Masses and Benedictions and perpetual adoration. We had novenas, scapulars, sodalities, first- and second-class relics, plenary (and partial) indulgences, corporal and spiritual works of mercy as well as ember days, fast and feast days, rosaries and retreats and the Forty Hours devotion, with Stations of the Cross in Lent. Every day seemed to be special in some way, as we were always celebrating or preparing for a saint’s feast day or holy day. We were taught the seven sacraments, the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost, the seven sorrows (and joys) of Mary and other lore unfamiliar to most Catholics today. However great my life in the ordinary world was, I sensed it was somehow secondary in importance to my life at Holy Family Church.

To grow up in that parish was to be immersed in an insular culture with its own private language of Latin feast days (Septuagesima Sunday, Corpus Christi) and saints that seemed as real

ART: DAN SALAMIDA

as the American presidents. In a way, the Middle Ages were alive in that parochial world of centuries-old rituals that appealed to my youthful imagination. The use of church Latin added to the impression that none of this could ever change.

Part of the appeal of that Catholic world was the taste it gave me of European culture, which seemed more exciting than anything the American Midwest could offer. We Catholics were linked to Rome, going back to the ancient empire. I felt important, too, because I was in a spiritual network with countless millions of others, past and present, who said the same prayers and did the same things.

Supernatural

So I was part of history, part of a living tradition in which the past was sacred and still alive in the present. Catholicism meant the stories of heroes and virgin martyrs, popes and kings, as well as contemporary victims of Communist oppression. We listened in silent amazement as the nuns told stories of miraculous adventures and happenings: the stigmata of Padre Pio in Italy one day, a terrifying case of exorcism in St. Louis the next. Who needed to read adventure stories? The stories we heard—of violent beheadings, inexplicable healings and gruesome penances—unlocked the doors of the imagination. I was being made aware that the supernatural was real in a tangible sense, no matter how far-fetched and gruesome it sometimes seemed.

This education put too much emphasis on externals and prohibitions, but the mysticism of Catholicism was so powerful it could not help but be manifest. Not too surprisingly, I chose to study (and later teach) the work of writers who probed the mystery of things, writers like Milton, Dante and Shakespeare. Introduced to symbolism at an early age, I learned to look for meanings that were not apparent. To be taught that

Christ was physically present then, just as he was in every other era, was to be introduced to an expansive notion of time that included the timeless.

Eternal Perspective

I carry with me the memories of certain days in the eighth grade when I was pressed into early morning service as an altar boy at St. Elizabeth's Academy, a school for girls 20 minutes away from Holy Family. The nuns needed a young male attendant to serve the priest who came for daily Mass.

It was an effort to get there on time, catching the bus at 5:30 a.m., but I felt honored to be chosen. The best part was the breakfast afterward, which was brought to me in silence by a sister whose rustling skirts and quick steps over the gleaming linoleum hallway were all I could hear on those chilly mornings. As I ate

alone in a room beneath the chapel, I strained to hear the sounds of the girls, but they had not yet arrived for school. All I heard was the nun softly saying, "Thank you, Jerry" before disappearing. At 7:15, I had to abandon that quiet world—with its smells of polish and starch and soap—and return to the more familiar but equally cloistered parish school. The essentially feminine quality of all this became fully apparent to me when I entered the Jesuits' prep school for boys (St. Louis University High School) in 1954, which provided a

needed dose of masculine realism.

In both schools, we sensed that everything we learned had a higher purpose, the service of God. We learned of infinity, not just as a mathematical idea but as part of eternity. We learned to ask impossible questions about God, evil and the afterlife. My

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Jesuit instructors posed the Big Questions because they saw life from the eternal perspective (*sub specie aeternitatis*). If these questions led to certain fixed truths, they also kept alive a sense of life's mysteries and the importance of probing the unknowable.

Finding God in Silence

The importance of the inner life was clear in both school and church. The daily Mass was a quiet affair, with the priest facing the altar. His voice recit-

ing the Latin prayers was barely audible, but we in the pews could read along in our bilingual books. Our participation was mostly interior. The silent atmosphere was helped along by the quiet of the early morning; the absence of music at Communion provided an ideal time for contemplative prayer. Along with the grandeur of the liturgy, then, came something more important: the humility of silence.

Reading about the film director Martin Scorsese serving Mass on

Mulberry Street in New York reminded me of my own experience. To be an altar boy, he says, was to be the only one to hear the sacred words whispered in Latin, *Hoc est enim Corpus meum*, the only one to see with the priest the daily miracle of bread and wine become Christ's body and blood. The altar server witnessed a precise ritual of transformation, marked by the interplay of silence and bells. I would ring the hand bell three times, each ring signaling a deepening level of silence, a recognition that something transformative was (or should be) occurring in the inner life of everyone present.

I am grateful that a love of liturgy and silence was implanted in my impressionable heart, that I was part of a way of life so special that I assumed that everyone who did not share it knew all about it and secretly envied it. Fifty years later, I find myself exploring the meaning of God and silence as I write and speak about Thomas Merton and contemplative prayer, re-appreciating my Catholic roots.

There are many reasons why people leave the church—or stay. For me, the decision to stay has to do with hope and forgiveness, but also with the distinctly Catholic legacy of prayer. I value the living tradition that cares for the world through public and private prayer as well as through active ministry. I cannot ignore the imperfections of the Catholic world; but if I keep my focus on what really matters, the daily effort to experience the reality of God, I can be faithful to my heritage.

