America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY JAN. 24-31, 2011 $3.50

TRAVEL ISSUE

Easy as Riding a Bike

GINNY DALY WITH MARY DALY GORMAN

The editors on pilgrimage

OF MANY THINGS

Reviews of *All Things Shining* (Simon and Schuster) have got me ruminating again on the forms of religion today. The book, by the philosophers Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly, explores possibilities for religious experience in our secular age. David Brooks brought the book early notoriety by focusing on "whooshing up," the collective emotion experienced by fans at sport spectacles, as the authors' paradigm of religious experience in contemporary America.

"Whooshing up" may demean the Dreyfus-Kelly argument more than it merits. To be sure, the collective experience of sports is very real and expresses itself in all sorts of ways besides the cheers of the arena: in jerseys and jackets, stories of heroes and collections of relics. To be fair, moreover, even if Dreyfus-Kelly do not distinguish the Super Bowl from a Nazi rally, collective emotion does provide one, limited mode of self-transcendence. As Wesleyan University's president, Michael Roth, notes, the two philosophers try to evoke "whatever stands beyond us that requires our gratitude."

Just a few years ago Charles Taylor, in A *Secular Age*, identified the "festivity" of mass events as an aperçu on the sacred, but he was thinking of pilgrimages to Taizé and World Youth Days, events already laden with some religious significance, different in kind from arena spirituality. They demand more of the participant: the exertion of travel, especially on foot, the burden of repentance and the challenge of taking on a new way of life—in short, conversion. It is the personal cost of such activities and the risk of transformation of character inherent in them that distinguishes them from the cheap grace of being whooshed up in a stadium wave. They place demands on the self in a way being a sports fan does not.

Another philosopher, the late Iris Murdoch, in a fictional Platonic dialogue broadcast on the BBC, has her character, Acastos, make the case that genuine religion transforms us. Religion, Acastos says, "is beyond us, it's more real than us, we have to come to it and let it change us, religion is spiritual change, absolute spiritual change." Being religious means "always looking further and deeper," feeling "everything matter[s] and every second matter[s]."

It is on another issue that Murdoch differs most emphatically from the authors of *All Things Shining*. They reject any unitary experience and regard monotheism as a cultural dead-end. They want readers to settle for something more modest: relishing everyday enjoyments. As Michael Roth summarizes their view, "When we try too hard, we lose touch with the world."

Writing off religion as "trying too hard" shows that the promoters of the new paganism do not understand religion. Orthodox religion condemns excesses of effort as in Pelagianism and scrupulosity. But being religious also involves a holiness that both refines and integrates one's personality and one's experience of the universe. As Acastos tells Socrates in Murdoch's dialogue, "Religion is believing your life is a whole...." There is "a reverence for things—a religious person would care about everything...." Socrates reflects back, "So a religious person sees life as an interconnected whole, and a religious man would feel responsible for the quality of all his thoughts and experiences, even his perceptions...."

What is integrating and unifying for religious people is not some theological framework but their experience of holiness in others and the striving for holiness in their own lives, and through the prism of that holiness the overwhelming holiness of God. The antidote to nihilism in our secular age is not the ersatz religion of the playing field but the real holiness of flesh and blood men and women. "Deep calls to deep" (Ps 42:8).

DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J.

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BOOKS & CULTURE

ON THE WEB

Michael O'Neill McGrath, O.S.F.S., right, discusses art and faith on our podcast, and Jake Martin, S.J., reviews the **TV shows** you should be watching. Plus, additional **travel reflections** from the editors. All at americamagazine.org.

Will Growth Bring Influence?

The Dream Act died in the Senate in December and with it hopes of federal immigration reform anytime soon. Yet the political muscle of Latino-Americans is poised for steady growth. Demographics have seen to that.

Nationwide, the number of Latino voters has grown markedly. Of the 20.9 million Latinos eligible to vote in 2009, six million had become eligible since 2000, primarily because they turned 18. The authors of *The 2010 Congressional Reapportionment and Latinos*, just published by the Pew Hispanic Center, describe coming waves of a "U.S.-born Latino youth bulge." Much of it will take place in states that have gained or soon will gain Congressional seats and Electoral College votes.

Precisely how that growth will produce political influence, however, depends on reapportionment—the once-a-decade process of redrawing Congressional districts in the states according to the most recent census figures, in this case the U.S. Census of 2010. Some states have lost representatives, others have gained. It is politically significant that Latinos make up more than 15 percent of the electorate in all the states that gained seats. The percentage of Latinos is much higher in Florida and Nevada, two crucial swing states, and in Texas, which gained four seats. How will Congressional districts be drawn to even out the population of each? Will areas dense with Latinos be gerrymandered to dilute their influence? Or will Latino growth areas become new districts, as envisioned by law, able to field candidates of their own?

Latinos should carefully monitor the redistricting process and express their concerns because the ramifications of redistricting last a decade or longer. Surely representation in government is too precious a right to be taken for granted, especially now.

A YouTube Uplift

The story of Ted Williams, a golden-voiced homeless man from Columbus, Ohio, has captured the imagination and compassion of the nation. Discovered panhandling by the side of the road by a reporter for The Columbus Dispatch, Mr. Williams became an overnight sensation after he demonstrated his unique vocal talents in a video on YouTube and had the chance to tell his story of youthful hopes thwarted. His history includes years of alcohol and drug abuse and several arrests. An appearance on the Today Show quickly followed, and now warm-hearted counsel and job offers from all sides are overwhelming a man who has struggled with his demons for years on the streets.

It is admirable that Americans rush to respond to an individual's need when they know his story. It is too bad that the millions of other hard-luck tales—of missed opportunities, fractured childhoods, substance abuse and mental illness—that tell the individual stories of the nation's poor and suffering people cannot likewise be uploaded to YouTube. Maybe if we knew the stories of more hurting people—even those who are not as talented as Mr. Williams—we would not dismiss our responsibility to them so easily. Maybe we would not allow cultural fabrications and caricatures to excuse our indifference to the needy, the drug-addicted, the undocumented migrant. Here's to more stories on YouTube that offer accurate and sympathetic depictions of the individual humanity of suffering people among us. May these digital vignettes reveal the true faces and stories of the nation's poor and migrant people and prod us toward a more humane and reasonable discussion of personal and communal responsibility in the future.

Apocalypse When?

For nervous types (and some fundamentalists) preoccupied with the end times, as predicted (or not) in the Book of Revelation, the recent revelations that hundreds of birds had mysteriously fallen from the sky in Alabama came as worrisome news. Around the same time, fish began to die in a nearby lake in inexplicably large numbers—100,000 by some counts. The most logical explanation for the dropping birds was that they had been severely disoriented by fireworks at the New Year. But that did not explain the hundreds of other dead birds in Louisiana, felled by odd blood clots, nor the estimated two million dead fish in the Chesapeake Bay nor the 100 tons of fish that washed up on a Brazilian shore. What's going on? Will the end times be like an M. Night Shyamalan horror movie.

Not so fast. Some of these odd events may be explicable (fireworks disorienting birds, collisions with electrical wires and the like). Or it may be the classic case of overreporting. As soon as an unusual event is spotted by the media, similar events that would otherwise have been seen as local affairs are also reported, lending credence to the idea of a global phenomenon. This is magnified by the Internet, where events that in the past would not have been connected are now linked within seconds. But it is important to remember that while Jesus said the Father knows when even a sparrow falls to the ground, he also said that we can predict neither the day nor the hour of the end. Remember that the next time you turn on the news or fire up your PC.

Religious Freedom 2011

A bombing at a Coptic church in Alexandria, Egypt, opened the new year, just as the old year ended with the breakdown of the entente between the People's Republic of China and the Vatican on the appointment of bishops. December brought new waves of bombings against Christians in Iraq as Christians in Pakistan and Malaysia falsely accused of blasphemy were threatened with the death penalty.

Against the background of this rising tide of anti-Christian intolerance, Pope Benedict XVI delivered his message for the 2011 World Day of Peace, titled "Religious Freedom, the Path to Peace." It is the most extensive official treatment of religious freedom since the Second Vatican Council's "Declaration on Religious Liberty" in 1965. The pope's premise is that without religious freedom men and women cannot develop their own identities in relation to the transcendent horizons that are essential to being human. Freedom of religion "allows us to direct our personal and social life," the pope wrote, "to God, in whose light the identity, meaning and purpose of the person are fully understood." The alternative, when it is not all-out totalitarianism, is a society that subjects persons to arbitrary political manipulation.

The message insists that religious freedom entails respect for the faith of others, the right to change one's faith—to convert—and even the right to profess no religion at all. It welcomes religious pluralism; it affirms the need for public authorities to defend religious minorities; and it encourages interreligious dialogue and dialogue between religious and cultural institutions. It also embraces a "positive secularity," by which governments provide a common life and equal rights for men and women of diverse faiths. Here the message introduces a helpful distinction between secularity—the independence of political and other institutions from religious domination—and secularism, a West European ideology hostile to religion.

The pope also acknowledges the subversion of religious liberty by defective forms of religion, particularly fundamentalism. "Religious fundamentalism and secularism are alike," he argues; "both represent extreme forms of a rejection of legitimate pluralism and the principle of secularity," and both absolutize "a reductive and partial vision of the human person, favoring in the one case forms of religious integralism and, in the other, of rationalism."

The message underscores that religion requires protection in public as well as in private settings. "Each person must be able freely to exercise the right to profess and manifest, individually or in community, his or her own religion or faith," writes the pope, "in public and in private, in teaching, in practice, in publications, in worship and in ritual observances." For in the public exercise of religion believers make their distinctive contributions to the common good of their societies and to the justice and peace of the world. Such an expansive defense of religious liberty is most welcome in a church that until a half-century ago supported religious establishment and asserted that error has no rights.

Egyptian Christians protest on Jan 2.

Opening space for religious activity in the public square in ways consistent with Pope Benedict's vision, however, will demand hard, organized work over many years. The Holy See's own diplomacy has increasingly supported religious liberty for all, not just Catholics. But its capacity to monitor and respond to problems of religious persecution and intolerance is inadequate. Catholic donors and foundations might explore offering assistance to expand those capacities. Furthermore, opportunities to engage countries with problematic religion policies, especially China, have often been lost because of debilitating policy differences within the Roman Curia. Internal discipline within the Curia is necessary to engage the church's interlocutors over the long run.

The plight of Christians abroad also demands a vigorous response from church communities in the United States. Catholics and mainline Protestants must tackle these problems with as much organized effort as evangelicals and Jews. The old tools of denunciation of abuses and of cooperation with moderate religious leaders, though necessary, have proved too weak to hold back the advancing tide of intolerance. They should be supplemented by new strategies for mobilizing both elite and popular opinion.

Furthermore, both church and human rights groups should goad government to resist political constraints against examining the adverse policies of close allies like Israel and Turkey. Together Catholics and Protestants must press government to redirect U.S. foreign policy to effectively address religious liberty and the plight of minority Christian populations in conflict zones like Iraq, Pakistan and the Israel-Lebanon border. Religious liberty, as the pope urges, must become a visible part of diplomacy.

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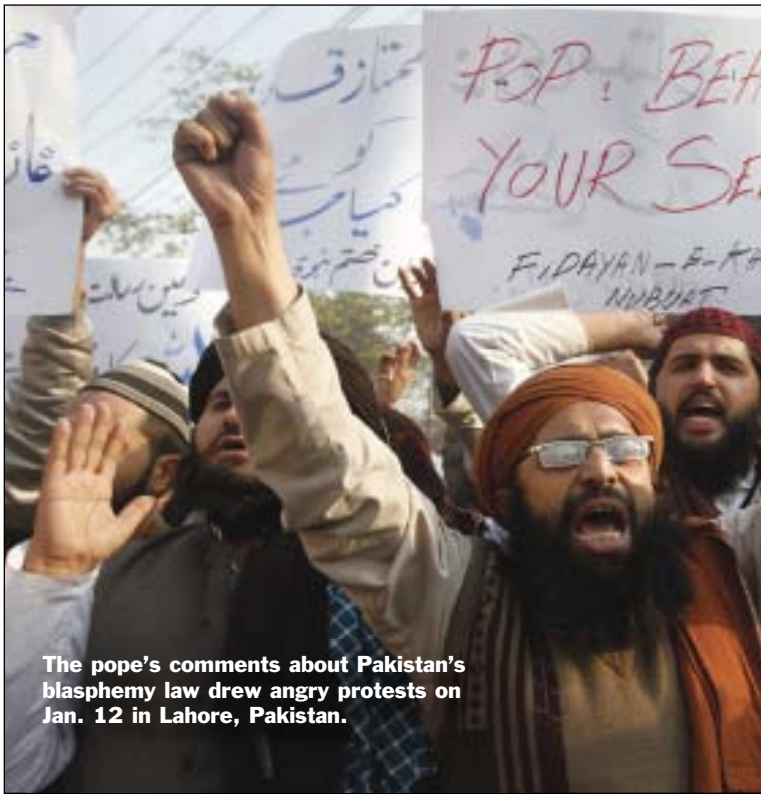
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Pope Denounces Violence As Threat to Freedom



The pope's comments about Pakistan's blasphemy law drew angry protests on Jan. 12 in Lahore, Pakistan.

