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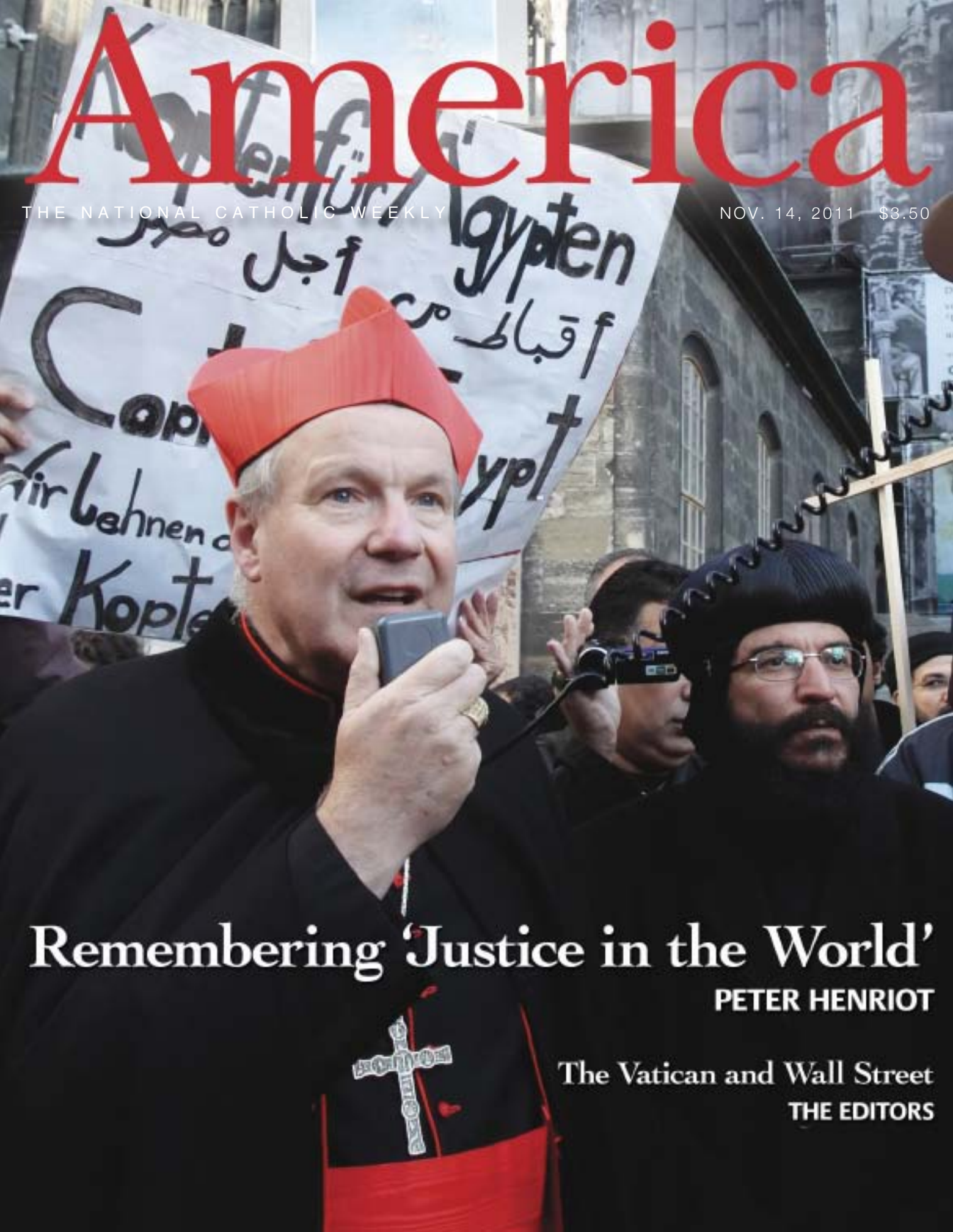

Remembering 'Justice in the World'

PETER HENRIOT

The Vatican and Wall Street

THE EDITORS

OF MANY THINGS

Hereford sits along Arizona's Mexican border, walled in on the west by the Huachucas and on the east by the Mules, two of the many small mountain ranges that mark the state. The Huachucas form one of the state's "sky islands," unique, high-altitude ecosystems where rare, often endangered species of flora and fauna are preserved. The range is divided by canyons that cut across it east to west. Ramsey Canyon is renowned for its hummingbirds. Leafy Carr Canyon is the source of the creek that supplies water through century-old wooden conduits to the legendary outlaw town of Tombstone across the valley and north beyond the Mules.

The valley is high desert, a transition zone between Sonoran and Chihuahan habitats. While the San Pedro River runs along the east side of the valley, the distinguishing feature of the landscape is mesquite. The squat, spindly trees grow everywhere, and in season their leaves spread a grey-green aura across the landscape that veils the hardpan desert floor. Remarkably the mesquite also hosts more mistletoe than I have found any place else in North America. It is a land my friends Lou and Barbara Kuttner fell in love with and where they built their retirement home 15 years ago and where they host me in their guesthouse for my annual retreat.