Although Holy Family Parish has closed, I am grateful for the many seeds planted in me there; it was a place where I developed a taste for mystery, a thirst for spirituality and a love of learning and prayer. My writing desk is the only physical token I have of those days, but it is enough. Its role as a mock-altar long forgotten until now, it is where I continue to focus on other sacred functions, each a marker on the journey through time to eternity. **A**

“Here comes everyone.” —James Joyce

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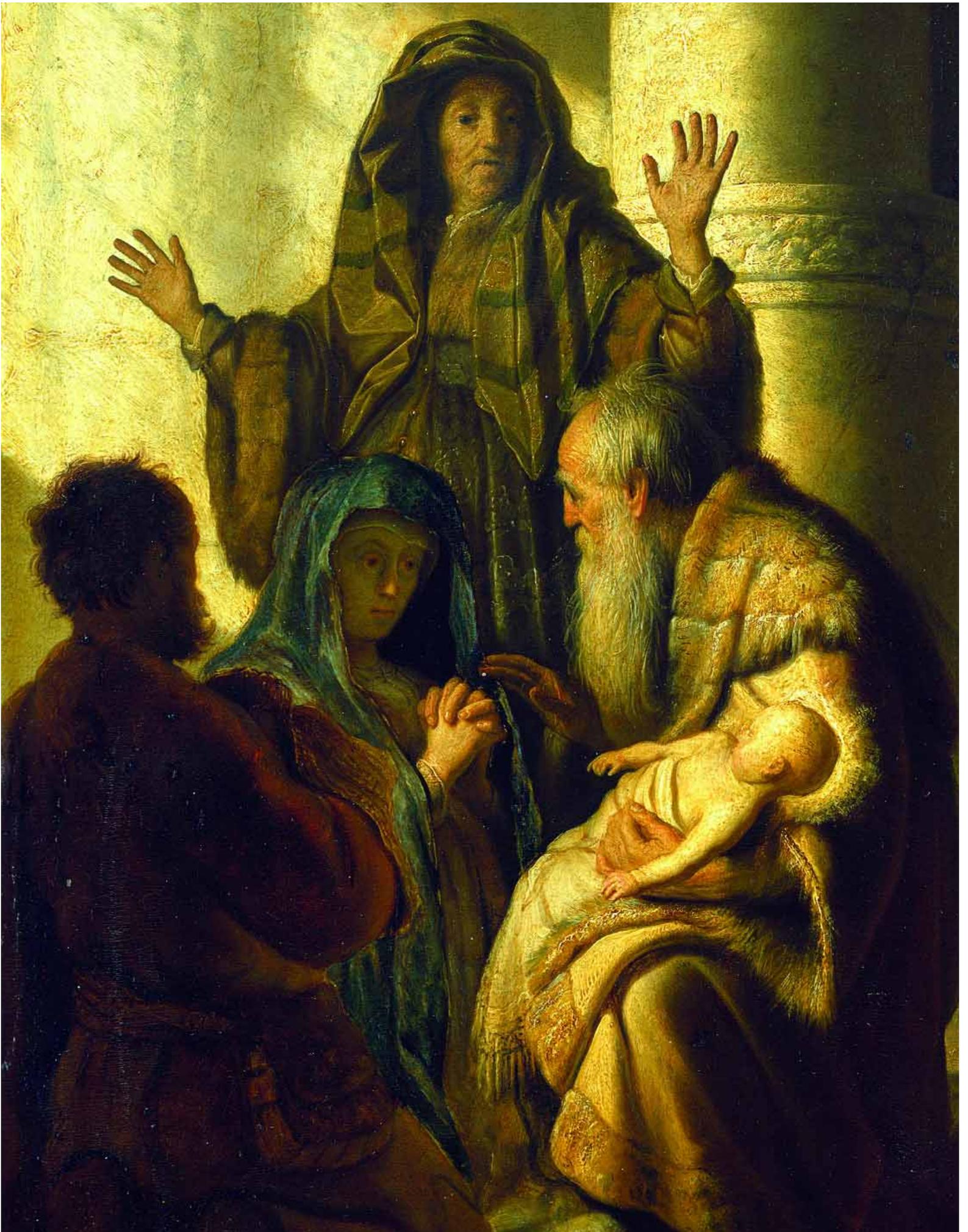


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Lk 2:22–32

Simeon, what you've been awaiting
in your weathered skin
is here now in your clasp,
the heartbeat of innocence,
proof that we're not despaired of.

Widow Anna, steady at prayer
though on the creakiest of limbs,
go tell what your vision shows you,
the youth of the world
in this surprise of a child.

O cluster of elders
retelling the feats of a lifetime,
attend to what's newest of new,
this pure light from the source,
Jesus, the flesh of mercy.