Religious freedom and diversity are not threats to society and should not be a source of conflict, Pope Benedict XVI told diplomats from around the world. The meeting on Jan. 10 continued the pope's Christmas-season focus on the connection between religious liberty and peace and on threats to full religious freedom in Western democracies as well as in countries notorious for violating human rights.

Pope Benedict deplored recent attacks on Christians in Iraq, Egypt and Nigeria and expressed concern about the recent renewal of Chinese government restrictions on Catholics there. He also condemned the murder on Jan. 4 of Salman Taseer, the governor of Punjab in Pakistan. The pope said Pakistan must overturn its blasphemy law, which makes insulting the Prophet Mohammed or the Koran punishable by death. Taseer had supported the move to abrogate the law. Pope Benedict said the law often "serves as a pretext for acts of injustice and violence against religious minorities."

In Pakistan Hafiz Hussain Ahmed, an influential Islamic leader, suggested that Pope Benedict XVI mind his own business. "The pope has given a statement today that has not only offended the 180 million Muslims in Pakistan; it has also hurt the sentiments of the entire Islamic world," Ahmed said. Punctuating the pope's message, on Jan. 11 Iranian authorities revealed that they had arrested 70 Iranian Christians since Christmas, denouncing them as "hardliners" who pose a threat to the Islamic state.

The pope asked the representatives of 178 countries to examine how well their own countries respect the right of individuals to believe, to act in accordance with their conscience, to gather with other believers for worship and to carry out the educational and social projects their faith inspires. Pope Benedict told the diplomats that when religious believers are free to practice their faith, society benefits from an increase in upright behavior, respect for others and solidarity with the poor and weak. Discussing threats to full religious freedom in Western democracies, the pope expressed concern about efforts to push religion to the margins of public life or to deny citizens the right to act in accordance with their religious convictions, "for example where laws are enforced limiting the right to conscientious objection on the part of health care or legal professionals."

Pope Benedict also condemned educational programs that "mandate obligatory participation in courses of sexual or civic education" with content opposed to Catholic teaching. Church leaders and Catholic parents in Spain have objected to a public school curriculum that presents homosexuality and abortion in a positive light.

The pope told the diplomats that there is no such thing as a "scale of degrees of religious intolerance," on which a certain amount is acceptable. It is not permissible to infringe on freedom of conscience out of concern to uphold "other alleged new rights that, while actively promoted by certain sectors of society and inserted in national legislation or in international directives, are nonetheless merely an expression of selfish desires lacking a foundation in authentic human nature," the pope said.

Frederico Lombardi, S.J., the Vatican spokesman, said those "alleged new rights" included a woman's right to choose to have an abortion and the right of homosexual people to marry and adopt children.

From CNS and other sources.

Note: Because of a production error, the article "No Progress for Disabled People" in the issue of Jan. 3-10-17 was incomplete. The full text is available on America*'s Web site, americamagazine.org.*

HOLY LAND

New Pressure From Israeli Hardliners

The Holy Land Coordination, a group of representatives of European and North American bishops' conferences, began its annual visit to Israel and the Occupied Territories on Jan. 10 against a backdrop of increasing pressure on Palestinians from the Israeli right. In recent days East Jerusalem's historic Shepherd Hotel was razed to make room for new homes for Israeli settlers; and a controversial measure, aimed at the country's Arab minority, that called for stripping the citizenship of any Israeli convicted of espionage passed in the Israeli Knesset's Internal Security Committee. Notable was the clear reluctance of the nation's Shin Bet domestic intelligence agency to endorse the proposal.

The move follows other initiatives that mark a hardening on the right within Israel: a loyalty oath that could become a condition for acquiring citizenship; calls for banning Jews from renting property to Arabs; and street demonstrations demanding prohibitions on dating between Arab boys and Jewish girls.

The razing of the hotel was condemned by the British Foreign Office, and Saeb Erakat, chief Palestinian negotiator with Israel, said: "The State of Israel is demolishing one Palestinian property after another in an effort to cleanse Jerusalem of its Palestinian inhabitants, heritage and history.... Such actions are unlawful and undermine the two-state solution and the negotiations process."

The Holy Land Coordination is a Vatican-mandated effort to keep bishops worldwide apprised of conditions in the Holy Land and is meant as an expression of solidarity with the Holy Land's Christians. Opening the annual meeting, Jerusalem's Latin Patriarch Fouad Twal said Christians in the Holy Land "are still anxious from the two extremisms: The Muslim one, with its attacks against our churches and our faithful, and the Israeli right wing, invading more and more of Jerusalem, trying to transform it to an only Hebrew-Jewish city, excluding the other faiths."

Quoting the final documents of the recent Synod of Bishops for the Middle East in Rome, Archbishop Twal said: "Persecution must raise the awareness of Christians worldwide of the need for greater solidarity. It must also arouse in us the commitment to support and insist on international law and respect for all people. The attention of the whole world should be focused on the tragic situation of certain Christian communities of the Middle East, which suffer all manner of trials sometimes even to the point of martyrdom. Painful experience caused us to write these words. They turned out to be a prophecy as well, when we think about the situation in Baghdad and Egypt."

Commenting on the hardening of opinion within Israel, Archbishop Twal called for greater coordination with Israeli human rights groups: "Unfortunately for long we ignored communicating with the Israeli civil society institutions, and now more than ever they are reduced and lost their power. The Israeli public opinion is important to us, for they may say what we can't say, and they may do what we can't do."

Excavators demolished the Shepherd Hotel in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem on Jan. 9, clearing the way for 20 new homes for Jews in the contested area.

Haiti's Recovery Continues

One year after a devastating earthquake struck Haiti, killing 220,000 people and making 1.5 million others homeless, the citizens of the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere have achieved a lot with international aid, but much more needs to be done, a senior United Nations official said today. "Clearly, speeding up the reconstruction and recovery effort is the absolute priority for 2011," the U.N. humanitarian coordinator for Haiti, Nigel Fisher, said in New York two days before the anniversary of the disaster. The U.N. estimates that 810,000 people are still living in 1,150 camps in Haiti, just over half the peak of 1.5 million in July 2010. Of the 700,000 who have left the camps, about 100,000 have been relocated into 31,000 transitional shelters. People are returning to their homes but are living in their yards because they are afraid of further collapses. Meanwhile, 95 percent of Haitian children who were going to school before the quake have returned to their classrooms.

Bishops Offer Prayers for Tucson

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops renewed its call for respect for human life as the nation mourned those affected by the shooting that killed six people, including John M. Roll, the chief judge for the U.S. District Court for Arizona, and wounded at least a dozen others, including U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords, on Jan. 8 in Tucson, Ariz. "We commend to God those who have died," said Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York, president of the U.S.C.C.B., "and we pray for the families who lost loved ones and for those who are suffering from their wounds. We also pray for the person who committed these acts and those who are responsible for his care.... While we as bishops are also concerned about the wider implications of the Tucson incident, we caution against drawing any hasty conclusions about the motives of the assailant until we know more from law enforcement authorities."

Pakistan's Christians Keep Low Profile

Christians and other minority groups in Pakistan have been warned to be on their guard in the wake of the killing of Salman Taseer, governor of Pakistan's Punjab Province. Auxiliary Bishop Sebastian Shaw of Lahore said that across Pakistan people were "shocked and horrified" by the assassination on Jan. 4. The late governor had been a critic of Pakistan's controversial blasphemy law. Bishop Shaw said he was calling on the faithful to avoid public comment or action that could be misinterpreted and used to justify acts of violence and intimidation. "All of our people need to be very careful. Saying anything can incite the mob. We must not live in fear. We must have faith in God. But if we go on the streets to express ourselves at this time, it will create a negative reaction." Pakistan's blasphemy law has been increasingly criticized as a pretext for violence and intimidation of minority groups, particularly Christians.

NEWS BRIEFS

San Diego's disputed cross

Pope Benedict XVI has donated $50,000 to help the **victims of the worst floods** the state of Queensland, Australia, has suffered in 50 years. ✦ A federal court ruled on Jan. 4 that a **cross on a San Diego hillside** conveys a message of government endorsement of religion, sending the case back to lower courts to decide whether it may remain on federal land. ✦ The **Rev. Larry Snyder**, president and chief executive officer of Catholic Charities USA, commented on the failure of the Dream Act in the Senate on Dec. 20 and the fate of the students it was intended to help: "They will continue to be cast into the shadows until, as a nation, we can find a way to address our broken immigration system." ✦ The British branch of the **Y.W.C.A.** has dropped "Christian" from its official name because, they said, it "no longer stood for what we are or what we do." ✦ **Rosemary Lynch**, the Franciscan sister who founded Pace e Bene, an organization to promote nonviolence and for more than 33 years protested nuclear weapons testing, died at age 93 on Jan. 9 after being hit by a car during an early morning walk. ✦ Bishop **Salvatore Cordileone** of Oakland, Calif., has been appointed chairman of the U.S. bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for the Defense of Marriage.

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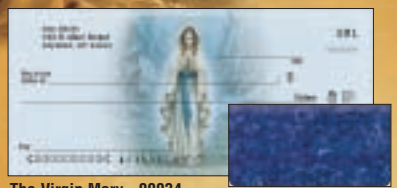

The Virgin Mary - 00034
Leather Cover and Labels - 00155

On the Wings of Hope - 00384 One image. Leather Cover and Labels - 00384 *A portion of the proceeds will be donated to fight breast cancer.*

Footprints in the Sand - 00008
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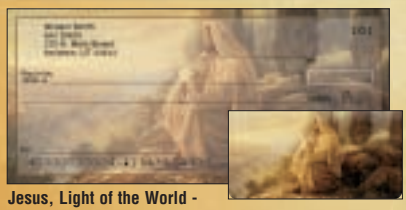
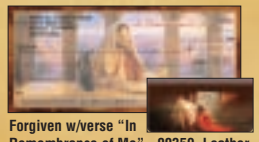
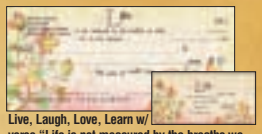


Jesus, Light of the World - 00018 Leather Cover and Labels - 00018

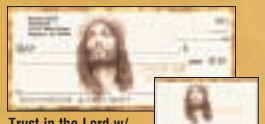
Thomas Kinkade's Faith for All Seasons w/verse "Believe all things are possible with God" - 00105
Leather Cover and Labels - 00105



Forgiven w/verse "In Remembrance of Me" - 00359 Leather Cover - 00359 Labels - 00018

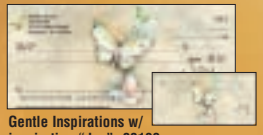


Live, Laugh, Love, Learn w/ verse "Life is not measured by the breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away"- 00332 Leather Cover and Labels - 00332

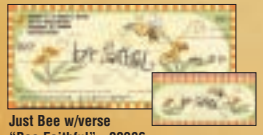


Trust in the Lord w/ verse "I am the Light of the World" - 00354 Leather Cover and Labels - 00354

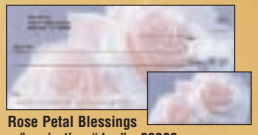
Waterscapes w/verse "Believe" - 00400
Leather Cover and Labels - 00400



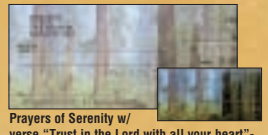
Gentle Inspirations w/ inspiration "Joy"- 00193
Leather Cover and Labels - 00193



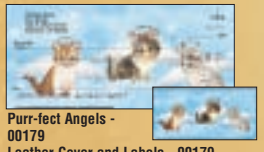
Just Bee w/verse "Bee Faithful" - 00386
Leather Cover and Labels - 00386



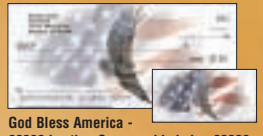
Rose Petal Blessings w/inspiration "Joy" - 00060
Leather Cover and Labels - 00060