This year nature has been more than ordinarily harsh to Cochise County. For three years the area has suffered severe drought. This past September's monsoons brought only six inches of rain, half the usual autumn rainfall. A hard frost last winter killed off much vegetation, including many cacti: prickly pear, agave, Santa Rita, cow's tongue and ocotillo. Much of the valley's broom, whose feathery blooms soften the rugged landscape, was killed off too. Then in May the Monument fire burned 33,000 acres in the Huachucas with fingers of flame racing across the valley floor. For several days, Hereford was evacuated. Along Highway 92 the charred ruins of homes and businesses and in the fields the blackened skeletons of mesquite trees testify to the fire's ferocity.

Birds seem to be everywhere. Coveys of quail scamper across the open ground just across the fenceline, chirping as they dart through the grass and mesquite. Roadrunners, with their heads held high and in silhouette quite plainly the distant cousins of the pterodactyl, charge about their business with attitude, like New Yorkers at rush hour. Doves fight with finches in the eaves of my casita. Every time I exit the main house, swallows dart from the rose bush facing the door, and songbirds of every sort inhabit the pyrocanthus at the front of the house: thrashers, mockingbirds, sparrows, bush tits and desert wrens.

The pyrocanthus reminds me of the tree sprung from the mustard seed: "All the birds of the air make their nests in its shade." The pyrocanthus (literally, fiery flower) is a tough, spiky bush, named for its red and orange berries. Like the surrounding desert, it seems an inhospitable place to make a home, much less an avian community of so many shapes, sizes and melodies. All day long, and some of the night, birds dart in and out. They perch on its branches and peer out from its protective cover. And most of all, they sing. They echo the prayer of the three young men (Dn 3:80). "Bless the Lord, all birds of the air; sing his praise and exalt him forever."

DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J.

Editor's Note. With much gratitude and appreciation, we bid farewell to Barbara E. Reid, O.P., our Word columnist. She has been a popular contributor with both readers and editors. She will be missed. We welcome Peter Feldmeier, of the University of Toledo, as Sister Reid's successor.

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Cover: Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Austria, left, with the Coptic Bishop Anba Gabriel during a demonstration in Vienna on Oct. 21, 2011. Some 500 supporters of Christian churches protested violence against Christians in Egypt. Photo: Reuters/Heinz-Peter Bader.

Contents

www.americamagazine.org VOL. 205 NO. 15, WHOLE NO. 4952 NOVEMBER 14, 2011

ARTICLES

COLUMNS & DEPARTMENTS

BOOKS & CULTURE

ON THE WEB

Michael F. Suarez, S.J., right, discusses the **Rare Book School** on our podcast. Plus, video analysis of **"Justice in the World"** and a review of **"Into the Abyss,"** a documentary on the death penalty. All at americamagazine.org.

Ending a Reign of Fear

President Obama's decision to send 100 military advisers to east and central Africa to help eliminate the menace of the Lord's Resistance Army was immediately criticized by many of the same people who thought little of sending thousands of U.S. combat troops off to Iraq. That reaction says less about the mission's wisdom than it does about the "defeat Obama at all costs" dysfunction of contemporary U.S. political discourse.

The L.R.A. began as a rebel movement in Uganda in 1987. Led by Joseph Kony, the self-proclaimed "spokesperson" of God, the L.R.A. has carried on a two-decades-long rampage of rape, murder and child enslavement through northern Uganda, South Sudan, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Surely from a humanitarian perspective and according to just war teaching, this small contribution to ending the L.R.A.'s reign of terror is worth making. The cost to the United States is small. The risk to the advisors themselves is minimal. The possibility of being dragged into another geopolitical quagmire seems remote.

This modest commitment signals a deepening attention of U.S. foreign policy to humanitarian concerns and represents a second effort, after Libya, based on the international responsibility to protect, a new U.N. doctrine that calls for an appropriate, multilateral response to humanitarian crises when the sovereign authority is incapable of responding or is itself the culpable party. It is worth asking if other interests may have prompted this decision: there are significant oil reserves on tap in Uganda. U.S. support for Uganda's President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni also demands continuing scrutiny. But putting an end to the L.R.A. will help bring stability to this troubled region and will mean at least that unarmed villagers will not have to live in fear any longer.

A Life Raft

While President Obama's latest proposal to help homeowners will not solve the foreclosure crisis, it still could help a million homeowners who are "underwater"—that is, whose mortgage balance is larger than the current value of their home. The plan is a modest adjustment to the Home Affordable Refinance Program launched by the administration in 2009. That program failed to reach many borrowers, largely because lenders refused to participate. The aim of this new fix is to give homeowners who have steadily made payments an opportunity to refinance at the current low interest rates. Owners with up to 20 percent equity in their homes are eligible. Refinancing could give buyers a more affordable monthly payment and let them stay in their homes. It is a life raft for 10 percent of U.S. homeowners underwater, not a fix for all. Yet it is still worth doing.

Because its scope is limited to those who have made consecutive payments, the plan overcomes the objection to bailing out irresponsible buyers. This plan requires payment of the full loan. And it prevents the downward spiral that foreclosures initiate: ruining one's credit rating and, in the worst cases, putting families onto the streets and in need of still more government services. It stabilizes neighborhoods, because foreclosures lessen the value of nearby properties and threaten safety for as long as homes stand vacant, waiting to be sold. The proposal also gives no credence to the myth that "the market" can solve the housing problem. The unbridled market caused the housing bubble and has not fixed it yet. In this tough struggle toward recovery, the prevention of a million foreclosures is a good deal.

Qaddafi's End, a New Start

In the eyes of some, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi died as he had lived. To others, his unexplained killing is not a good start for the rebel government that will replace him.