JAMES S. TORRENS

JAMES S. TORRENS, S.J., *is poetry editor of
America.*

*Left: "Simeon and Hannah at the Temple" by
Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn, circa 1628*

BOOKS & CULTURE

ART | GREGORY WALDROP

OBJECT OF DEVOTION

The story of a dramatic restoration

When iconic works of art require cleaning or repair, one impulse among custodians urges extreme caution: “Don’t touch!” No conservator, for example, would be foolish enough to lighten the flesh tones, grown dark over the centuries, of the “Black Madonna” of Czestochowa, Poland’s holiest relic. Yet radical interventions can yield astonishing, even consensus-altering results for works that viewers thought they knew well. Michelangelo’s ceiling in the Sistine Chapel underwent a controversial restoration in the 1990s that not only confirmed the artist’s genius in representing the human form but revealed him as a master of color as well.

In the case of “Madonna della Strada,” the cultural stakes were admittedly lower. A small painting of the Virgin and Child, it had hung for nearly 425 years in a corner of Rome’s Chiesa del Gesù, the mother church of the Society of Jesus, completed in 1584. St. Ignatius Loyola, the Jesuit founder, had venerated the image even earlier, an association that inspired a popular cult around the painting. For centuries worshippers had credited it with healing powers, though no one called it an artistic masterpiece.

Time and heavy-handed retouching over the centuries had so obscured the

original painting that modern scholars were puzzled over how to date it. Noting its devotional appeal, they wrote it off as a nondescript work of the late 15th or early 16th century. In 2006, when an overdue cleaning of the



“Madonna della Strada” before its recent restoration

“Madonna della Strada” (“Our Lady of the Way”) unexpectedly turned into a bolder reclamation project, the results were startling [see cover]. The image turned out to be 200 years older than previously thought and, in terms of quality and artistic pedigree, far more interesting.

The painting is first documented in the 16th century in the small parish

church of Santa Maria della Strada, which preceded the Gesù on the same site in the heart of Rome and at a crossroads along the ceremonial route of the popes. A Jesuit in the 18th century claimed that “Our Lady of the Way” owed her title to the image’s original position on the exterior wall of the church facing a main street. (There is no evidence to support that theory.) In all likelihood, the little painting decorated a space somewhere inside Santa Maria della Strada.

Ignatius probably first encountered it in 1540, when he preached day after day on an adjacent street corner. Within a year the pope had approved his small band of “reformed priests” as a religious order and given them Santa Maria della Strada as their pastoral home base, effectively making Ignatius caretaker of the painting.

Ignatius’ attachment to the Virgin ran deep. Visions of the Madonna and Child and accounts of all-night vigils before crowned images of the holy pair punctuate his autobiography. His devotion could even go hand in hand with conservation. After forsaking his old life

as a courtier for that of a pilgrim, he donated part of his last wages “for an image of Our Lady, which was in bad condition, so that it could be repaired and very finely adorned.”

Years later in Rome, Ignatius showed equal solicitude for the “Madonna della Strada.” Before his death in 1556, he instructed the Jesuits to preserve the image and even-

PHOTO: PASQUALE RIZZI

tually to enshrine it in the new, large church he had planned for but never lived to see replace Santa Maria della Strada. When the still-unfinished Gesù opened for services in 1575, the painting was installed temporarily above a side altar. Seven years later, the Jesuits transferred it permanently to its own lavishly decorated chapel to the left of the high altar. There it remained, a direct link to Ignatius' own devotion but cut off from its pre-Jesuit history. Until now.

With the recent restoration, the image has begun to reveal some of its secrets. The first surprise came as soon as the painting was removed from its niche. Scientists from Rome's La Sapienza University determined that the painting, previously thought to be a work on stone, is actually a fragment from a larger, now-lost fresco or a wall painting almost certainly from Santa Maria della Strada.

Already detached from its original context by Ignatius' time, the fragment

was eventually transferred to canvas and affixed to a slate panel. That delicate operation, a conservation technique developed in the 19th century known as *strappo d'affresco*, involves peeling away the uppermost layer of paint from the fresco onto a glue-coated cloth and applying a canvas backing. After "washing" to loosen the glue, the cloth is stripped away from the painted surface, leaving the image intact on its canvas support. In the case of the "Madonna della Strada," the canvas was attached to a piece of slate. Substantial retouching and the addition of pious accessories—gold crowns, diamond earrings and sparkling necklaces attached to the image's surface—disguised its true appearance.

The biggest revelation, however, was the Madonna herself and the infant Jesus. Working in a makeshift studio in a hidden space high above the Gesù's

lateral chapels, conservators dissolved centuries' worth of grime, varnish, mineral deposits and overpainting from the image's surface. Tantalizing spots of color began to peek through the murky residue. After weeks of painstaking effort, a familiar yet new "Madonna della Strada" materialized.