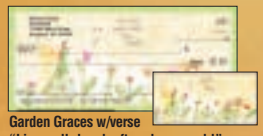
Prayers of Serenity w/ verse "Trust in the Lord with all your heart"- 00194 Leather Cover and Labels - 00194



Purr-fect Angels - 00179
Leather Cover and Labels - 00179

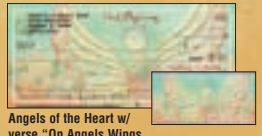


God Bless America - 00006 Leather Cover and Labels - 00006

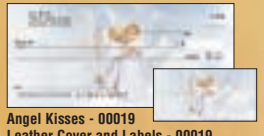


Garden Graces w/verse "Live well, laugh often, love much!"- 00172 Leather Cover and Labels - 00172

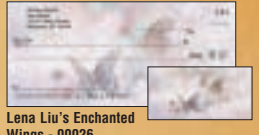
Thomas Kinkade's Heaven on Earth w/verse "With God all things are possible" - 00056
Leather Cover and Labels - 00056



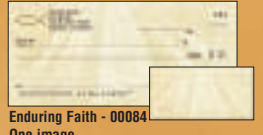
Angels of the Heart w/ verse "On Angels Wings... Anything is Possible" - 00376
Leather Cover and Labels - 00376



Angel Kisses - 00019
Leather Cover and Labels - 00019



Lena Liu's Enchanted Wings - 00026
Leather Cover and Labels - 00026



Enduring Faith - 00084
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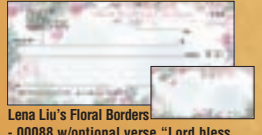
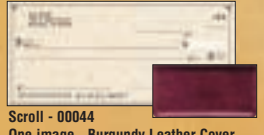
Leather Cover and Labels - 00084



Lena Liu's Floral Borders - 00088 w/optional verse "Lord bless and keep you." - 00117 Leather Cover and Labels - 00088

Blue Safety - 00027
One image.
Leather Cover and Labels - 00155



Scroll - 00044
One image. Burgundy Leather Cover - 00030-004 Labels - 00032-008

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MARGARET SILF

Light Switch

A friend tells me how, as a small girl growing up in the Bronx, she used to pester her older siblings to let her join in their games. One day, to her astonishment, they agreed. As the children of recently arrived Italian immigrants, they were very proud to call themselves New Yorkers, so this particular small New Yorker was allowed to be the Statue of Liberty in their game. They produced a box for her to stand on, placed a flashlight in her hand and instructed her to stand there, holding up the light to inspire all who entered the harbor. And there she stood while they got on with their own game. I don't know how long it took her to realize what they had done, but the story reminds me that those who carry the light will often find themselves in lonely and exposed situations.

A recent television documentary in the United Kingdom recalled how important it was during wartime to keep the light of normality shining in a dark night. An elderly woman was sharing her memories of Christmas during the blitz in London in 1940. She remembered how the nearby subway station, in which the local people had found shelter from the air raids, had been transformed into a festive space for a children's party, including a large Christmas tree. A ladder had been placed behind the tree, and she had been chosen to be the 5-year-old fairy, to sit at the top of the ladder and hold the Christmas star. Another proud little light-bearer.

In a few days' time, on Feb. 2, we will celebrate the feast of Candlemas, perhaps more familiar as the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Traditionally, in Europe, the Christmas crib stays out until Candlemas. At the presentation, the child is hailed as "a God-revealing light" (Lk 2:32, Message translation), but this is the light that will not fade when the Christmas crib is dismantled.

The light is more needed than ever in our world today. The dark night seems to enshroud us and the storm clouds gather. How will that light shine in our own dark streets? We may bless the candles in church, but unless we carry the light out into a troubled world, the blessing will never be effective. There are many small ways of doing this and a few big and bold ways. Some lights scan the world like searchlights, seeking out and publicly exposing dishonesty and hypocrisy in the highest places, courageously speaking truth to power even under threat of extreme sanctions, because the light of truth will always provoke a savage response from the powers of darkness. Other lights flicker less dramatically, but with gentle determination, speaking a word of praise and encouragement when all around are grumbling and criticizing, or taking time to have a conversation with a neglected neighbor whose loneliness goes unnoticed.

Candlelight is contagious. One candle can light a thousand more.

In December 2010, in a small town in the English Midlands, it happened that there was no money in the public purse to pay for the usual festive street lighting, the lights from previous years having become largely unserviceable. Most people in the town complained and demanded that the local council should do something about it. A few decided to take action. One man, an electrician by trade, took it upon himself to repair the broken lights and bring them all back into service. Others brought their various skills to the task or rallied local businesses and raised some modest funding. The activists appeared on television, dressed as elves and delighted to have lit up the town again and given its people cause for celebration by inspiring their fellow citizens to take responsibility themselves for bringing light to their world.

Candlemas might be a good time to pause and ponder any situations in which we might ourselves choose to light a candle rather than curse the darkness. Sometimes it will seem that we are left, like my friend in the Bronx, holding a light that nobody values while the world gets on with its own games. Sometimes the light we hold will be challenged to keep shining, like a lighthouse on a rocky coastline, in the face of death and destruction. We must be like the wartime fairy, who held her star as a sign that however bad things are we will never forget that we are human beings who know how to celebrate the things that matter.

Candlelight is contagious. One candle can light a thousand more, without itself being diminished. It is a flicker of hope capable of dispelling a fog of despair. In the words of Helen Prejean, C.S.J., "When I light a candle at midnight, I say to the darkness: 'I beg to differ.'"

MARGARET SILF *lives in Scotland. Her latest books are* Companions of Christ, The Gift of Prayer *and* Compass Points.

PHOTO: REUTERS/ROB O'NEAL/FLORIDA KEYS NEWS BUREAU

Matthew Ruhl, S.J., holds his bicycle aloft to celebrate the finish on Sept. 4, 2010, of a 99-day, 5,052-mile bicycle ride from Cape Flattery, Wash., to Key West, Fla. Twelve cyclists made the cross-country trek to raise awareness of the call by Catholic Charities USA to reduce poverty by 50 percent by 2020.

Finding your daily joy is as easy as riding a bike

Cycles of Life

BY GINNY DALY WITH MARY DALY GORMAN

Want to feel like a 10-year-old again? Hop on a bike. The incredible feeling of freedom returns right away. Remember how you felt on your first bike? You could zoom all over the neighborhood. Block boundaries no longer mattered, and you could stay out until the streetlights came on. First thing summer mornings you would jump on your bike and be gone. That bike meant freedom and fun.

It is almost better bicycling as a senior. The feeling of the 10-year-old comes right back. Get on your bike and go wherever you please. Cycle around the neighborhood doing errands. Take to a scenic trail through a park. Head downtown. Train for a longer ride to raise funds for charity or a sightseeing ride in another country. A bicycle is a ticket to a healthy, exciting new lifestyle.

My sister Mary and I have a friend, Bartley O'Hara, who will call us and say, "Let's go for a bike ride!" He sounds just like a kid when he calls. "This is a mortal sin day," he says. "On such a beautiful day God says it's a mortal sin if we don't go out and ride." So off we go! Laundry can wait. Yard work can wait. Paperwork can wait. Time to get in the saddle. That's how my sister and I got started: riding with friends on "mortal sin" days. At the beach we would ride the boardwalk and tool around town.

We grew up in Washington, D.C., a great city for biking. The Capital Crescent rail-trail goes right through Rock Creek Park. It is a beautiful, easy route to the city, along the Potomac River. Picture-postcard views of the monuments become almost routine. On a bike it's a cinch to tour museums. No traffic or parking hassles. Ride right up to the door of the Smithsonian, park and lock the bike and in we go—an hour for a shot of culture, then back on the bike with a stop for a slice of pizza on the way

GINNY DALY *and* **MARY DALY GORMAN,** *sisters and writers, have bicycled in Europe, Australia and New Zealand. Through biking they have been active fundraisers. Ginny served as the first woman chairperson of the board of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy. Mary did background research for this article.*

home. It doesn't get much better.

After I was tapped for the board of directors of the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, our riding became more serious. Well, maybe not serious, but more organized. Rails-to-Trails converts abandoned railroad track to trails for walking, biking, stroller and wheelchair use nationwide. The board meetings included not merely the usual cocktail socials, but always a bike ride as well. What a great opportunity to try different rail-trails around the country!

Trail riding is ideal for several reasons. Since railroads do not climb at more than a 6-percent grade, there are no hills. Without the distractions of traffic it is easy to get into the rhythm of riding—de-stress and decompress. And the scenery is beautiful. A biker has the same view the train conductor once had.

When Rails-to-Trails hosted a three-day ride for major donors and board members, Mary and I signed up. The 25 to 35 miles of riding each day was interspersed with rest stops, lovely lunches, fabulous dinners and lodging in charming inns. The conservancy brought along a guide to present the history of the railroad in each area and other points of interest. Rails-to-Trails publishes directories for trails nationwide, with maps and information about accommodations.

One of the most rewarding aspects of biking is riding with extraordinary people. That happened to us when Rails-to-Trails joined with World T.E.A.M. (The Exceptional Athlete Matters) Sports to showcase athletes with disabilities on a ride across America's rail-trails. Some riders were parapelegic, quadrapelegic, amputees, blind, half-paralyzed—all were extraordinary.

How does that work? When a cyclist has trouble ascending a steep hill, for example, a stronger rider puts a hand firmly on that rider's lower back to support the push. Kevin, paralyzed on his right side and riding a home-built tricycle, was in trouble on one relentlessly steep hill in Illinois. A strong rider helped, but reinforcements were required. So another, then another and finally four strong men, two on each side, helped him make that hill. At the sight of it, tears flowed unbidden among many riders.

Riders were assigned different roommates each night. One night my roomate, Lee, a young, quiet and sweet woman who had survived a massive brain injury in childhood, said: "I've been watching you, and I can't see your disability. I can see all the others. What's yours?" Thanks to a burst of grace, I replied, "My disabilities are on the inside, so they don't show." Next day Lee proudly and promptly reported that to everyone.

It is a humbling privilege to ride alongside newly made friends like these, whose courage, determination, humor and spirit shine forth like the face of God.

After the Flood

Our long-distance road cycling began with a flood. In 1998 I was in San Diego at a Rails-to-Trails conference when my beloved beach cottage in Delaware was clobbered by the effects of violent storms. Water spilled over the windowsills, furniture floated, books drowned. It was obvious the house would never dry out by summer.

A colleague on the conservancy board, Mark Ackleson, president of the Iowa National Heritage Foundation, offered

Close to Nature

The Black Hills of South Dakota are nature at its finest. I'm blessed to be able to ride the 110-mile Mickelson Trail here,

created in the 1990s from an abandoned railroad bed. Cycling in these beautiful natural surroundings connects me to the landscape. The physical effort of pedaling and moving is akin to a walk on steroids. Car travel limits us to the sense of sight alone. Biking engages sight as well as sound and touch, so the experience is much more intimate and connected. Whether biking in the Black Hills or in Tasmania, I find this connection gives me a more profound experience of the places I visit.

DAVE SNYDER
Lead, S.D.

For Heart and Soul

As a single traveler, cycling has afforded me a variety of healthy, fun and social vacations. I have ridden national rail trails in Washington, Wisconsin, South Dakota, Pennsylvania, Vermont and Virginia with groups from Rails-to-Trails. Some of the people I met have remained good friends for years. Memories of themed rides like the Mount Pigmore Classic will make me laugh when I am 90. I have cycled through Holland and France. I have enjoyed countryside, small towns and local people I would never have encountered on main roads. Everywhere, riding has offered a terrific combination of exercise and easy social connections. I have encountered beautiful places that nourish my heart and soul.

MEREDITH KIMBELL
Reston, Va.

Unforgettable Fitness

When I was 58, on a business trip, the cardiologist next to me opined, "If you ride a bike 1,000 miles per year, you'll never have a heart attack." Right or wrong, what did I have to lose? So began the sheer joy of riding a bike—a lot. I began tracking miles in 2006. I found that the pace that works for me is about 2,000 miles a year. For the past eight years I've had many unforgettable experiences. A few 100-milers, a couple of "hotter than hell" rides in Wichita Falls, Tex., in August and this year the Five Borough ride in New York City. So far, the cardiologist has been right: I haven't died of a heart attack. And at age 66 I'm active, running a business in Annapolis, Md., while living in Fort Worth, Tex., and having as much energy as I've ever had. Biking brings me two incredible joys: delaying the onset of aging and the knowledge that I can go anywhere on this cool bicycle.