True, Colonel Qaddafi's reign degenerated into a time of terror, built around the leader's ego rather than a government of institutions. But the tyrant's fall was unique in that his killers carried cellphones and recorded their prey's capture, torture and decomposing corpse with bullet holes in his torso and head.

There is an expectation that tyrants must die horribly, as if any other ending, like imprisonment, would ratify their crimes, and as if victims have earned the right to humiliate the corpse. But the definition of civilization—an advanced stage of human society—denies this. A society is judged on how it treats its weakest members.

In war it is better to capture than to kill. To kill a prisoner is a war crime, and in the Qaddafi case the United Nations has called for an inquiry. The head of Libya's interim government, Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, has promised an inquest. The Transitional National Council now faces the investigation of at least three murder cases: that of Gen. Abdul Fattah Younes, the rebels' top commander; of dozens massacred at the Mahari Hotel in Surt; and of Colonel Qaddafi himself. Certainly advisers from other countries could help establish a justice system in Libya. Unfortunately, the United States, though praised for its diplomatic handling of this rebellion, is not a moral exemplar when it comes to guaranteeing due legal process for enemies of the state.

For the 99 Percent

The release of the Vatican's new declaration on reform of the world financial system, long in preparation, happened to be published as media interest in the Occupy Wall Street movement was in crescendo. Headlines naturally drew a connection. While Catholic social teaching has often been at its most effective when social movements—labor unions, human rights movements, peace and environmental activists—have been its carriers, the still amorphous Occupy Wall Street movement and the Vatican report are not directly connected. Rather, they are parallel events responding to the suffering and loss of hope inflicted on so many by the current economic crisis.

Unlike many protesters, however, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace offers an analysis of the problems underlying the sputtering world economy. Even more, it offers challenging solutions, including a financial services tax, the conditioned recapitalization of banks that reinvest in "the real economy" and a world authority to regulate international financial transactions. These proposals are fully in line with the "the universal common good," a principle requiring institution-building to meet global needs unsatisfied by the existing international arrangements.

The document indicts 20th-century liberal (that is, free-market) economics as an "ideology," in the sense of a set of fixed ideas immune to correction by the inconvenient facts of human suffering. "In the 1920s," it observes, "some economists had already warned about giving too much weight, in the absence of regulation and controls, to theories which have since become prevailing ideologies and practices on the international level." The ideology has gone under different names: "liberalization," "structural adjustment," "the Washington consensus." Its chief tenets were deregulation, small government, low taxes, free trade and the profit motive. The council admits that "global economic well-being...grew over the second half of the twentieth century, to an extent and with a speed never experienced in the history of humankind." Nonetheless, it points out, this progress often exacted a tremendous human price.

The report recounts how more than 40 years of unrestrained free-market capitalism have produced repeated economic crises, first in the developing countries of Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe, and now in Western Europe and the United States. The result has been the rampant growth of plutocracy and inequality reflected in the anti-Wall Street protestors' chant, "We are the 99 percent." As if to underscore the council's (and protesters') point, a report issued last week by the Bertelsmann Foundation of Germany listed the United States as 27th among 31 member states in its degree of social justice, ranked above only Greece, Chile, Mexico and Turkey.

CNS PHOTO

In identifying inequality as a pressing social problem, the church that repeatedly opposed class conflict in Marxism cannot be charged with stirring up class warfare. The reduction of inequality has been a concern of modern Catholic social teaching since Blessed John XXIII's encyclical letter "Mater et Magistra" ("Christianity and Social Progress," 1961). The Second Vatican Council asserted that "vigorous efforts must be taken...to remove as quickly as possible the immense inequalities which now exist." Pope Paul VI's "Populorum Progressio" ("The Development of Peoples," 1967) described "the scandal of glaring inequalities not merely in the enjoyment of possessions but in the exercise of power" and affirmed that "private property does not constitute for anyone an absolute and unconditional right." One might reasonably say that an allergy to inequality and the demand for its amelioration are part and parcel of the Catholic common good tradition.

The most controversial recommendation of the report is the proposal for global management of financial transactions through "a kind of 'central world bank' that regulates the flow and system of monetary exchanges." The proposals build on "the logic of the Bretton Woods institutions," the World Bank and International Monetary Fund; and, like the 2009 G-20 meeting, they recognize the inadequacies of those bodies to meet the demands of a globalized economy. Far from imposing a one-world government, the proposal allows for a wide range of possible implementations. It simply recognizes that the advance of globalization requires new rules and new governing institutions.

As the economic crisis is drawn out and protests multiply, preachers ought to take the occasion to educate congregations on the pontifical council's report. (The report, with commentaries, is at americamagazine.org/finance.) Catholic universities and colleges ought to study it and discuss inequality as a sign of our times. In this election year, Catholics will also be listening to hear what their bishops have to say about a question so integral to Catholic social teaching.

SOLIDIFYING RELATIONSHIPS

The Quest for Peace Continues At Assisi Gathering

Speaking to some 300 representatives of the world's major religions gathered in the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Assisi, Italy, Pope Benedict XVI opened an interreligious pilgrimage for peace on Oct. 27 with an expression of shame for the complicity of faith in acts of violence and praised agnostics and other "searchers" for helping to purify faith. The event marked the 25th anniversary of the first interreligious gathering in the hometown of St. Francis, called in 1986 by Pope John Paul II.