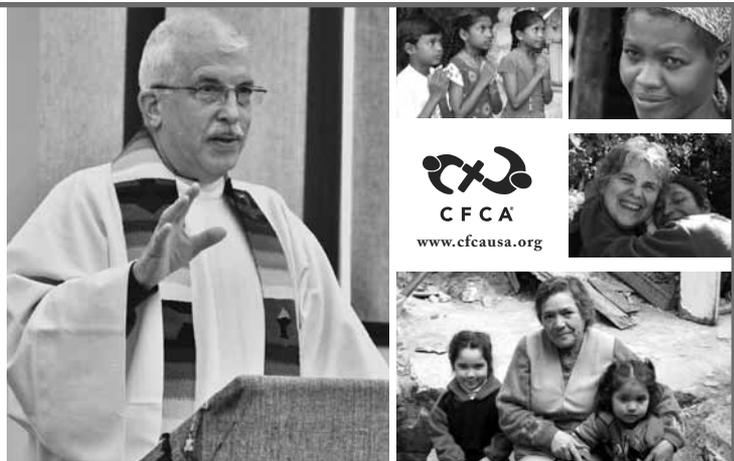
Faces once frozen under masks of dirt and resin reappeared fresh and lively: a rosy-cheeked Christ Child, still a little Byzantine Pantocrator with his right hand raised in blessing, but now substantial and more three-dimensional, "enthroned" on his mother's arm. The Virgin, sporting a stenciled crown, a variation on the Eastern *basilissa* (imperial) type of icon, is convincingly tender, with a healthy complexion, a delicately curving neck and a gaze that, like her son's, engages the viewer. Though broken off along its bottom

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edge, the restored image also expresses more clearly the Virgin's intercessory role. Her right hand, newly revealed, is directed downward, as if once she gestured to kneeling figures of patrons or other supplicants. Experts overseeing the restoration dated the work on stylistic grounds to the end of the 13th or the beginning of the 14th century. That makes the "Madonna della Strada" a relatively rare example of late-medieval Roman wall painting.

A jewel, if still not a masterpiece, the restored "Madonna della Strada" will not rewrite art history. But it does belong to a late-medieval milieu that until recently remained understudied, mainly for lack of evidence. That alone makes the recovery both surprising and significant for scholars.

What about the image's modern devotees—the office workers, neighborhood residents, legions of priests and religious, retirees with grandchildren in tow, not to mention the taxi drivers and street sweepers who count this Madonna as their special patron? How do they feel about the restoration?

"The response has been overwhelmingly positive," says Daniele Libanori, S.J., rector of the Chiesa del Gesù and the principal advocate of the restoration. "Since the image was reinstalled, I can think of maybe two times when someone came asking for the Madonna, not recognizing her in the restored version." Libanori claims a notable increase in devotion since the makeover.

Liberated from its 19th-century veneer, the "Madonna della Strada" breathes freely. If more people are praying before it, it may be because the image is more available to viewers, both as a work of art and as an unobscured object of veneration.

For a painting inseparable from its Jesuit associations, that is appropriate. Sensory engagement with images, real or imagined, is fundamental to Ignatian spirituality. In the *Spiritual Exercises*, the retreat manual written

by Ignatius, the suggested meditation on Christ's birth is especially vivid. Mary, "almost nine months pregnant, as we may devoutly think of her, and seated on a donkey," Ignatius writes, travels with Joseph to Bethlehem accompanied by a young servant girl and an ox. The latter will complete the menagerie around the newborn Savior, foretold in the words of the prophet Isaiah ("The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib").

The servant girl, however, is a non-scriptural figment of Ignatius' contemplative imagination. No matter how poor, Our Lady must have had at least

one servant, he reasoned. With their bold restoration, present-day caretakers of the little image have made it easier for a viewer to follow Ignatius' advice for praying about the Nativity—that is, standing in the place of the servant girl, to "watch and contemplate" the Mother and Child as if in their presence, to imagine oneself at their service and to reflect on the meaning of this intimate encounter with God-With-Us—Emmanuel.

GREGORY WALDROP, S.J., is assistant professor of art history at Fordham University in the Bronx, N.Y., and a specialist in the art of late medieval and Renaissance Italy.

BOOKS | JOHN A. COLEMAN

COMMON GOOD SENSE

JUSTICE

What's the Right Thing to Do?

By Michael J. Sandel
Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 320p \$25
ISBN 9780374180652

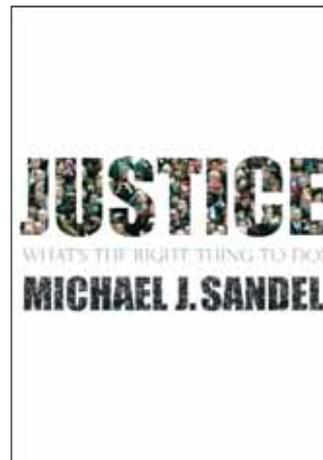
I discovered it abruptly. Something more than mere intrinsic academic interest lies within Michael Sandel's new book. I had been carrying the book in my hand when I was stopped by a stranger on the street in New York City in early October who wanted to know what I thought of certain of the author's views. She had been reading the book in preparation for the PBS series based on it. Videos of the Harvard professor's lectures for the course, which he has been teaching since 1980 and from which the book stems, are now ubiquitous on YouTube. Clearly he is a gifted teacher. How could anyone engage over 1,000 Harvard undergraduates in one lec-

ture hall and yet make it seem, at times, like a genuine seminar, a spirited discussion, not just a lecture?

At one level, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* is a crisply written exposition of the classic positions on justice: utilitarianism, Kantian deontological principles, the views of libertarians, John Rawls, Aristotle's treatment of justice as a virtue. Sandel

insists that these more abstract philosophical accounts often deeply inform the way we ordinary non-philosophers construe contested policies on justice, such as affirmative action, same-sex marriage, price gouging and surrogate parenthood. In this well-honed treatment, Sandel attempts to bring moral clarity to genuine alternatives that confront us every day as democratic citizens.