HARRY SPRING
Fort Worth, Tex.

solace: "Ginny, since your beach house is out of commission, this is the perfect summer to ride the Des Moines Register's Annual Great Bicycle Ride Across Iowa," known as Ragbrai.

I solicited Mary and my other sister, Markie McKaig, for company and support: "Since our mother grew up in Council Bluffs, Iowa, we can ride in her honor." At the time we were 61, 59 and 53—old enough to know better, but young enough to say, Why not?

First step: find a good bike. Women who begin biking usually pull out an old bike from the garage. Men who take up cycling treat themselves to nifty new equipment.

Second step: train. Of course, the best way to prepare for a big bike ride is to ride a bike. All spring and early summer the three of us trained. We spent entire days riding trails around the city, longer and faster each week. We learned, the hard way, to use the bike rack, change flat tires, and patch blisters and skinned knees.

Iowa is a huge state, 500 miles straight across. But the Ragbrai route is never straight. It zigs and zags to take in as many small towns as possible. And Iowa is not flat, as we had thought; one area is nicknamed Little Switzerland. The ride is always the third week in July. To call it hot is an understatement. But it is enormous fun. For younger riders, it was a rolling frat party: at each rest stop they danced to fiddlers on flatbed trucks, drank beer and gorged themselves on barbeque, homemade pie and, of course, corn. We seniors chugged into each town in time to hydrate and hop back on the bike. Maybe we weren't 10-year-olds after all.

ON THE WEB
Additional cycling tips.
americamagazine.org

T-shirts told the story. Our yellow tank tops read: We Be Three DC Biking Mamas. Others asserted: Seven Days on a Bike Makes One Weak! And: If You're Not Having Fun, Lower Your Standards!

After Ragbrai we could conquer anything. We rode the AIDS ride from Boston to New York. We did the Tour de Canal, a two-day, 185-mile ride along the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal that benefits the national Alzheimer's Association. We rode for cancer research and to support research on lungs, heart diseases and multiple sclerosis. Separately and together we have ridden in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Europe.

After some 15 years of hard riding, we are slowing our pace but still biking. Our writer friend Tom Hoyer sets a good example. Tom has logged 22,000 miles by riding 20 miles a day around Rehoboth Beach, Del., since his retirement from government bureaucracy. He says he feels younger now than when he was working.

Whether you are 16 or 66, biking is a unique way to stay healthy while experiencing the joy of discovery. It may even help you to pray. It can, however, be addictive. Don't say you weren't warned. A

Accidental Pilgrims

The editors reflect on their spiritual encounters around the world.

Unsuspecting Pilgrims

By Francis X. Hezel

Manila in 1975, at the height of the Marcos era, was the capital of a troubled country. The super-rich ruled; the business establishment made the deals necessary to keep its stores open; and the average Filipino struggled to get by. Every other day, it seemed, the newspapers would carry a story of another violent confrontation between government troops and the National People's Army, the guerilla insurgents who presented themselves as revolutionaries, agents of change and champions of the poor. As the Philippines became increasingly polarized, college students often took to the hills to join the N.P.A. One week it was a college basketball star another week it was a beauty pageant queen who donned fatigues and picked up an automatic weapon to join the liberationist movements.

I had come to the Philippines for the final year of religious formation (Jesuits call it tertianship), which included a 30-day retreat at the novitiate in Novaliches, north of Manila. For me, the retreat was an attempt at emotional engagement with the Lord, picking up conversation with an old friend but with long pauses when neither one spoke. We Jesuits prayed over the purpose of life, our own infidelities and the invitation of Christ to seek him wherever he was to be found. We looked for him in the solitude of contemplation, often on quiet walks through the wooded novitiate property, and in the song and prayer of the daily liturgies. It was a retreat in more than one sense of the word: a step back from the squalor and desperation of a land with too many people and too few decent-paying jobs.

The day the retreat ended, Felix Yaoch, a Micronesian priest and fellow tertian, and I hailed a jeepney to Manila to attend a meeting. As we jumped out of the vehicle on one of the most crowded streets in Manila, I turned toward the intersection and caught sight of people rushing this way and that, dodging traffic and one another as they poured into the street. I was dazzled, as if hundreds of Manileños were caught in slow motion, their faces frozen. I thought I saw them with their eyes upturned in a kind of pantomime. Here they were: those people described by St. Ignatius in the meditation on the Incarnation in the Spiritual Exercises—"some at peace, some at war; some weeping, some laughing; some well, some sick." These were the people from whom we had been carefully shielded during our retreat in the wilderness. Here they were again—street beggars, field workers, army troops, young N.P.A. recruits and businessmen among them—a cross section of humanity seeking salvation from poverty, from futility, from meaninglessness.

Manila's Divisoria retail market in 2010

PHOTO: © ERIK DE CASTRO / REUTERS

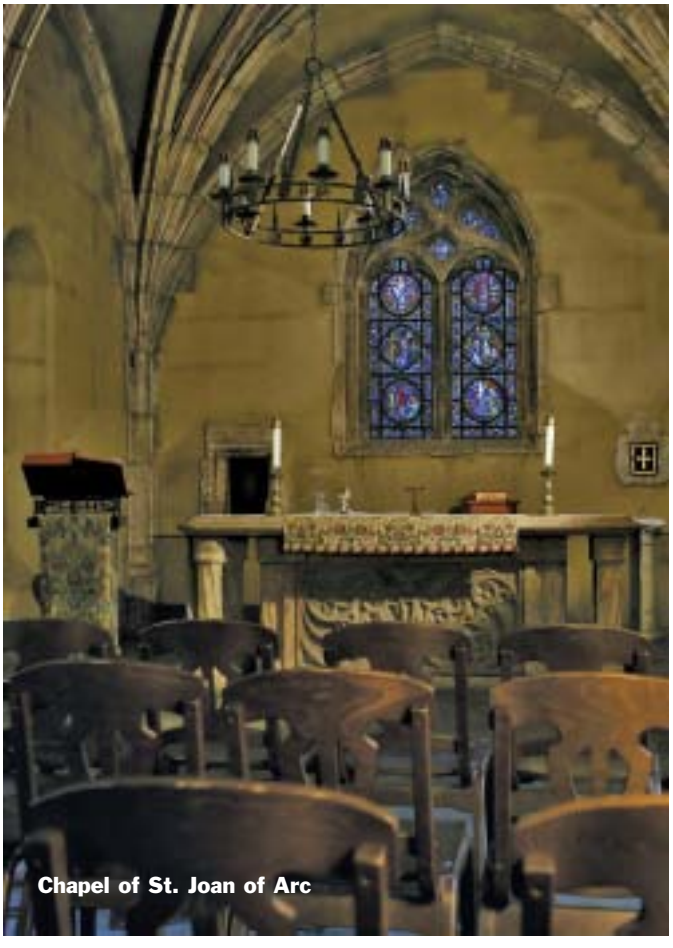
Perhaps the God who showed a bit of his face to us in the quiet of Novaliches was serving notice that here is where we could find him: in the bustle of the streets and on the faces of unsuspecting pilgrims.

FRANCIS X. HEZEL, S.J., *who has spent over 40 years in Micronesia, is a guest editor of* ***America****.*

Joan of Milwaukee

By James Martin

The last place you might expect to find a 15th-century French chapel is Milwaukee. But plunked down in the middle of Marquette University is the Chapel of St. Joan of Arc. A speaking engagement last fall brought me to Wisconsin,



Chapel of St. Joan of Arc

and I was determined to see the inside of the chapel. The last time I was at the university, a friend pointed it out during a whirlwind tour and mistakenly said that the Maid of Orléans prayed here. Not exactly, said a guidebook that awaits visitors today. The compact white building was transported brick-by-brick to the United States from France in 1926 and then to Marquette in 1964. Though Joan probably did not visit the chapel, it contains a single stone on which she is supposed to have prayed. Inside are a rough-hewn altar and simple wooden seats.

Also inside is silence. In the middle of the fall semester, in the middle of a busy campus, I could hear no noise. Finally, I thought, some quiet after seemingly endless days of cars and trucks honking in New York. When I sat on the creaking chair, I felt a deep stillness. And I wondered whether it was quiet in the fields of Domrémy before Joan heard her famous voices. Much of her life was noisy: her family lived in crowded quarters; later, during battles, she was surrounded by shouts and cries; upon entering a town she was often greeted with deafening cheers. Perhaps she knew silence only in the fields—and in her jail cell awaiting her trial, when her voices temporarily deserted her. Silence can be a double-edged sword: for the lonely a torment, for the overworked a balm.

The red leaves blew about on the plaza outside, but I could not hear them.

JAMES MARTIN, S.J., *is culture editor of* ***America.***

ON THE WEB

More travel reflections from the editors.
americamagazine.org

PHOTO: COURTESY OF MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

Walk Into Repentance

By Drew Christiansen

Said to be the site of Caiaphas's palace, Jesus' trial and Peter's denial, there has been a church at the site of Saint Peter in Gallicantu—Saint Peter Where the Cock Crowed—since Byzantine times. The current church was built by the French Assumptionist Étienne Boubet in 1931. In the 1990s it was beautifully renewed by Robert Fortin, an American Assumptionist who was rector, and the Palestinian Christian architect Samir Kandah. In keeping with the commemoration of St. Peter's denial, a constant theme in the church's art is repentance. A walk within the church takes one deeper and deeper into the spirit of contrition. There is no place quite like it.

On the upper level, Father Boubet designed the church in shades of violet and green, colors of repentance, and with little natural light. The altar is flanked by images of penitent saints, including the "good thief," Dismas, and St. Mary of Egypt. On the second level, an extraordinary, blue-tinted bronze of the Suffering Servant invites visitors to contemplate the prophecies of Isaiah fulfilled in Jesus. Committed pilgrims should avoid the impulse to move ahead with the crowd and instead take time to meditate there on Isaiah's Servant Songs, whose enactment began in this place.

Opposite the statue, a stairwell leads to a crypt chapel, where living stone flows into a white marble sanctuary. Three paintings in modern iconic style adorn the space. To the left, with a cock looking down from a pillar, a handcuffed Jesus gazes on Peter after his denial; in the center Peter weeps over his denial; and to the right one sees reconciliation as Jesus asks, "Peter, do you love me?" In the lower chapel, pilgrims cannot but reflect on their own failures to be true to Christ.

The walk then takes pilgrims into the rock below the church, to a cistern that was deepened into a holding cell. Its walls have been inscribed with crosses by centuries of pilgrims who have descended to the place where Jesus is said to have been held

Gallicantu

prisoner the night before his death. In this bleak setting, the custom is to recite Psalm 88, from which I have excerpted here verses 4 and 6:

> For my soul is full of troubles,
> and my life draws near to Sheol,
> I am reckoned among those who go down to the Pit….
>
> Thou hast put me in the depths of the Pit,
> in the regions dark and deep.

A psaltery presents the prayer in more than 80 languages. When the recitation is complete, guides sometimes plunge the cell into a chilling darkness.

In "the Pit," as pilgrims experience the depths of Christ's abandonment, their walk of repentance runs its course. St. Peter Gallicantu is special among holy places because step by step it offers so many opportunities to enter into Christ's passion and to stir up repentance in the heart.

DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J., *editor in chief of* **America,** *is a canon of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.*

ABOVE PHOTO: WIKICOMMONS/BERTHOLD WERNER
RIGHT PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/DENIS BABENKO

God in the City

By Karen Sue Smith

On my first visit to the cathedral in Milan, Italy, the Duomo di Milano, the largest Gothic cathedral in the world, I did as many tourists do on the recommendation of their guidebook: I went up onto the roof to view from there the magnificent piazza over which the church presides. It had rained that morning, which made the white marble facade slippery and, with no guardrails, a bit dangerous. Yet the payoff included much more than the view. Up there one can walk through the forest of saints' statues and spires that give this building its distinctive appearance.

No guidebook, however, describes what I found inside the cathedral, which has proved most memorable. The place was bustling. The enormous structure begun in the 14th-century was full of modern people engaged in the very act of being the church. This parish was alive, even though no Mass was conducted there during the hour or more that I lingered. Although many churches in Europe seem to be shells, stuffed with the ghosts of congregations past, more than houses for contemporary worshipers, this duomo was different. Some tourists did look up at the windows, point and consult their maps, yet most of the people I saw were locals. They spoke Italian. Lots of Milanese, it seemed, were praying, lighting candles, making confession, gathering with friends, checking the bulletin boards, talking with the priests, coming and going routinely—giving the place a throbbing heartbeat of its own. The massive marble seemed to breathe.