Pope Benedict distinguished this year's gathering at Assisi by insisting that nonbelievers be invited. This was interpreted by many as a gesture calculated to begin a dialogue with proponents of Western secularism. Indeed, in his opening address Pope Benedict visited one of secularism's favored terrains. He said the post-Enlightenment critique of religion as a cause of violence was valid when "religion really does motivate violence" and that the "reckless brutality" of religiously motivated terrorism "should be profoundly disturbing to us as religious persons."

Pope Benedict repeated the emphatic declaration of the first Assisi gathering that religiously inspired violence was the antithesis of religion and contributes to its destruction. But the pope went on to consider a second kind of violence, one brought about by the denial of God. As well as the horrors of "state-inspired atheism," he said, the denial of God brought about "the decline of man and humanity."

The worship of money and power had become a kind of "counter-religion," in which only personal advantage mattered. Such a conception, he said, leads necessarily to force being taken for granted, as a result of which "peace is destroyed and man destroys himself in this peace vacuum." The denial of God, he said, "corrupts man, robs him of his criteria and leads him to violence."

Dr. Rowan Williams, archbishop of Canterbury and spiritual leader of the Anglican Communion, told the participants during his address that they must help the world see how much religions have to offer "in the struggle against the foolishness of a world still obsessed with fear and suspicion, still in love with the idea of a security based on defensive hostility and still capable of tolerating or ignoring massive loss of life among the poorest through war and disease."

There was no interfaith prayer at the culmination of the two-hour final ceremony. Instead, the delegates observed a time of silence "during which each person will be able to invoke the gift of peace or to express an earnest desire for it from deep within"—a formula designed to include the four nonbelievers present.

The gathering may not have broken much new ground, but it could help solidify relationships built up over 25 years of a common pursuit of a spiritual humanism of peace. Archbishop Williams said, "The challenges of our time are such that no one religious body can claim to have all the practical resources needed to confront them, even if we believe we have all we need in the spiritual or doctrinal realm." And a Mexican humanist, Guillermo Hurtado, pledged to "make every effort to ensure that believers and non-believers in reciprocal trust can live out the shared quest for truth, justice and peace."

In his final remarks, Pope Benedict said, "Today's event is an image of how the spiritual dimension is a key element in the building of peace." The Catholic Church, he concluded, "will not let up in her fight against violence, in her commitment for peace in the world."

AUSTEN IVEREIGH, *reporting from Assisi*

U.S. BISHOPS

Religious Liberty Tops Concerns

The Obama administration and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops continue their rocky ride as the bishops increasingly focus on concerns related to religious liberty. Bishops have become alarmed by, among other conflicts, the

Pope Benedict XVI greets delegates at the Vatican after the gathering in Assisi.

shutdown of Catholic foster parenting and adoption services in Illinois because of new laws governing civil unions; requirements that Catholic Relief Services include condom distribution in their H.I.V. prevention activities; and a too-narrow interim religious exemption in new Department of Health and Human Services requirements on reproductive services for women.

Speaking before a House subcommittee on Oct. 26, Bishop William E. Lori of Bridgeport, Conn., chair of the bishops' Ad Hoc Committee for Religious Liberty, described "grave threats to religious liberty." He said the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Independence require government to protect religious liberty, "no matter the moral and political trends of the moment."

A public contretemps over the nonrenewal of a Department of Health and Human Services contract with the U.S.C.C.B.'s Office of Migration and Refugee Services has become the latest source of conflict. Since 2006 the contract had directed more than $19 million to M.R.S. to coordinate counseling services for victims of human trafficking. That deal became the target of a lawsuit filed in 2009 by the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts, demanding that H.H.S. "ensure that funds...are not being used to impose religiously based restrictions on reproductive health services."

The director of media relations for the U.S.C.C.B., Mary Ann Walsh, R.S.M., said the decision to end the relationship with M.R.S. and pass the work on to other agencies willing to make abortion and contraception referrals indicated a "very ham-fisted anti-Catholic attitude." She cited a story that appeared in The Washington Post on Oct. 31, which reported that the recommendations of career H.H.S. personnel were ignored when the grant was awarded to other agencies.

But Richard Sorian, H.H.S. assistant secretary for public affairs, said, "The review process for competitive grants is comprehensive and considers a number of factors, including, but certainly not limited to, the scores given by reviewers." Sorian said, "Ensuring the health and security of victims of human trafficking is H.H.S.'s top priority for programs providing funds to assist these victims," he said. "We are talking about women in many cases who have been repeatedly raped, sexually assaulted, held against their will and forced to work in cruel conditions. Their health and ability to retake control over their own lives is our sole concern in awarding these grants."

But Sister Walsh alleged it was abortion politics, not the needs of the trafficking victims that propelled the change. "It would be interesting to see if he could come up with an actual number when [reproductive services] was a need," she said. "Of the hierarchy of the needs [of trafficking victims]—food, shelter, counseling, safety, legal assistance," Walsh said, "I think those are all a lot higher."

Sorian denied that the M.R.S. decision reflected a bias against Catholic service providers. "This administration has and continues to partner with Catholic organizations, including U.S.C.C.B., across government," he said. "In fact, after their trafficking-related contract expired, U.S.C.C.B. received a $22 million grant from the Administration for Children and Families to provide employment services to refugees, asylees and victims of trafficking."