Sandel looks at three variant approaches to justice. First, justice involves the maximization of social welfare (but are there any inalienable



rights?). Second, justice fundamentally entails respect for human freedom. This latter position either follows the Kantian categorical imperative, a libertarian view that justice merely means informed choice, or the position of John Rawls that justice demands both respecting human liberties and arranging society so the worst off receive benefits, whenever inequalities are permitted. The third views justice as a virtue, following Aristotle. Sandel prefers this third variant.

As Sandel argued in an earlier book, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982), liberal theories of justice based on merely respecting human freedom remain stone deaf to moral ties we have not explicitly chosen. Liberal theories all assume some unencumbered self, without pre-existing loyalties or obligations. Such theories of purely procedural justice always privilege the right (proper or fair procedures) over the good.

Aristotle (and Catholic social thought, inasmuch as it is indebted to Aristotle, through Aquinas) instead sees justice as a virtue, dependent on prior deliberation about the ends, purposes or goods of human actions and institutions. Despite the reputed attempts of John Rawls and other liberal justice theorists to finesse all questions of the good (in a sense, leaving such questions to mere human preference), Sandel argues that it is not possible to find some neutral, nonjudgmental, non-value-laden base. Debates about rights or liberties almost always are closely linked to underlying questions about the good.

Again, following Aristotle, Sandel is a champion of a politics of the common good. He wants us to think of ourselves as citizens, not just consumers or isolated choosers. For him, justice demands that we ask what kind of people and society we want (or ought) to be. Fair procedures alone will not suffice.

Justice, then, is as much about the

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political philosophy of citizenship as it is about a casuistry to determine, in difficult cases, what is the just thing to do. Sandel insists:

A new politics of the common good...requires a more demanding idea of what it means to be a citizen, and it requires a more robust public discourse—one that engages more directly with moral and even spiritual questions.

Sandel would not put some a priori liberal and secular gag-rule on the arguments brought to public debates about abortion, genetic manipulations and the like. "A more robust public engagement with our moral disagreements," he maintains, "could provide a stronger, not a weaker basis for mutual respect."

Not all readers or listeners of the PBS series will be satisfied that Sandel pays sufficient attention to the real dangers inherent in resurrecting true respect for dense loyalties and particular attachments or in controversial accounts of what constitutes true

human or public virtue. Can one stress, as Sandel does, the importance of group solidarity without re-igniting the ethnic and religious tensions liberalism was designed to temper? Stephen Holmes, a New York University law school professor and a critic of Sandel, exclaims: "I wouldn't want a government strong enough so it could make [the desired virtue] happen. Without the coercive power of the state, talk about the good life is just something that sounds nice in a seminar."

Sandel deftly uses a Socratic style and presents vivid case studies to raise new questions about the common good. He insists, nonetheless, that whatever the dangers of imposing one's view of the good in order to retrieve virtue, neglecting virtue leaves us with a hollow, merely procedural liberalism that rarely garners any deep loyalties or evokes a robust sense of citizenship.

JOHN A. COLEMAN, S.J., a sociologist, is associate pastor of St. Ignatius Church in San Francisco, Calif.

most extraordinary in human history."

Second, as economics underpins all aspects of international power, this China will transform world politics, displacing the United States as the dominant state. In doing so, a regnant China will shift world politics away from the 300-year-old system of contending nation-states and toward a new order: a world led by a "civilization-state" rather than a nation-state, a world where international politics reflects what Jacques calls a tributary system of relations. In other words, we should expect a return to a world order akin to that which China created in Asia before the West "opened" China at gunpoint in the mid-1800s.

And the third argument? It appears to be something like this: We should welcome China's rise and its reshaping of world politics, for this new order of things is likely to be relatively helpful for both China's citizens and the world at large. But welcome or not, it is coming; and we in the West should be prepared to accept the inevitable with a modicum of good grace, and get on with working out an accommodation with this new order.

Granted, Jacques does not really evaluate this coming future. He does hint that some will find China's dominance irksome, but then the domination of the world by the West and, most recently, the United States, has been hard on others as well. He suggests, for example, that "if the calling

card of the West has often been aggression and conquest, China's will be its overweening sense of superiority and the hierarchical mentality this has engendered." Or: "In an important sense, China does not aspire to run the world because it already believes itself to be the centre of the world, this

being its natural role and position.... As a consequence, it may prove to be

PETER R. BECKMAN

THE SUN RISES IN THE EAST

WHEN CHINA RULES THE WORLD

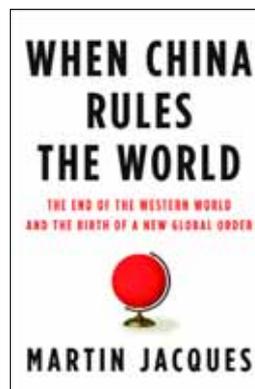
The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order

By Martin Jacques
The Penguin Press. 576p \$29.95
ISBN 9781594201851

The start of a century seems to demand prognostications. One hundred years ago, the rise of Germany, the nation most determined to change the international status quo, caught the attention of European journalists, academics and writers of speculative fiction. How would an ascendant Germany reshape the world? Was it to

be war or peace?