The large tapestry banners hanging in the nave gave the interior a festive feel. What might otherwise have been a vast, cold cavern was instead inviting overall and cozy and intimate in places. The little rooms for the sacrament of reconciliation seemed to wait expectantly. A small alcove bedecked with a Bible and flowers, like a hospitable reception area of a fine restaurant, set the tone as one approached the quiet, inner sanctum for the reception of grace.

View from the roof of the Duomo di Milano

In the nave stood a very public glass chamber, and within it a priest sat behind a desk. A person entered and the two began to talk. This was no confessional, but rather a place to speak with a priest. The people in the church could readily see when a priest was present and available—transparency through architecture.

When I looked closely at one of the side altars, I saw on the wall handwritten scrawlings (purposely never removed): prayers, petitions and testimony of answered prayers. I could make out some of the Italian. The fingers of those who scribbled their gratitude to God in sacred graffiti on those walls reached out and touched me. Such good company! The faith of many generations of Catholics was palpable that day in a house of God for the people of the city.

I pray that it may still be so.

KAREN SUE SMITH *is editorial director of* ***America.***

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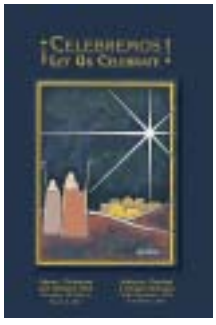

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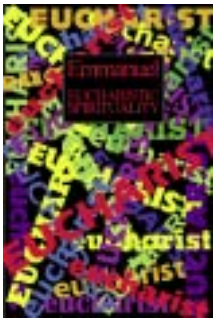

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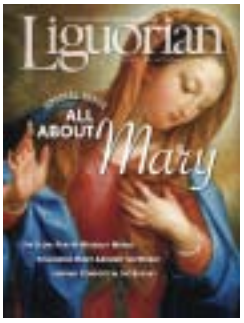

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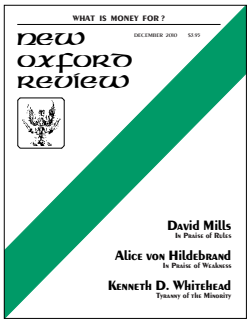

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Have Faith, Will Travel

The volunteer journey

BY KERRY WEBER

Six years ago, David Haeussler had zero interest in traveling to El Salvador and perhaps only slightly more interest in his Catholic faith. So when an ad in the parish bulletin prompted his wife, Monica, to sign up for a trip to El Salvador with the **FIAT Volunteer Program**, David was concerned. He worried the trip would be unsafe and recommended she not go alone. So Monica invited him to join her.

"I said I'll just go down to El Salvador, work and come back," David said. But after he arrived in the country, it did not take long for his plans to change. "I fell in love with the people there," he said. "My views didn't match the reality. The trip changed the way I look at immigration, at the third world, at the bonds that we all have."

The FIAT Volunteer Program, run by the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, is one of many Catholic organizations that offer short-term service trips to individuals who are trying to live out their faith beyond the boundaries of their hometown. According to voluntourism.org, 4.7 million people, from teens to retirees, combined travel and service opportunities in 2007, and one million of those traveled internationally. There are many Catholics among them.

Although short-term programs are sometimes criticized for focusing on charity rather than sustainability, both the volunteers and those they serve often are affected for the long-term. David, 62, and Monica, 53, have returned to El Salvador seven times, and David has enlisted the help of organizations like Engineers Without Borders and the Rotary Club to complete a water distribution project for a village, while Monica has helped raise funds for a school lunch program for children, among other projects.

The potential for personal and spiritual growth over even a short trip is tremendous, said Gloria Patrone, O.S.B., FIAT's director of volunteers. Sister Patrone said the volunteers often feel they are receiving more than they give. "They say, 'What are we really doing here?' and I say 'building relationships.' Relationships are the basis of everything."

Potential volunteers need not leave U.S. soil to build relationships and make a difference. **Nazareth Farm** in Salem, W.Va., offers weeklong service retreats for close to 2,000 high school and college students each year. The 31-year-old farm also holds special retreat-service weeks for families and adults. Volunteers assist the farm staff in conducting home repairs for the surrounding, often poor, rural community and complete chores on the farm. "A lot of kids haven't done these kinds of physical tasks before," said Jordan Schiele, a staff member at the farm. "Doing the work and also realizing that they are able to do it impacts them. Through meeting the homeowners and seeing how people live here, the volunteers experience God in a different way."

FIAT volunteers at work in El Salvador

PHOTO: COURTESY OF PROJECTFIAT.ORG

While most short-term service programs offer time for group reflection, volunteers may seek to nurture their contemplative side. Women may want to look to the **Benedictine Lay Volunteers.** Those 18 and older can take part in the prayerful routine of Benedictine life while serving at the Mother of God Monastery in Watertown, S.D. The length and areas of service are flexible—from teaching English as a second language to assisting with a day camp on the nearby Crow Creek Reservation. "It's not a big dramatic missionary adventure to a far-off location, although those

KERRY WEBER *is an associate editor of* ***America.***

are wonderful," said Rose Palm, O.S.B., the director of volunteers. "There's more quiet spiritual time because it's built into our daily life. Many people who come like the idea of sharing community and meals and prayer with us."

Volunteers more interested in the political side of injustice may want to consider the **Columban Volunteers**, who offer short-term exposure trips to locations like Peru and the U.S.-Mexico border. These trips focus on volunteer education rather than direct service. "It's about an encounter at a table," said Amy Woolam Echeverria, the director of the Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach. "We give volunteers a chance to hear people in need tell their story and understand the conditions in which they live." The Columban Volunteers also make a conscious effort to follow up with participants and to encourage the young participants in the border-experience trip to remain active in advocacy work through an internship at the Columban Center in Washington, D.C.

No matter the destination, an open mind is key to making the most of any volunteer commitment, Monica Haeussler said. She knows her travels to El Salvador may sound exotic, but she insists she is nothing special. "Dave and I aren't holy rollers," she said laughing. "A lot of people think these trips are the religious equivalent of extreme sports for athletes, but it's something everyone should do at least once." A

IDEAS | JON M. SWEENEY WITH MICHAL WOLL

ALT-HONEYMOON

Seeking the sacred in Prague

Clearly the anticipated answer to "Where did you go on your honeymoon?" was not "Prague." Our friends, perhaps expecting us to name the Caribbean or some other lush, fun place, always responded, "Why there?" The city, well known for its beautiful architecture, significant culture scene and dramatic post-Communist evolution, was on both my wife's and my own short lists of must-sees.

Michal and I left for Prague in early May, looking forward to the cool, damp weather that marked the low season in Eastern Europe. In our living room the week before, we marked fold-out maps from Time Out; I located English-language used bookstores and bakeries. She circled veggie restaurants and bicycle rentals.

These were in addition to the obvious landmarks we wanted to see, which included numerous churches and synagogues. Prague has an extensive history of religious events, people and places, including an extant Jewish quarter. That was appealing to us, religious couple that we are.

One cannot visit a major European city without coming face to face with such history, essential to the fabric of the human story. But as Americans, it can be confusing: Our history simply is not as long, and we have never lived through an era when the religious establishment was inseparable from the government. One still feels both elements in Prague. The most prominent feature of the central city square is a towering statue of the 14th-century reformer Jan Hus. The tourists were so plentiful around Prague Castle we could hardly get near it. We were hoping to see the great St. Vitus Cathedral, seat of the Archbishop of Prague, which is attached to the castle and from which Czech presidents still rule.

We also made a conscious choice

The old town square in Prague

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/MARCELLO

not to visit a nearby concentration camp—for a variety of reasons. First, Michal, who is a rabbi, had visited it once before. Second, this was our honeymoon, and the solemnity of such a place did not fit with the celebration of our visit. Third, Michal's preference was to focus on the rich heritage and living tradition of her people—rather than their suffering. So, map in hand, we set out to explore Prague and revel in uninterrupted time together.

Touring Churches

The first church we visited was one of two St. Nicholases in the old city. The nave contained a gift shop, a series of large, propped-up posters with the history of the place in three languages (Czech, German, English), stacks of pastel fliers advertising the church's nightly Baroque music concerts and a person sitting at a desk prepared to sell us tickets to that night's offering. The sanctuary was roped off, as if no longer in use. We quickly discovered with sadness that most of the city's churches, and a synagogue as well, held communal activity only when hosting Baroque music concerts. It was fascinating how many different houses of worship could simultaneously present a night with Vivaldi with holy artifacts useful only as lovely concert backdrops.

ON THE WEB
Jake Martin, S.J., on television shows you should watch.
americamagazine.org/culture

The cavernous Church of Our Lady before Tyn offered a more austere experience: dark Gothic columns set off by equally dark icons depicting the suffering Savior. These unnerved both of us, for different reasons. I found them bleak and depressing, while Michal just found them inexplicable. We saw a depiction of the baby Jesus looking oddly emaciated. We had paid a fee to enter the sanctuary—something we are usually loath to do. But there was no service time when we might have entered more prayerfully.

The Baroque, gilt, colorful excess of the Loreto Church, near Prague Castle, offered a bit of relief from the medieval dark in Tyn. Chapels, monuments and paintings of a plethora of saints, primarily women, were there "to encourage the masses to return to and understand the beauty of the church," as a brochure explained. The church was bright, full of displayed treasures and streaming visitors. The story of St. Agatha, new to Michal, was creatively on display. Agatha, an Italian, was martyred in the third century during the persecution ordered by the emperor Decius. At the church gift shop we were disappointed to find no postcards of the statue of two chubby cherubs frolicking with a platter holding Agatha's breasts. (I was glad I had broken the rules and taken a photo on the sly.) Yet we still had not seen a place where people actually pray.

We wondered if these were active, worshiping churches. They did not appear to be. By this point we realized how uncomfortable being tourists was for us when it came to religion. We were exposed to plenty of history, art, architecture and organized tours in a variety of languages, but it all felt empty. We began to yearn for signs of religious life and for the sense that others were engaging with the spiritual, the symbolic or the sacred in these places.

A Search for Worshipers

The Alt-Neu Shul (Old-New Synagogue) was the one house of worship where religion could be felt. A simple stone and wood structure built in the late-13th century, it is the oldest active synagogue in Europe. Worn wooden benches that had clearly supported many bodies gave it an atmosphere of gravity and immediacy. I asked Michal to translate the Hebrew inscribed on the wall above either side of the Torah ark. One text, from the Talmud tractate Berachot, said: "Know before Whom you are standing." The other was Psalm 16:8: "I place God in front of me always." I could begin to hear and feel the community praying in that space, just as they have done for seven centuries. I turned to Michal and said, "I would like to pray here someday." Michal took a step back and

THE SECRET PLACE

The flowers of grass open to
my dull tread tracking
through the dew of grace,
rain of tears, flow of blood
into the sun of your beaten face.

I step into the welcome
of the wind
and pass over to the unknown
where I am desired
beckoned by beauty, the beckoning
terror of sheer beauty.

I return changed,
witness to the secret place,
bearing the wounds
of beauty's face.

LOUIS TEMPLEMAN

LOUIS TEMPLEMAN, *a writer, lives in Jacksonville, Fla.*

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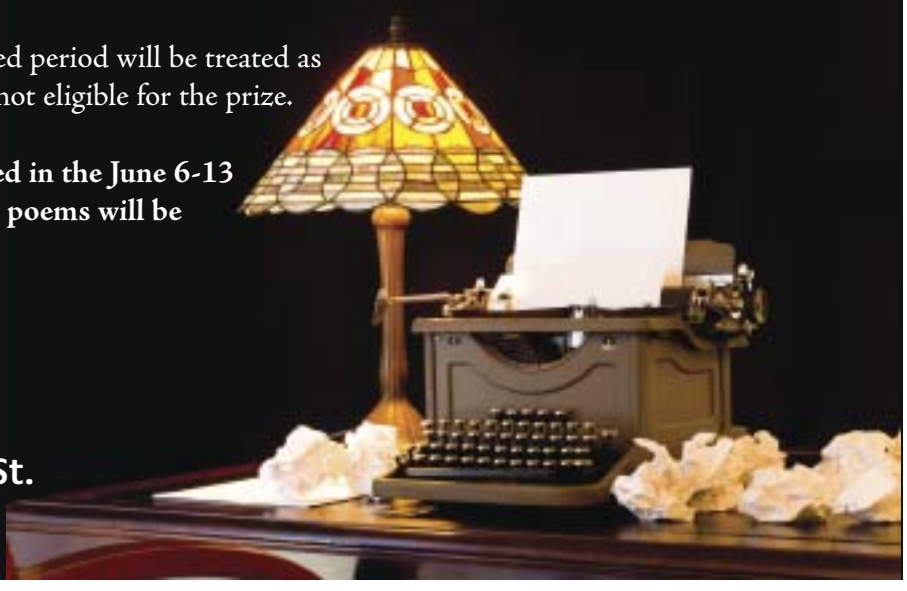

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pointed to the four-inch slits high in the foot-thick concrete walls. "Those are the windows to the women's section, the only place where I would be welcome," she said.