Another H.H.S. official pointed out that hundreds of millions in federal dollars were awarded to Catholic agencies for 2011. Sister Walsh wondered, however, if a changing climate in Washington and the ramifications of the A.C.L.U. suit might mean those grants and contracts will in the future become a diminishing resource for Catholic service providers.

Bishop William E. Lori on Capitol Hill, Oct. 26

Going Non-Nuclear

Nuclear disarmament is a moral imperative that requires bold action from the world's military powers, a U.S. cardinal and a former secretary of defense said at a forum on Oct. 25 sponsored by the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. Cardinal Roger Mahony, retired archbishop of Los Angeles, and William Perry, who served as defense secretary under President Bill Clinton and helped build the U.S. nuclear arsenal during the cold war, said that even though eliminating nuclear weapons around the world will be a tough challenge, this does not mean world leaders should not try. "The church...finds the nuclear status quo morally unacceptable," Cardinal Mahony said, pointing to the need to begin moving toward a mutual, verifiable, global ban on such weapons. The church rejects "the view that nuclear deterrence is the only option in the long term," he said. "Rather, the church insists that nuclear disarmament, not nuclear deterrence, is a long-term basis for security."

World's Migrants Call U.S. and Europe Home

Recent statistics show an increase in the number of international migrants over the past 10 years, with Europe having the most international migrants. The International Organization for Migration estimates that the number of global migrants increased from 150 million people in 2000 to 214 million in 2010. The organization also reported that the number of refugees worldwide was 15.4 million in 2010, while the number of internally displaced persons increased to 27.5 million in 2010 from 21 million in 2000. Of the total migrant population, about 49 percent were women. About 72.1 million international migrants resided in Europe, while 19.3 million migrants were recorded in Africa. The figures reflect the trend of migrants moving from less developed regions to more developed regions that provide more economic opportunities. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, the nation with the most immigrants was the United States, with 38.5 million people born in a foreign country.

Bumpy Start for New Liaison to Jews

The new head of the Vatican agency responsible for relations with Jews, Cardinal Kurt Koch, told an audience gathered at Seton Hall University in New Jersey on Oct. 30 that many Jews approve of the potential canonization of Pope Pius XII; that the long-demanded opening of the Vatican's Holocaust-era archives would not shed more light on Pius's Nazi-era actions; and that Jews can look upon the cross as "the definitive Yom Kippur." The statements were met with either blank expressions or grumbling from the audience of about 60 rabbis, priests, theologians and specialists in interfaith dialogue. Rabbi Eric Greenberg, director of interfaith affairs for the Anti-Defamation League, said the cardinal's opinions raised issues that demonstrate "the continuing challenges facing Catholic-Jewish relations."

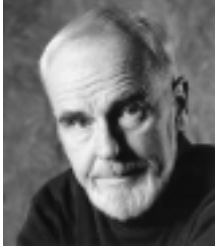
From CNS and other sources.

NEWS BRIEFS

Protest in Karnataka in 2008

Bishop **Howard J. Hubbard** of Albany, chair of the U.S. bishop's International Justice and Peace office, called on Oct. 27 for the reauthorization of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, which "plays a vital role in preserving human dignity and human rights around the globe." ✦ On Oct. 28 Catholic bishops in India's Karnataka State called for the dismissal of "false cases" against Christians who had been arrested after protesting **attacks on three dozen churches** in 2008. ✦ On Oct. 31 the U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear the appeal of a federal court ruling in Utah that **memorial crosses** along state highways were unconstitutional. ✦ Ireland's **Association of Catholic Priests** marked its first anniversary with a meeting in Dublin on Oct. 4 that included calls for women's ordination and an end to mandatory celibacy. ✦ Wisconsin's bishops urged parishioners to **keep guns out of church** after a state law allowing residents to carry concealed weapons went into effect on Nov. 1. ✦ A study by the European Central Bank says Catholics are more likely to **support government intervention** in the economy than Protestants and also have a stronger preference for sharing wealth equally.

JOHN F. KAVANAUGH



Blessed Are the Rich

Does that title feel jarring? It probably should not, since great wealth is among the new beatitudes, including "blessed are the impure," "blessed are the war-makers" and "blessed are those who obtain vengeance."

I am not raising this touchy topic to condemn all rich people. I would have to condemn my own comfortable and secure life (and maybe I should). I would have to ignore the evidence of wealthy people who generously serve others and share their bounty. More foolishly, I would have to ignore the fact that Jesus counted the wealthy Lazarus and his sisters among his friends and warmly welcomed Zacchaeus, who promised to give back anything unjustly accumulated as well as half his largess.

But if one seriously considers the Gospels, it is an inescapable fact that Jesus had major issues with the accumulation of riches—especially in the midst of human suffering and poverty. Like other human goods, riches can enslave us; but unlike the softer or warmer mortal sins, our blind adherence to riches can harden us in self-righteous selfishness, creating a chasm between ourselves and the poor as well as God—the fate of the rich man, "Dives," in Jesus' parable.

I could fill this column just with sayings of Jesus concerning wealth and poverty, and they might burn our ears. Maybe that is why we do not hear much about those texts. Let it rest, however, that Jesus himself, in a description of history's upshot and of our own destiny, said that it came down to clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, visiting the sick or imprisoned and other acts described in Matthew 25. It is clear that Jesus wants people to have good clothing, food and shelter. But it is iniquitous when we amass more and more to ourselves while others have nothing.