Martin Jacques, a British journalist, editor of volumes on British politics, and long-serving former editor of *Marxism Today*, invites us to consider this century's future with China. His basic argument is threefold. First, China is rapidly becoming an economically advanced state. Given its continental size and 1.3 billion people, we should reasonably expect it to be the world's leading economy in 20 to 50 years. Moreover, "given its scale and speed, China's economic transformation is surely the



rather less overtly aggressive than the West has been, but that does not mean that it will be less determined to impose its will and leave its impact. It might do this in a different way, however, through its deeply held belief in its own inherent superiority and the hierarchy of relations that necessarily flow from this." Jacques leaves it up to the reader to weigh the pluses and minuses of a China-dominated world.

When China Rules the World is far more explicit in its extended, clearly presented thesis regarding China's internal affairs. It concludes that China has reached the point of "economic takeoff" under supple Communist Party leadership and that economic modernization will not transform Chinese culture and values. He also suggests that it is culture that has tamed the party leadership, but it has also reinforced the central role for an elite-led government whose primary goal is to ensure unity and stability, and that in turn mandates continued economic modernization. China's size, however, allows experimentation, providing reforms and privileges to some regions, denying the same to many others.

Jacques also devotes a large part of the book to an examination of China's relations with the rest of the world, particularly East Asia. "The way in which China handles its rise and exercises its growing power in the East Asian region," he writes, "will be a very important indicator of how it is likely to behave as a global power." He points to Hong Kong as offering a critical clue. Once Britain and the residents of Hong Kong accepted China's territorial claim, China allowed a different politico-economic system to prevail. This, Jacques asserts, captures "the very heart of a tributary state system, of a civilization-state approach." However, to disavow the Chinese claim to sovereignty—as Taiwanese governments have done—makes China a real threat. That, too, apparently is part of the tributary system.

And for other states, particularly the powerful, what does China expect? China will remain a power accepting the status quo, Jacques argues, at least for the 20-year run-up to its achievement of economic dominance. It can afford to wait, for its historical tradition emphasizes patience, and it knows its position—at the center of the world.

Is it really inevitable that China will rule the world, especially given the economic turmoil of the last 12 months? Jacques tells us that his book has been a 12-year project. Just when he had it about nailed down, the global recession set in, causing him to scatter caveats here and there about how the downturn might delay the prediction. Besides acknowledging the crisis of the moment, he also points out some of the entanglements in which a rising China can become caught, particularly with the United States. China funds the

debt of the United States, giving China a vested interest in ensuring continued American economic strength in order to ensure a return on its investments. The road to economic domination may be quite full of potholes.

While I am skeptical about the inevitability of China's rule, I would urge wide readership of this book. At the turn of the last century, the drumbeat of dire predictions about a German-dominated world might have encouraged less thoughtful responses to German concerns and demands. Jacques's assessment may encourage a more reflective response to China's emergence as a key actor in world politics.

PETER R. BECKMAN is emeritus professor of political science at Hobart and William Smith Colleges and co-author of *Nuclear Weapons, Nuclear States, and Terrorism* (Sloan Publishing).

Correction: In the Book Briefs section on Dec. 7, there was a typographical error regarding the anniversary of the death of Fulton J. Sheen. Dec. 9 is the 30th anniversary of his death, not the 20th anniversary, as was printed.

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LETTERS

National Service Needed

Re "Up or Out" (Editorial, 12/7): I have favored a universal two-year period of national service for all citizens since before 9/11. It was my privilege to be a commissioned officer in the regular Army for nine years. I was stationed only in the United States, but as a psychiatrist I know well the "wounds of war" that our citizens carry home with them and that last until death.

National service could be in the military, the Peace Corps or with a nonprofit institution. Without a two-year period of military service, without government servants who have experienced mandatory National Service, we will continue to misuse and expand the military industrial complex against which President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned us. There will be mercenary armies and more misadventures and death upon deaths.

Our "war of necessity" was being funded in the 1980s by C.I.A. covert activities. It did not start only on 9/11.

We armed the different Muslim peoples to drive the Soviets out of Afghanistan, and now those arms are aimed at us. Now is the time to initiate universal national service for all citizens. It is the least we can do as Americans to preserve our liberty, expand our horizons and contribute to the common good.

MARY MARGARET FLYNN
San Carlos, Calif.

Global Governance

Re "Papal Correspondence" (11/30): We cannot write without a pencil or pen. We cannot follow the lead of Catholic social teaching (see "Charity in Truth," No. 67 and footnotes) without a new world constitution. Drafts of a new world constitution have already been carefully worked out. A few groups like Citizens for Global Solutions are active.

The war system is eating us alive. There is an alternative to war, to competing ruthlessly and violently with other nations, pouring a disproportionate amount of resources into the destruction of other human persons and

our planet. The alternative is "a workable global governance system," such as a democratic world federation. Pope John XXIII said a world authority is "a moral imperative." Doesn't that mean that striving now for this is not optional? All hands on deck!

BENJAMIN J. URMSTON, S.J.
Cincinnati, Ohio

Prayer, Not Lobbying

The bishops (Signs of the Times, "Bishops Disappointed With Health Bill," 12/14) have every right to form their opinions of the new health care bill before Congress. But with the rather heavy-handed lobbying of the House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, and the promised raft of letters to congregations urging us to oppose this bill, they have crossed a line of separation of church and state that is one of the foundations of our democracy. If they want to lobby Congress, then they should also agree to pay taxes and register as a lobbying group.