On our way out a young woman asked us in simple English if we had any questions. Michal inquired about one of the Hebrew acronyms on the side wall, and the woman recited another line of the Psalms in lovely Hebrew. We complemented her fluency and inquired whether she was a member of this Jewish community. She shyly replied that she was only an employee.

The Jewish Museum, across from the Alt-Neu Shul, offered little to suggest the presence of modern religious life. From reading some of the descriptions in the display cases one might think that Judaism existed only in shtetls long ago: "Rosh Hashana was a time when Jews would…." Other practices were described that Michal assured me had not been practiced in centuries, even in the most strictly observant communities. Mostly it was Michal's delight in the timeless scrolls and books that gave some life and sense of continuity to the ancient tradition; to use a common Yiddishism, "Only the ones who know will know." We could not help but wonder how the throngs of tourists, few Jews among them, would even understand, from their experience of the museum, that there is contemporary Jewish life and practice in Prague.

On Friday night, weary and damp from a full day of walking the city, we located a basement apartment in a commercial district where the liberal Jewish community gathers each week. There was neither gilding nor cherubs; the only music came from the voices of people singing and praying in a mix of Czech, Hebrew and English. There we met Eleina once again, the employee of the Old-New Synagogue, who greeted us with a sweet smile of recognition. How unusual it must be for one of her museum customers to show up to pray on the Sabbath! Later, as we walked back through the city square, past the Astronomical Clock and Jan Hus, we realized that for an hour or two we had felt at home.

How Was Your Trip?

What is the point of visiting these old synagogues and churches? They are fine places to learn about history. They are often gorgeous, ornate and unusual. Sometimes you can pay an additional fee to take photographs to show your friends back home. But ultimately this seems like little more than nostalgia. Those with an abiding interest in being a part of religious life today would rather spend time in places of worship—even basement apartments—where congregations gather and people pray that connect us in the present and point to a better future.

When friends asked, "How was your trip?" we would smile and say "Great!" recalling the joys of being together and the disappointment and ambivalence about much of our experience. Many of the stops on the tourist trail had left us dissatisfied, but we found what we needed.

JON M. SWEENEY *is the author of many books, including* Light in the Dark Ages: The Friendship of Francis and Clare of Assisi *and* The St. Francis Prayer Book. **MICHAL WOLL** *is a Reconstructionist rabbi who serves the congregation of Beth Jacob in Montpelier, Vt.*

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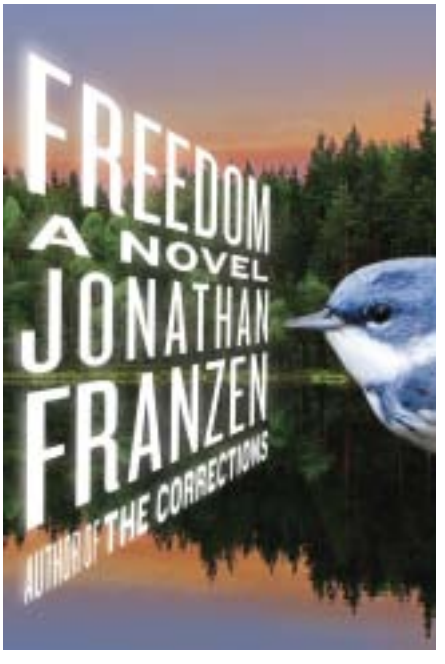


FREEDOM
A Novel

By Jonathan Franzen
Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 576p $28

During the inaugural season of the new Yankee Stadium this past summer, the New York tabloids reported the story of a fan who was inconvenienced by a security guard's refusal to let her bring her Apple iPad to her seat. This seemed to the patron an outrageous violation of her personal freedom. Yankee security considered the iPad a laptop, and these are forbidden. She called it a personal digital assistant. A nearby hot dog vendor who witnessed the kerfuffle delivered the money quote for one reporter: "I can't bring my iPad into a game? White people's problems."

This tale is not included in Jonathan Franzen's ballyhooed new novel, *Freedom*, but it would not necessarily have been thematically out of place. The emotional lives of the characters in *Freedom* are very much the stuff that many a hot dog vendor (or reader) might dismiss as the particular obsessions and dramas of a privileged suburban family, one that would do well to take itself a little less seriously in times of trouble. That this sense is

present throughout the novel does not ruin Franzen's effort, but it somewhat compromises what Franzen clearly intended as a "big book," the kind of literary opus that could perhaps land the author on the cover of Time (which has already happened; he's been there twice now).

This is not to say that the lives of Walter and Patty Berglund and those who love them are depicted as easy or lacking in their own peculiar tragedies, but the reader may find it hard to sympathize or engage entirely with this contemporary American family as they negotiate the perils of modern existence as socially conscious and painfully self-conscious people. Frankly, the Berglunds are irritating people, not only to their fictional neighbors but to the reader as well, and they remain irritating in almost everything they do.

From their suburban roots as a family to their gradual migration to gentrified urban life, the Berglunds and their relatives and friends search for a kind of autonomy (freedom?) that their parents, their past, their commitments or their culture seem somehow to have robbed from them. Walter wants to save his marriage to Patty, but might prefer to save the globe from warming. Patty is sure she wants to be the perfect mother, but also wouldn't mind some surgical interventions to remind her of an athletic youth, or the not-so-occasional bottle of white wine to help with her misgivings about how life has turned out. Son Joey wants individual autonomy but does not disdain the monthly cash infusions Patty sends from under Walter's nose.

The only major character who seems free from this unease and contradictory existence is Walter's rock-star buddy Richard, but Richard's saving grace is his utter lack of concern for the rules and mores of any of the cultures through which he lazily moves. He is the most entertaining of the bunch, truth be told, and the unlikely moral voice throughout much of the novel. Portrayed as a more priapic version of the alt-country rocker Jeff Tweedy, Richard is able to recognize and tell the truth about everyone's lives even while he might be helping to ruin them.

While *War and Peace* is the novel to which Franzen most frequently and consciously refers in the book (particularly in the complicated and frequently tormented relationships between Walter, Patty and Richard), I found much less of Tolstoy and much more of John Cheever in these pages. Like Cheever, Franzen is at his best when detailing (and despairing over) the random cruelties and pettiness of economically prosperous but emotionally hollow American community life: the unsolved mystery of one neighbor's slashed tires, the suspicious disappearance of another neighbor's bird-killing cat, the unreflective adulteries and affairs, the gossip and rivalries that

color every intention. I was reminded repeatedly of Cheever stories like "The Housebreaker of Shady Hill" and his other tales of families struggling with an undefined sense of angst and anomie in a world where the superficial appearance of success has been achieved.

Franzen does take *Freedom* beyond that—this is no short story, after all—into larger themes of overpopulation and environmental catastrophe and war-plagued societal collapse, and in these themes *Freedom* hints at the dystopian menace that could always be found lurking in the background of Franzen's earlier novels. His characters in *Freedom* have some concrete notions of how to save the world (or, in the case of Joey and Richard, how to profit from its collapse while lending a perfunctory hand), and they chase those ambitions in tandem with their search for their own safe emotional backyards. Perhaps the military-industrial complex running rampant in Bush-era America can be exploited for good; maybe rapacious mountaintop-removal mining can fund bird sanctuaries; or maybe even grossly mismanaged inheritances can help to create a brighter future. But as the story winds down, these quests once again become secondary to the individual quests for autonomy and for those ever-elusive safe backyards in which to relax. At the same time, sudden tragedies and inevitable personal setbacks bedevil those primary quests as well.

By the final 100 pages of the novel, the story and its actors have run out of steam; some characters are simply whitewashed out and others are spent of their energy for anything but a simple existence where they won't be bothered and won't bother in turn. Poking around in the silly rubble of their lives at this late point, Franzen seems to say, will not change the overall arc of their individual or collective quests, nor offer a chance for greater meaning than the characters found themselves. Ultimately, perhaps, life is a bit too much for the Berglunds, be it writ large or small.

JAMES T. KEANE, S.J., *a student at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, Calif., is a former associate editor of* ***America****.*

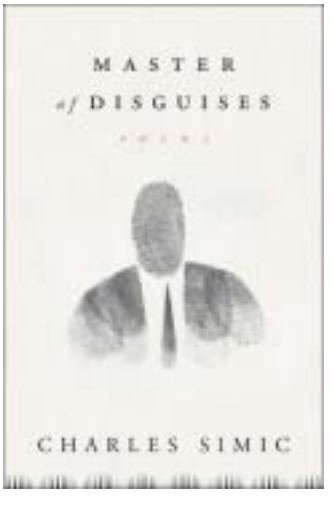
DAVID GARRISON

AS UNREAL AS REAL CAN BE

MASTER OF DISGUISES
Poems

By Charles Simic
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 96p $22

The poems of Charles Simic, while not exactly lyrical (certainly not in the way the language, say, of Mary Oliver or Charles Wright is lyrical), nevertheless punctuate our experience of reading with the intensity and hurt of such deeply lyric works as the Anglo-Saxon "Seafarer" or Roethke's songs from *The Far Field*. Yet their real connection is to the prose of writers like Heinrich Böll—inward, detailed, evocative and colored by a mid-20th-century European childhood—in Simic's case, Yugoslavian. For example: "When she still knew how to make shadows speak/ By sitting with them a long time/ They talked about her handsome father/ His long absence, and how the quiet/ Would fill the house on snowy evenings." One has the sense of having awakened in a high-ceilinged room near a quiet river, in a house where money has come and gone, where the styles of European fashion have been made trivial by cruelty and predatory greed.



In his latest collection, *Master of Disguises*—typically short poems of three or four stanzas, 12 to 20 lines long—we encounter striking images that suggest a time and a place, memory, a wary child's sensibility and a weary adult's dry humor. These memories come in quickly signaled glimpses, in dream-like images: "A dark little country store full of gravediggers' children buying candy" (the plural *gravediggers* is the spot of color) or "We kept the gas oven lit to warm ourselves/ While mother cried and cried chopping onions/ And my one goldfish swam in a pickle jar." These poems conjure relentless connections and associations, the mind integrating the tiny moment from the past and the flickering moment of the present.

Simic has chosen as an epigraph to this volume a line from Wallace Stevens's "The Comedian as the Letter C," a line that captures the attraction for Simic of the surreal and quirky: "Everything as unreal as real can be." Simic's sense of form has always favored the minimal, the tiny nub of a poem that squeaks when rubbed between your fingers, a poem that hints at play but names a minor tragedy maybe, or maybe not, the ambiguity of what it is we might be looking at, an ambiguity that must remain so, a lens that recognizes the irony and bitterness of history, delivered in a voice darkened yet hopeful: "like someone/ Out for the first time after a long illness/ Who sees the world with his heart."

And then come the poems that are

simply beautiful collections of sound and image. "Keep This to Yourself," which could easily have been the title of a piece by William Stafford, is such a poem. It takes the light at the end of a summer day and dances us into that light, beginning by setting us somewhere among "country roads...that are empty." These roads will hold the late light a little longer, surely just for the pleasure of the boy walking home from a game:

Whoever he is, he'll have to hurry.
This lovely moment won't last long.
The road before him lies white
Here and there under the dark trees,

As if some mad girl in the neighborhood
Had emptied her linen closet
And had been spreading her things
Over the soft late-summer dust.

The ease with which Simic presents this moment—"whoever he is," "here and there," "as if," "spreading her things," and the wholly unexpected closing word, "dust"—leads to a delicacy of feeling about the moment itself and a feather-light nostalgia for those barely glimpsed moments in our lives of simple, transient beauty. This is the art of Simic's language—a momentary glimpse of the sea through an opening door, the color of a girl's hair coming in through the snow.

The title poem, "Master of Disguises," begins with this: "Surely, he walks among us unrecognized." And Simic's humanism is captured nicely in the possible forms "he" might take: "Some barber, store clerk, delivery man/ Pharmacist, hairdresser, bodybuilder/ Exotic dancer, gem cutter, dog walker/ The blind beggar singing, O Lord, remember me." For Simic, of course, we have proven ourselves many times over capable of folly and wrong beyond imagination, of having created a history that Walter Benjamin describes as "a single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage." And yet also for Simic there burns within us a lightness, a joy, a great and refreshing hope in what we have been given. The master of disguises might be "some window decorator," might be a "homeless old man, standing in a doorway." In fact, says the poet, "I wouldn't even rule out the black cat crossing the street/ The bare light bulb swinging on a wire/ In a subway tunnel as the train comes to a stop."