It is worth remembering these things as we hear from Christian politicians the smug sound bites that the poor have caused their own problem, that if they are poor they should work harder, that the way to solve our economic problems is to tax them for a loaf of bread—the same amount a millionaire might pay.

Jesus had major issues with the accumulation of riches.

I am making here no brief for President Obama or the Democratic Party. If anything, they make matters worse by using the rhetoric of advocacy for the poor while they themselves are loath to do anything that might jeopardize their own privilege.

The Gospels are also worth remembering when we witness the hostile reaction of some Catholics in the face of any challenge from the Vatican to unbridled capitalism. The most recent statement from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is a great example. It is titled "Towards Reforming the International Financial and Monetary Systems in the Context of Global Public Authority." As the document itself clarifies, it is an attempt to respond to "the needs of all peoples."

The document's preface makes clear that we are called to make "a thorough examination of every facet of the problem—social, economic, cultural and spiritual" with the one goal of implementing the work of Christ. Echoing Pope Paul VI in "Populorum Progressio" (1967), it is centered on the universal value of human dignity and the quest for the common good.

Now, there may indeed be different prudential judgments as to how we might ensure human dignity and the common good in the face of human need. But why is there such resistance even to bringing up the topic?

In The National Review Online, the Catholic commentator George Weigel goes out of his way to denigrate the recent document: "The truth of the matter is that 'the Vatican'…called for precisely nothing in this document." Weigel calls it a "'note' from a rather small office in the Roman Curia." This is the same rhetorical tactic he used in his attempt to diminish Pope Benedict's encyclical "Caritas in Veritate" as "incoherent sentimentalism" concocted by justice and peace advisors exploiting the "gentle soul" of Benedict, "who may have thought it necessary to include in his encyclical these multiple off-notes."

I often wonder what George Weigel or Newt Gingrich or Representative Paul Ryan, Catholics all, might say of the multiple "off-notes" that Jesus sounded in the Gospels. Is he "outside his area of competence"? Is he stoking "class warfare"? Or is he calling us to a way of life that does not have capitalism as its bottom line?

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

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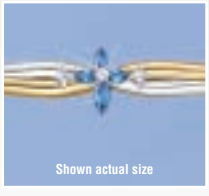

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A protest rally at the gates of the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation at Fort Benning near Columbus, Ga., Nov. 22, 2009. Formerly known as the School of the Americas, the institute trains military personnel from Latin American countries.

PHOTO: CNS/JIM WEST

Retrieving a forgotten proclamation

Remembering 'Justice'

BY PETER HENRIOT

A seminarian I taught recently asked me to name the most influential document on church social teaching since the Second Vatican Council. He was surprised by my unhesitating and vigorous response: "Justice in the World," the statement from the world Synod of Bishops of 1971. Surprised, I suppose, because if it were really so influential, one would expect to hear more about it in this 40th anniversary year of its publication. But there seems to be no official Vatican celebration; the document is not on the Vatican Web site, nor is it included in the Vatican's monumental *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church.*

"Justice in the World" appeared at a critical moment in church and global history. As a consequence of ripples and rapids of changes in the Catholic Church stirred up by the winds blowing through the open windows of the Second Vatican Council, the church was called to be ready for engagement with the political events of the day. The liberation theology of Latin America was one among many influences that shaped this engagement. The ethics of the social revolutions of the 1960s, the heightened tensions of the cold war, the increasing focus on the socioeconomic challenges of the so-called third world and the expansion of the media were other global factors that a church in the modern world could hardly ignore.

In the 2010s, we Catholics find ourselves in a similar ecclesiastical and global environment. Living with the recent experience of two powerful popes, grappling with scandals that raise questions about ecclesial integrity and accountability and facing declines in lay membership and in priestly and religious vocations, the church is again called to examine its

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message and its structures. The challenges of the global economic crisis, the unpredictability of terrorism, mounting environmental problems and the emergence of new power centers in the developing world also call for effective responses from the church. If "Justice in the World" is more relevant today than when it was first published, why has a pall of official forgetfulness fallen over the anniversary? I suggest two reasons: its source and its message.

It is appropriate to ask whether the evident sidelining of the statement in Vatican circles has as one of its causes the downgraded role of the synod of bishops in church governance. The synod, established by Paul VI after Vatican II, was designed to implement the collegial character of the episcopacy. But as greater emphasis has come to be put on the papacy and centralized Vatican institutions, collegiality has been a subject of heated differences within the church.

One consequence has been that periodic assemblies of the synod of bishops—called by the pope to discuss both topical and regional issues—have not been asked to produce magisterial statements. Their messages have been secondary to the post-synodal apostolic exhortation made by the pope. Of the 23 synods held since 1967, only the third gathering, in October 1971, issued on its own a major teaching document, "Justice in the World." Synods, even when meeting with the pope, have been denied any teaching authority of their own.

Too Controversial?

There may be other reasons "Justice in the World" has not been accorded prominence in this anniversary year. Its principal message, some of its language and a number of its recommendations are controversial and have given rise to disputes in both ecclesial and political circles.

The document's message can be summed up in one well-known sentence: "Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation" (No. 6). The promotion of justice is a necessary feature in the task of evangelization. There simply is no sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ if the commitment to justice is downplayed or eliminated.