Furthermore, the use of the sacraments as political weapons in this debate is truly disappointing. As a

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who has knowledge of and is committed to the Catholic health care ministry with experience working in a Catholic mission services program. This leader will also have a master's degree, with emphasis in theology, counseling and ethics preferred.

Avera Health is based primarily in South Dakota, and regular travel will be required. The application deadline is Jan. 4, 2010. For more information, please contact John Reid, Search Consultant—The Reid Group, at JReid@TheReidGroup.biz or (800) 916-3472.

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practicing Catholic, I must say that the bishops are rapidly becoming irrelevant to the practice of my faith. They should be leading their flocks in discerning how to live our faith in a complicated world that seems increasingly strange. This requires that they treat us as intelligent Catholics, not illiterate medieval peasants. It requires prayer, not lobbying and cajoling.

JOHN PASTOR
Duluth, Minn.

More Harm Than Good

I fear that if the bishops end up withholding support for an imperfect bill on the basis of the funding issue alone, and if Catholic legislators are so dissuaded, then they will have done more harm than good. Overwhelmingly, women's reliable access to health care is at stake, not to have their pregnancies aborted, but to insure quality prenatal and postnatal, obstetric and other medical care. Without such access assured, the wellness of newborns becomes a family issue.

Are the bishops more concerned that the principle of withholding tax monies that might be substituted for abortion be made more ironclad than they are with actually reducing the need to resort to the practice and to provide for the birth and well-being of the children they bear?

MICHAEL BASILE
Murray, Ky.

Into the Everlasting Arms

Re the Of Many Things column by Drew Christiansen, S.J. (12/14): At 96 Mary Christiansen is "pulling away," as her son says, something my Mom did at 87 in 1995. It fell to me to be with her as she died. As she was dying, I held her

hand and the following thought came to mind: "Here's the woman who held my hand as a toddler and taught me how to walk, and now I'm holding her hand as she walks into eternity," or as Father Christiansen might have said, "into the Everlasting Arms."

It was a very calming experience for me, tinged with happy thoughts about where Mom was then walking for the first time. I even was able to whisper in her ear, "Thanks Mom, for being a good mother!" And a good mother she was indeed, raising a brood of six single-handedly after our dad left us early on and later burying three of us. To Father Christiansen I say, respectfully, "Thanks for the memories!" I also pray that when the time comes, you will be able to release your mom with confidence into the everlasting arms of the Father. It's amazing what faith in the promises of Jesus can do!

BRUCE SNOWDEN
Bronx, N.Y.

Learning From South Africa

The article "What If We Said, 'Wait?'" by Michael G. Ryan (12/14), is excellent, and I hope that a few bishops listen and take heed. I live in South Africa and we have been the "guinea pigs" for the new translation this year. It has caused an enormous amount of pain and chaos in parishes. The letters column of our national Catholic paper, *The Southern Cross*, has been full of responses, 95 percent negative.

The bishops have insisted that this literal translation is an excellent one and that we must obey Rome. We also have been told that since English is a "minority language" here, the responses of English-speaking Catholics do not need to be heard. Priest friends have told me that it will take them a very long time to memorize the eucharistic prayers because they are so poorly constructed; that they cannot

be "prayed," but only read.

I hope that the U.S. Catholic laity will make a major uproar when this translation begins to be used. South African Catholics can be ignored, but the U.S. Catholic Church cannot, especially since it is U.S. money that funds the Vatican.

SUSAN RAKOCZY, I.H.M.
Hilton, South Africa

Hoping Against Hope

Thank you for a wonderfully lucid and compelling case for giving these translations a "trial run" that will allow the people of God some input into the language in which our communal prayer will now be prayed. Sadly, I don't think this proposal will gain much traction as evidenced by how little the bishops seemed to listen to the well-argued, well-reasoned objections raised by Bishop Trautman.

MARK HALLINAN, S.J.
New York, N.Y.

Back to Vatican II

Whenever I read prattle like Father Ryan's, I wonder if the author has actually read the council document he is referring to, in this case "Sacrosanctum Concilium." Had he done so, I wonder what he would make of the document's prohibition of personal innovation and its insistence on tradition, on Latin as the principal language of the Mass and the pride of place of Gregorian chant in the liturgy.

The fact that the rubrics of the missal promulgated by Pope Paul VI built upon this, with the presumption that the Mass is said facing East, also seems to have escaped Father Ryan's notice. The failure to consider the document's eloquent appraisal of the Mass as a work of redemption, the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, made for the remission of our sins, says it all.

DANIEL McGLONE
Melbourne, Australia

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God's Family Reunion; These Four Kings

HOLY FAMILY (C), DEC. 27, 2009

Readings: 1 Sm 1:20–28; Ps 84:2–10; 1 Jn 3:1–2, 21–24; Lk 2:41–52

“Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” (Lk 2:49)

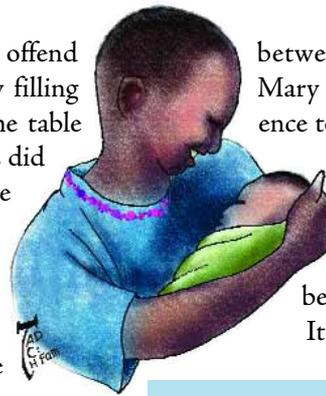
It was the empty place at the table that sounded the alarm for the worried parents. After a day’s travel, enjoying the camaraderie of the extended family, the nightly meal revealed that their son was missing. The circumstances may be different these days, but most families know what it is to have an empty place at the table—a place meant for a son or daughter who is absent because of estrangement or because other duties have taken precedence or death has claimed them too early. During the rest of the day, the family may manage without the absent one, but it is the gaping hole at the table that is the hardest to endure. Sometimes the story ends happily. The soldier returns home in time for the next holiday; a sick child recovers; an alienated member becomes reconciled; a missing teen is found unscathed.