Simic's poems continue to teach us, and Simic himself continues to listen. In the final poem of the volume he tells us this:

I'm just a shuffling old man
Ventriloquizing
For a god
Who hasn't spoken to me once.

The words make sentences and the sentences make poems and the poems make something that was not there before. The master of disguises engages us in an unexpected conversation before he wanders down a darkening street and around a near corner. Meanwhile, he has helped us catch something we must have already known, but forgotten. He has pointed to what we are.

DAVID GARRISON *is provost and professor of English at LaGrange College, LaGrange, Ga.*

ALLAN FIGUEROA DECK

PROGRESS AND PERIL

PEREGRINO
A Pilgrim Journey Into Catholic Mexico

By Ron Austin
Eerdmans. 224p $19.99 (paperback)

One summer many years ago my mother took me, at age 11, to Mexico City from Los Angeles to meet my Mexican relatives for the first time. This was quite a shock: discovering an alternative world. Ever since then I have been trying to assimilate how such diverse universes can co-exist. So this is the book that I have always wanted to write myself, but this *gringo* Ron Austin, a senior Hollywood writer and producer of "Mission: Impossible," "Matlock" and "Charlie's Angels," has beat me to it. As a bilingual, bicultural Mexican-American caught between worlds, I am deeply moved by Austin's richly evocative vision of Mexico. He documents the encounter of Mexico's people with their seemingly overpowering northern neighbor. Austin's is the work of a lifetime and a labor of immense love.

For him it all started as a young man on a filming assignment to Mexico 50 years ago. One thing led to another over decades and the result is this brisk and engaging essay combining memoir, travel book, history and cultural analysis in a stimulating and pleasant read. In short, Austin fell in love with Mexico and with the people's everyday Catholicism. He also fell in love with the God revealed in Jesus Christ; and even more, he clearly and unabashedly chose to follow Christ in the Catholic community of faith.

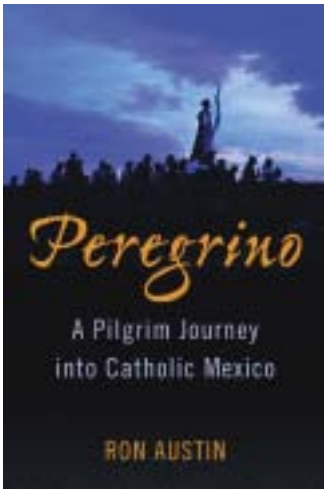
There is something remarkable about the robustness of Austin's enthusiasm for his Catholic faith, including the institutional church in this day and age. His apologetic is at once intelligent, nonsectarian, dialogical, respectful and even contagious. Coming from a man with such excellent worldly credentials, who flourishes in Hollywood's hyper-secularity, the book is fascinating and unexpected. Perhaps it exemplifies the coming

shape of religion in a post-secular age.

Austin weaves several threads into his narrative. The first is the lived reality of ordinary Mexicans. The author strives to capture the particularity of the people through a vivid historical lens. He does a credible job of synthesizing key moments of the past 500 years since the Spanish conquest, leaning on respected Mexican thinkers like the Nobel Prize-winning literary giant Octavio Paz.

Mexico's engagement with Catholicism is the book's second thread. In this Austin demonstrates that he is a student of cultural and theological anthropology. For him symbol, ritual and myth in the form of stories of the saints play a vital role in getting underneath the skin of a people. The book is full of examples taken from ethnographic observations. To this he adds plenty of theological and philosophical reflection inspired by heavyweights the likes of de Lubac, Congar, von Balthasar, Pelikan, Girard and Pope Benedict XVI.

The essay's third thread is the relationship between Mexican and American cultures. What is the impact of one on the other? Where is the encounter of two wildly antithetical nations actually heading, especially in relation to U.S. Catholicism? Austin seeks to answer these questions in terms of the role played by religion in the experience of most Mexicans.



This is a timely question, especially for the Catholic Church in the United States, in light of the contention by the researchers Putnam and Campbell in their recent publication, *American Grace*. There they leave no room for doubt that Hispanic Catholics (65 percent of them of Mexican origin) are the leading indicators of the U.S. Catholic Church's future. In this, Austin's focus coincides beautifully with the late Cardinal Avery Dulles's observation that the coming of Catholic immigrants from Latin America offers a golden opportunity for Catholicism to affect U.S. culture more substantially than ever before.

Perhaps the heart of Austin's message is found in a wide-ranging chapter titled "Progress and Peril: Mexico and the Crisis of Modernity." He shows how neither the pervasive U.S. emphasis on the autonomous self nor the dominant secular ideologies of Europe have succeeded in winning the hearts of mainstream Mexicans. Will modernity's "acids" ultimately uproot their distinctive worldview with its

"love of community, work, family ties, and tradition?" Of particular interest in this connection is Austin's reference to the "thwarted mysticism" of middle-class Western spirituality, which tends to lead its practitioners to a life of isolation unhinged from community and tradition.

There is a gentle polemic underneath some of Austin's assessments of recent church history showing sympathy for Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's critique directed toward liberation theology in two Vatican documents of the 1980s. Austin suggests that the underlying spirit of a theological vision stressing social change can degenerate into mere activism, a replay of a persistent Pelagianism. While not denying faith's link with justice, what Austin finds so appealing in Hispanic Catholicism is something else: its straightforward supernaturalism and recognition of sacrifice as linked to *agape* and modeled on the paschal mystery. For Christians suffering can be redemptive, and the Mexicans so admired by Austin know it.

This is not a scholarly work. Rather, it is a sui generis exercise that synthesizes years of musings from a deeply personal faith perspective. There are inaccuracies: for example, when the author states that Morelos, a leader of the independence movement from Spain, became a priest "at the then-late age of twenty-five." At that time 24 was the youngest age at which one could be ordained a priest; so this assertion makes no sense. At times the author also seems opinionated, dropping criticisms here and there but giving little explanation. Yet ultimately the book is a rewarding read for anyone interested in grasping what is at stake today in the drama of religious and spiritual transformations taking place in the bosom of U.S. Catholicism.

ALLAN FIGUEROA DECK, S.J., *is executive director of the Secretariat of Cultural Diversity in the Church of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C.*

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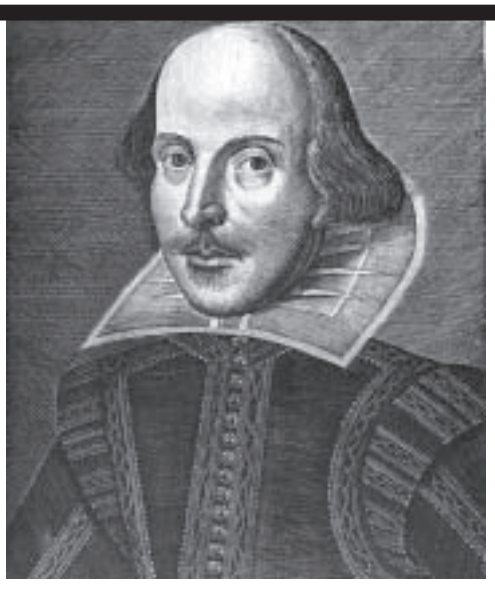

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LETTERS

'Illegal' Means Illegal

Gregory Byrne's "Class Act" (Faith in Focus, 11/29) commits several fallacies that will prevent us from coming together in rational discussion on immigration. He appeals primarily to emotion instead of backing up his position with facts. He employs the fallacy that because life is difficult in one place, a person is entitled to go to another place and totally disregard its legal system, which has been put in place to keep order and make the place worth moving to.

Then there is the "yes, but" fallacy. Mr. Byrne acknowledges that his ancestors came here legally; but the only relevant difference he sees is that their papers were stamped by immigration officials. This is analogous to saying that a marriage license is "just a piece of paper." Immigration papers signify that the new entrants were met by representatives of the society and found not likely to adversely affect that society, were cleared medically, had acceptable character and means of support. A society has a right to make these determinations. Mr. Byrne finds the word "illegal" offensive. But the word simply means they "came in an illegal manner." If they came contrary to the law, say that. If they suffer, say that too. But let us face this issue rationally together.

PETER M. BLASUCCI
North Baldwin, N.Y.

The Mighty, Gentle Hudson

"On the Slope With Teilhard," by Drew Christiansen, S.J. (12/13), reminds me of the very moving experience of a visit to Teilhard's grave at the former Jesuit seminary of St. Andrew-on-Hudson, now the property of the Culinary Institute of America, in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. Just to the west flow the waters of the Hudson, the ageless wonder of water containing sturgeon fish whose DNA survived many of the eras Teilhard studied. Their ancestors swam these waters while the Tyrannosaurus and its prey prowled the landscape, which has little changed. Looking at the high bluffs across the river shows the tremendous power of the river to create a sheer cliff, while simultaneously being gentle enough to carry the miniscule life code in the protoplasm of tiny creatures who survive into the future. Teilhard's discovery of Christ's immanence in the matter and energy of even the smallest parts of the universe is an inspiration to all.

WILLIAM VAN ORNUM
Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

Let's Be Fair

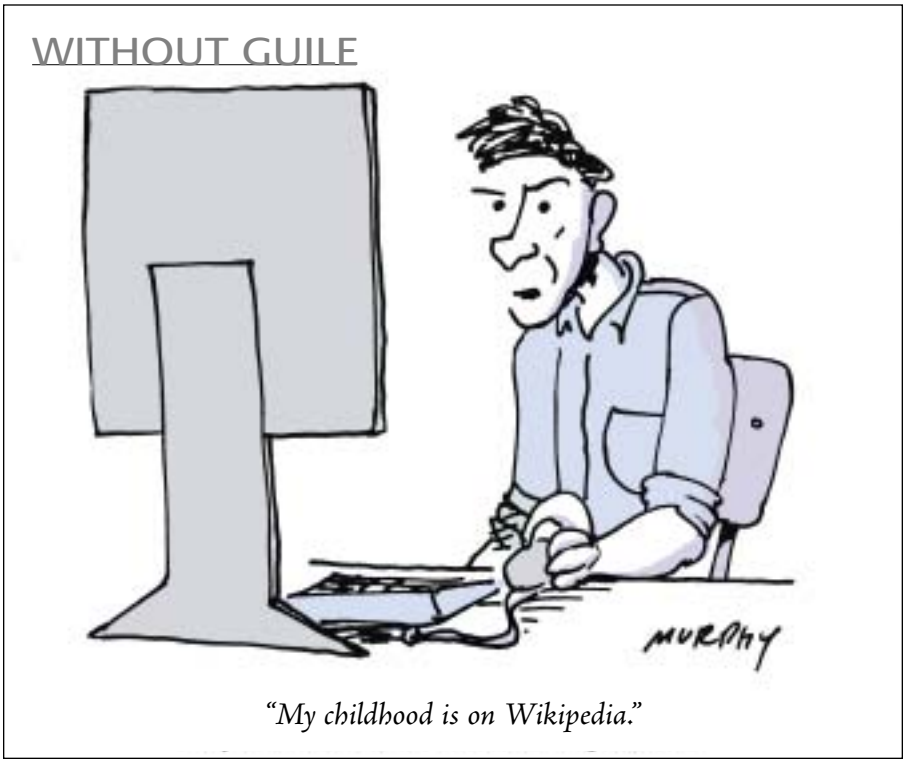
I found "Kill Zone," by Raymond A. Schroth, S.J. (11/8), captivating but disturbing. Although our combat service men and women have been "trained to kill," this has always been so in war. Their hypervigilance, black-and-white thinking and numbing of emotions are unfortunately necessary traits for both doing their jobs and surviving. Though many experience adjustment problems on coming home and should receive treatment, the vast majority carry on moral and respectable lives. Highlighting the atrocities by Calley in Vietnam and Gibbs in Afghanistan makes them seem commonplace in war, and to say that your "main fear" is that insensitive behavior will become "true for more of the young" seems unfair.

KURT CHRISMARK
Nevada City, Calif.

Don't Give Up

Thank you for Nicholas Lash's "Teaching or Commanding?" (12/13). Quoting Vatican II documents adds salt to the wounds of the faithful who took the council seriously. We accepted "the people are the church," consensus, subsidiarity and all other efforts for understanding and being living witnesses of the good news to the world.

Pope John Paul II detoured all of this and was adamant about restoring centralized authority to Rome. He chose all bishops to be micro-managers of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Teaching for enlightenment and participation gave way to a leadership of



"My childhood is on Wikipedia."