Use of the word *constitutive* has been a bone of contention. In two significant articles in Theological Studies (June 1983 and June 2007), the theologian Msgr. Charles M. Murphy explored in depth how this word came to appear in the text and noted various interpretations given to it in subsequent discussions. Instead of understanding the word to mean "necessary" or "essential," some have interpreted it to mean only "integral" (simply one part among many in the evangelical message) or merely "helpful" (assisting the work of spreading the Gospel). But when *constitutive* is taken to mean an absolute requirement, then work for justice cannot be ignored in any ecclesial project. This has been the widely accepted understanding of the term in the justice and peace work I have seen in the United States and in Africa. Is it fair to say that the official oblivion into which "Justice in the World" has fallen is due to the discomfort this understanding caused for some more conservative elements in the church?

"Evangelii Nuntiandi" (the apostolic exhortation of Pope Paul VI published the year after the 1974 Synod of Bishops) spoke of an evangelization that includes messages "about life in society, about international life, peace, justice and development—a message especially energetic today about liberation" (No. 29). But the discussion guidelines (*lineamenta*) for the 2012 Synod of Bishops, "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith," mentions the promotion of justice only in passing.

"Justice in the World" offers a brief but powerful scriptural analysis emphasizing God as liberator of the oppressed in the Old Testament and Jesus as preacher of justice for the poor in the New Testament (Nos. 30-33). But it is especially in describing the scriptural link of justice and love that the document makes one of its strongest points: "Christian love of neighbor and justice cannot be separated. For love implies an absolute demand for justice, namely a recognition of the dignity and rights of one's neighbor" (No. 34). If I say I love my neighbor, then I want my neighbors' dignity respected,

their rights recognized, their development promoted and effective community solidarity effected. These demands of love are essential elements of social justice enforced in the political context of today's world.

Though the influence of "Justice in the World" on subsequent teaching is not always explicit, Pope Paul VI was especially strong about the unity of justice and love. He proposed building "a civilization of love," a program that is echoed in subsequent papal teaching. Pope Benedict XVI has written two encyclicals on love, dedicating one of them, "Love in Truth" ("Caritas in Veritate"), to the memory of Pope Paul XVI and has developed the idea of political charity, a concept that pope would have approved.

Inductive Method

In its discussion of pertinent issues of the day, "Justice in the World" uses a method that enjoys wide currency (although not always accepted in some ecclesial circles), the well-known triad "See, Judge, Act." This method, articulated clearly in Blessed John XXIII's 1961 encyclical "Mater et Magistra" (No. 236), calls for observing reality, analyzing and evaluating it in light of Catholic social teaching and responding to it with effective action. Its wide use in Latin American pastoral work was sidelined by the 1992 meeting of Celam in Santo Domingo but reinstated in the 2007 meeting in Aparacida, Brazil.

This method emphasizes an inductive, experiential approach to designing responses to social challenges rather than a deductive, top-down approach that relies on already stated positions in theories or instructions from hierarchical sources. Thus "Justice in the World" emphasizes the need to listen to "the cry of those who suffer violence and are oppressed by unjust systems and structures," since the hopes moving in the world today "are not foreign to the dynamism of the Gospel" (No. 5).

In its analysis and recommendations "Justice in the World" was able to take up, with a certain freshness and urgency, specific issues like world hunger, fair trade, migrants and refugees, abortion, human rights, religious liberty, environmental concerns, the role of media and promotion of the United Nations. That these issues were discussed in this 40-year old document demonstrates that "Justice in the World" remains relevant to the contemporary struggle for justice in the world.

The "See, Judge, Act" method, or reading the signs of the times, as it was more often called, became widespread in the social-pastoral work of many bishops' conferences and national and diocesan justice commissions. Religious communities adopted it especially in their work with the poor. In the United States it lay behind the 1976 U.S. bishops' convocation of the Call to Action Conference in Detroit, Mich. Ultimately it resulted, in the 1980s, in the bishops' two influential pastoral letters on peace and economic justice.

The method also contributed to the emphasis in "Justice in the World" on the relationship of social structures and the promotion of justice. While this element might earlier have been present in Catholic social teaching, it is made explicit in the synodal document. In speaking of a growing demand for the right to development, it cautions, "This desire however will not satisfy the expectations of our time if it ignores the objective obstacles which social structures place in the way of conversion of hearts, or even of the realization of the ideal of charity" (No. 16).

This appreciation of social structures accounts for the document's teaching about social sin and its recognition that "education demands a renewal of heart, a renewal based on the recognition of sin in its individual and social manifestations" (No. 51). Indeed, pastoral attention to social sin is called for in the sacrament of penance (No. 58).

Eventually Pope John Paul II, generally regarded as an opponent of liberation theology, adopted the notion of structural sin, like that of liberation, into his own teaching ("On Social Concern"). Pope Benedict XVI made the analysis of sinful structures his own in "Love in Truth."

Justice in the Church

The 1971 synod statement broke new and important ground—however controversial—in its call for an internal

examination of conscience: "While the church is bound to give witness to justice, it recognizes that anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes. Hence, we must undertake an examination of the modes of acting and of the possessions and life style found within the church itself" (No. 40).

This was explicitly developed with mention of respect and promotion of rights within the church, the need for administration of temporal goods in a way that does not diminish evangelical credibility and the call for a "sparingness" in lifestyle among all Christians, including bishops, priests and religious.