In the Gospel today, there is at first a note of relief that Jesus is found unharmed. But a more ominous note sounds when Jesus declares he must be in his Father’s house. We already know the end of the story. We know that as Jesus builds a new family to abide in

his Father’s house, he will offend some religious leaders by filling in the empty places at the table with people whom others did not consider part of the family. Jesus claimed that all these unwanted folk were God’s beloved children.

The Gospel episode ends with Jesus returning to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph, saying that he “was obedient to them” and that he “advanced in wisdom and age and favor.” We sometimes imagine Jesus as a reluctant teen, who has to continue to abide by his earthly parents’ rules even as he feels he must begin to pursue his life’s work in response to God’s call. Throughout his opening chapters, however, Luke has portrayed Jesus’ earthly parents as utterly Law-observant and completely conforming themselves to God’s will.

There is no tension between what God asks and what they choose to do. Mary assents to Gabriel, even though she does not understand everything that is asked of her. Mary and Joseph obediently have their child circumcised after eight days and then present him in the Temple in Jerusalem, as the Law prescribes. Every year, they go to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. We might see, then, in the ending of today’s Gospel that there is no conflict



between Jesus’ obedience to Mary and Joseph and his obedience to the will of God. Rather, it is Mary and Joseph who have taught Jesus how to recognize the call of God and how to be obedient to it. It is in their home in

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Pray for the grace to treasure in your heart, as Mary did, the ways of God that are not immediately understood.
- Give thanks for all the siblings who sit with us at God’s family table.
- • •
- What hidden mystery about Christ is being revealed in you?
- How have the gifts of strangers revealed Christ to you?

ART: TAD DUNNE

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.

We too learn in our homes that we are already God's beloved children, as the reading from 1 John asserts. It is not a privilege to be earned, but a gift already bestowed. And just as Hannah longed fervently for Samuel, so God longs to dandle each of us on her knee and wrap us in her loving arms. We already have a place at the table in God's family and are invited to remain there.

As the second reading reminds us, we make the family resemblance visible in our shared belief in the Son and in our obedience to the command to love one another. When we gather as church, as God's family, we find healing and forgiveness from all that is not perfect in our birth families. There are no empty places at the table at God's family reunions, where all the lost come home and grow in wisdom through obedience to the source of love.

EPIPHANY (C), JAN. 3, 2010

Is 60:1-6; Ps 72:1-13; Eph 3:2-6;
Mt 2:1-12

"The mystery was made known to me by revelation" (Eph 3:3)

A favorite game of children of all ages is hide-and-seek. There is a certain thrill in thinking that one can become momentarily invisible to the seeker. Then come the peals of delight and surprise when the hiding place is discovered and once again one's whereabouts are clearly known. Today's feast centers on the hiddenness of God's plan having been revealed to all, without discrimination. For Jew and Gentile alike, God's love bursts forth like a light that pierces the darkness, like a child's squeals of delight when found. There is no hiding from this wondrous gift as it reaches to the ends of the earth.

There is a tradition in Latin America and in Hispanic communities in the United States that on El Día de los Reyes, the "Day of the Kings," a small plastic baby Jesus is

hidden in a cake baked specially for the feast day. The figurine is nestled within the dough, signifying the efforts to hide the child Jesus from the evil intentions of King Herod. As the cake is cut, the slicing knife represents the danger posed to the infant Jesus by the cruel king.

In some places the tradition is that whoever gets the piece of cake with the figurine is obliged to host the next family gathering on Feb. 2, the feast of the Presentation. In other places, the one who finds the baby Jesus in his or her portion receives an array of gifts from those present. These traditions make tangible both the danger inherent in the revelation of the Christ and the excitement of the hidden designs of God become manifest.

In the Gospel, the danger is most palpable as the exotic visitors from the East wisely discern the true king who has been revealed, in contrast to Rome's puppet king, who wants to

engage in a sinister version of hide-and-seek. Herod tries to get the Magi to "search diligently for the child" and then bring Herod word when they find him. But the plan is foiled when a divine warning in a dream directs the Magi to return to their country by another way.

These visitors from an unknown land also lead us to reflect on the gifts that come to us in hidden ways from those we regard as strangers. Their odd dress, their different colored skin and unintelligible tongue immediately put us on guard.

Those who are different are often a source of fear for us, but in today's Gospel they are friends, co-heirs to the promise and the first to recognize the hidden plans of God. In the Gospel narrative, these extraordinary visitors appear only briefly. Would we welcome such strangers, who reveal the hidden Holy One in our midst, if they were to stay?

BARBARA E. REID

Fordham University
Graduate School of Religion and Religious Education

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