CARTOON BY TONY MURPHY

obedience to instructions and commands. Such leadership and authority lend themselves to the temptation to rule and control rather than teach and encourage.

MARK FRANCESCHINI, O.S.M.
Denver, Colo.

Just Who Is The Teacher?

It is too much to expect, but every Catholic bishop in the United States should read Nicolas Lash's "Teaching or Commanding?" (12/1).

With his usual brilliance, Lash makes the distinction that must be made for at least a conversation, if not reform, within the Catholic Church to occur. If any bishop disagrees (not dissents) with the teaching in the essay, he could write an opposing essay that has the same knowledge and clarity that Lash shows.

GABRIEL MORAN
New York, N.Y.

All Creatures Brit and Yank

The interview of Deborah Jones by George M. Anderson, S.J. ("All God's Creatures," 11/22) provides a valuable glimpse of a large realm of morality; but readers should not conclude that the British model of animal rights morality should be adopted in the United States. Ms. Jones's reported emphasis on Britain's "firsts" may appeal to an American type-A urge to "catch up," but there has been a long, evolving sense of stewardship toward wild and domestic living creatures in the United States as well.

This country has been pre-eminent in applying the principle that wildlife "belonged to all" and that the "commons" could and should exist at the landscape scale. The creation of national parks, forests and wildlife refuges recognized the right to life of whole ecological communities. Similarly, the small, diverse family farm of the 18th and 19th through mid-20th century United States was a place where husbanded animals were generally accorded love and dig-

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nity. It is unfortunate that post-World War II American society allowed the "bigger is better" notion to callously steer the vehicles of its food supply.

MICHAEL LAWLER SMITH
Lexington, Va.

Let's Get Serious

Joseph G. Bock's article, "The Church Rebuilds in Haiti" (12/6), was disappointingly uninformative. A far more helpful and interesting article would have been, for example, an analysis of why Haiti, a country with nearly the highest percentage of Catholics—nearly 80 percent according to the fact box in Bock's piece—could be a country at the very bottom of the list of world nations in almost every important category: life expectancy, per capita income, education level, employment, desirability as a place to live. The seriousness of the problems facing Haiti deserves articles with hard-thought analysis and original critical thinking.

CAROL TRAVIS
Glen Head, N.Y.

The Stolen Marbles Mystery

I wish to correct the comment "Retrieving Stolen Art" (12/20). The Breughel has returned to Canada's Concordia University; but the Netherlands is the country of its origin. No problem about that. The British Museum houses the Elgin Marbles because they belong by sovereign law to the British nation, the Parliament of 1816 and again of 1963 having found that Lord Elgin acquired them legitimately. Thomas Bruce, Earl of Elgin, died in 1841; he was no thief, but dead men cannot sue for libel. If you sincerely think the Elgin Marbles to be stolen art, then please substantiate your claim. If you cannot, then please kindly withdraw it.

STEVE KAY
Woodridge, U.K.

Happiness Now

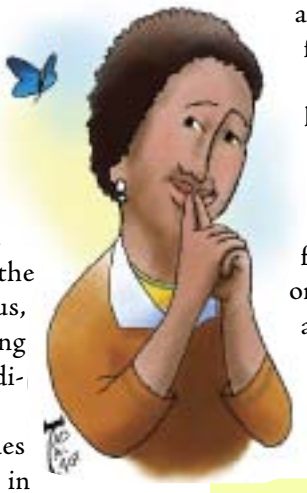
FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), JAN. 30, 2011

Readings: Zep 2:3; 3:12-13; Ps 146:6–10; 1 Cor 1:26-31; Mt 5:1-12

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great" (Mt 5:12)

In Charles Dickens's famous tale *A Christmas Carol*, the miserly Ebenezer Scrooge is visited on Christmas Eve by the ghost of his partner, Jacob Marley, and is then shown three ghostly scenes from the past, present and future. This experience brings about Scrooge's transformation from an utterly stingy person who has no compassion for his fellow human beings into a man who awakes on Christmas morning full of hope that the dire scenes he has witnessed can yet be changed. His acts of benevolence to the family of his employee Bob Cratchit and his own reconnection with his nephew's family fill him with joy and good will toward all.

How do we find fulfillment and joy when the effects of sin and strife have marred the past and when hunger, poverty, devastation of the planet, ongoing wars and terrorism point to a bleak future? In today's Gospel Jesus sums up in eight statements a way of life that brings true happiness and blessing already in the present, along with the promise of fullness of joy in days to come. There is nothing terribly new in this teaching. The prophets and wisdom teachers before Jesus spoke in a similar manner (e.g., Prv 3:13; 28:14; Sir 25:7-9; Is 30:18; 32:20). Each statement of the beatitudes begins *makarioi hoi*, "Blessed [or happy] are those who...." Each is in the third person plural, indicating communal action and relationship. The first thing the beatitudes tell us, then, is that living them is not an individual pursuit.



The beatitudes name the ways in which peoples' happiness is threatened: grinding poverty (*ptochos*, in verse 3, denotes "beggar," one who is destitute), grief, landlessness, hunger, war and persecution. Jesus does not advise that those so afflicted simply wait for a reversal of fortune in the hereafter, though the final verse does speak of great reward in heaven.

Jesus also counsels attitudes and actions that will bring about the reign of God, already tasted in the present. To be poor in spirit is not to accept poverty as an inevitable state of life but rather to find one's wealth in God, to trust in God's care for the poor (Ex 22:25-27; Is 61:1) and to seek righteousness, which rectifies the unequal distribution of goods so that all have enough to thrive.

To be meek is not to be shrinking violets who accept injustice but rather to know our proper place as children of God and to insure that all are treated as full heirs to God's realm.

To be peacebuilders we are to engage in acts of mercy and forgiveness, which cleanse the heart and allow us to see God in the faces of our brothers and sisters here and now. And like the grieving women who went to the tomb of Jesus, we do not mourn in despair when we suffer loss, but we allow our sorrow to be transformed by hope in the Risen One.

Such a manner of life is able to heal the hurtful memories of the past and transform the present toward a hope-filled future. This is not proposed as an intense form of Christianity meant for only a few select persons. Jesus addresses this teaching to all his disciples and to a great crowd, inviting them to recognize their capacity for happiness in the present by espousing attitudes and actions that will influence the future.

Jesus' teaching is different from the often-quoted maxim of Nathaniel Hawthorne: "Happiness is a butterfly, which, when pursued, is always just beyond your grasp, but which, if you will sit down quietly, may alight upon you."

Happiness is available to us when we pursue Jesus' manner of living, which is already within our grasp.

BARBARA E. REID

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- As you pray, choose one of the beatitudes for your focus. How will you live it today?
- Ask Jesus to release you from any "ghosts" of the past that keep you from living in the happiness of the beatitudes.
- What blessing lies deepest in your heart?

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.*

Undiluted and Undimmed

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A), FEB. 6, 2011

Readings: Is 58:7-10; Ps 112:4–9; 1 Cor 2:1-5; Mt 5:13-16

"You are the salt of the earth" (Mt 5:14)

Today if we say someone is "the salt of the earth," we understand that person to be solid and dependable, someone who can be counted on through thick and thin. We might also say that someone's speech is salty to mean that their language is coarse, like that of a sailor who has been out to sea for a long time and has not had to be concerned about using polite expressions in refined company. But when Jesus said to his disciples that they were the salt of the earth, they might have understood the metaphor in light of several biblical connotations.

First, salt was a critical necessity for human life, along with water, fire and iron, as Sir 39:26 states. Salt was important for seasoning and preserving food. Job questions, "Can a thing insipid be eaten without salt?" (Jb 6:6).

A second way in which salt was important was for liturgical functions. It was included with cereal offerings (Lv 2:13) and burnt offerings (Ez 43:24). Blending salt with incense kept the fragrant powder pure and sacred (Ex 30:35). Salt was what Elisha used to purify a polluted spring of water (2 Kgs 2:19-22). In Catholic liturgical tradition, the baptismal ritual included putting salt on the infant's tongue as a symbol of incorruptibility.

Another way in which salt was used was to ratify covenants (Nm 18:19; 2 Chr 13:5). As a preservative, salt symbolized the lasting nature of the agreement.

Finally, different kinds of salts are necessary for the soil to be fruitful, but soil that is "nothing but sulphur and salt" is a desert wasteland (Dt 29:22; Ps 107:34; Jb 39:6). As a symbol of permanent destruction, conquerors would spread salt on a city they had razed (Jgs 9:45). As Jesus called his disciples "salt," they may have understood any of these meanings: they season and purify the world with God's love, giving witness to divine fidelity that preserves life for all eternity.

Jesus then queries, "But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned?" It seems like a trick question. Salt can be diluted, but could it ever lose its taste entirely? It is possible that Jesus was quoting an ancient proverb to which his disciples would respond, "Impossible!" In the Talmud there is an account of Rabbi Joshua ben Hananya (ca. 80-120 C.E.), who was asked by philosophers in the Atheneum at Rome, "If salt becomes savorless, with what can it be salted?" He responded, "With an after-birth of a mule" (b. Bek. 8b). The point is that just as it is impossible for a mule to give birth or for salt to become insipid, so disciples cannot cease to be who they are and to season the world with the good news.

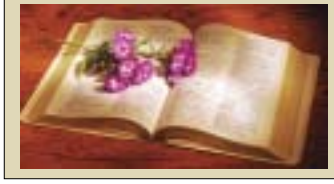
The accompanying image of disciples as light reinforces the message. As impossible as it is for a city set on a mountain to be hidden, and as unthinkable as wasting fuel to light a lamp only to extinguish it immediately, so inconceivable is it that disciples would cease to let their light shine before others. Although trials and tribulations may threaten to dilute disciples' "saltiness" or dim their light, nothing is ever able to take away their capacity to illumine God's love for others.

Finally, salt and light are most effective when they do not call attention to themselves. Just as in well-seasoned food the salt is not noticeable and in a properly lit room the lamps are not the focus of attention, so disciples' good deeds do not redound to themselves but lead others to glorify God.

BARBARA E. REID

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Talk to Jesus about things that threaten to dilute your "saltiness" as his disciple.
- How does Jesus help you keep your light burning brightly?
- How do your good deeds point to the Source of light and not feed your own glory?



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Lent 2011

NEW!

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Donna L. Ciangio, O.P., and Thomas B. Iwanowski

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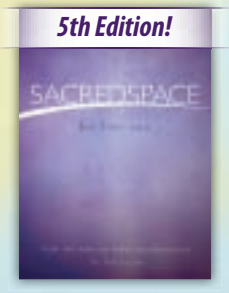
Most Rev. Gerald Wilkerson
San Fernando Regional Bishop, Archdiocese of Los Angeles



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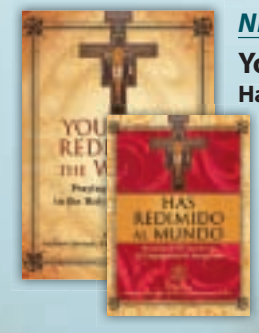

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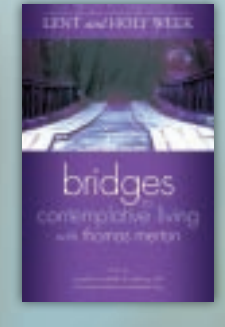

SMALL GROUP

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Watch for Our

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(Recipe can be found in *Open Our Hearts*.)

Tomato Vegetable Soup

Serves 4-6

INGREDIENTS

1 large sweet onion, chopped
1 small package shredded carrots
4 stalks of celery with leaves (cut into small pieces)
1 package sliced mushrooms
2 large cans chicken or vegetable stock
2 tablespoons olive oil or olive oil cooking spray
1 teaspoon celery salt
1 tablespoon basil
1 teaspoon Kosher salt (to taste)
4 twists of ground black pepper
1 tablespoon dried parsley flakes or 1 cup fresh chopped
1, 8-ounce can chopped tomatoes (optional)
Shredded rotisserie chicken (optional)

PREPARATION

In a large soup pot, heat olive oil or spray; sauté onion slowly until clear. Add celery and shredded carrots and sauté until tender. Add soup stock, tomatoes, mushrooms, and spices. Taste before adding salt. Simmer on low for about 20 minutes until hot. You can add one cup of couscous (whole wheat or semolina) right into the soup. Or cook rice or small pasta (e.g., orzo) separately and add later. Garnish with Pecorino Romano or shredded cheddar or other cheese of your choice.

Find featured recipes and tips to inspire your Lenten season.

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