Regarding rights within the church, for example, "Justice in the World" spoke of the wages of church workers and the roles of laypeople in administrative positions. The synod stated: "We also urge that women should have their own share of responsibility and participation in the community life of society and likewise of the Church" (No. 42). To assure action on these calls, a special commission was proposed for serious study.

ON THE WEB
Analysis of "Justice in the World" from the Center of Concern.
americamagazine.org/video

One need only think of the scandals that have rocked the church in recent years to see how relevant this call is for an honest examination of conscience. While major strides still need to be taken, especially with regard to the bishops' accountability for sexual abuse by Catholic priests, some exemplary bishops have performed public and private acts of repentance and reconciliation with victims. Pope John Paul II, though he seems to some to have been blind to this crisis, made repentance for the church's offenses a distinctive personal ministry. He made tens of apologies to offended groups, put corporate self-examination and repentance on the agenda of the Great Jubilee Year 2000 and personally led the Service of Pardon that opened that year.

Some celebration of the 40th anniversary of "Justice in the World" is in order. Good theology, keen social analysis and relevant practical recommendations make it one of the most influential documents of the Catholic social tradition. It is taught in many formal and informal courses around the world. And it has influenced the identification of the contemporary mission of Jesuits and other religious as "the service of faith and the promotion of justice." A commission of a Rome-based international group of major superiors of men's and women's religious orders is planning a seminar in November to explore the statement's implications for religious life. Now more than ever the world needs the good news, in which justice is a constitutive dimension. A

Catholic Social Teaching and Human Rights
Call for Papers

VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY
March 19-21, 2012

Villanova University invites papers and/or creative work on the following themes:

- Human rights, including the role and development of human rights discourse in *Pacem in Terris* and/or within the Catholic social teaching tradition, the relationship between human rights and religion, and the status of social and economic rights within the paradigm of human rights;
- Human rights abuses, including the Responsibility to Protect, international human rights law, human rights advocacy and education;
- The relationship between public authority and conscience, including the responsibilities of public authorities and the participation of citizens in public life;
- Social movements for progress, including the role of nonviolent social action, social media, NGO's, and international governmental agencies and alliances.

Papers should apply Catholic social teaching to these and related issues or illuminate new research in the humanities, social or natural sciences as well as public policy measures that can be brought into dialogue with Catholic social teaching.

Contributors are encouraged to explore:

- Themes in Catholic social teaching which illuminate and inform the nature, causes and consequences related to each issue;
- Theoretical or empirical research that advances the discourse of Catholic social teaching;
- Analysis of existing literature and research from the Catholic perspective that is particularly relevant to the theme;
- Recommendations on how future teaching documents might advance our understanding of the theme.

Papers may be selected for presentation at these conferences and/or be included in a future issue of the *Journal of Catholic Social Thought*, published by Villanova University.

To be considered for conference participation:

- Papers are solicited with a first right of refusal for publication in the *Journal of Catholic Social Thought*.
- Each must be original work that has not been or is not currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.
- Forward one paper copy of the manuscript.
- Submit an electronic file in Microsoft Word (doc) format.
- Electronic files may be made by regular or electronic mail as attachments.
- **Papers must be submitted by December 31, 2011.**

Papers may be selected for presentation at the conference, publication in the Journal or both. For more information about the conference, please see: http://www.villanova.edu/mission/conference

VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY

TELEVISION | JAKE MARTIN

WHY SITCOMS MATTER

The importance of being funny

Long before Charlie Sheen earned $2 million an episode for "Two and a Half Men," declared himself "winning" and held the American public hostage with his late-night escapades, sitcoms were the shining light of network television. The sitcom has not always been the television equivalent of the crazy old uncle at Christmas, full of excess and awkward moments and, one hoped, forgotten soon afterward. So relevant were sitcoms that people planned their Saturday nights around watching "The Mary Tyler Moore Show," and President Richard Nixon was recorded talking about "All in the Family" on the Watergate tapes.

Today, however, many thoughtful observers view the sitcom as a lumbering dinosaur whose cost efficiency and mass appeal make it a necessary evil in an age of artistic programming like "Mad Men" and "Breaking Bad."

Still, there is something to be said for the enduring charm of the sitcom, something that allows it to attract an audience when other genres like the western and the soap opera do not.

Bruised and battered as it enters its eighth season, "The Office," for example, represents the allure that the sitcom holds over the American viewer. Like the genre itself, "The Office" is past its prime; the writing has lost much of its snap and ingenuity, an inevitable result of years of squeezing the "funny" out of a finite set of situations and characters. The performances often have a canned, phoned-in quality that speaks of actors having played the same character for too long and for too much money.

Yet we keep watching. It is not

Steve Carell as Michael Scott, center, in NBC's "The Office."

PHOTO: DEAN HENDLER/NBC © NBCUNIVERSAL, INC.

always about the quality, though it once was; rather, it is about familiarity and trust. Like few other art forms, the sitcom's relational model insists on an intimacy between artist, medium and audience.

While it is difficult to imagine anyone other than Leonardo da Vinci speaking of the "Mona Lisa" as "my painting," many viewers speak of sitcoms in a proprietary manner. A sitcom can become part of our lives in a way that even a quality show like "Mad Men" does not. "Mad Men" isn't really "ours" because it is not our story; rather, it shows us who we want to be and what we are not. The sitcom is "ours" because it comes closer to showing us who we are.

Also the sitcom may be unique among artistic media in its ability to focus on relationship in a dualistic sense: it moves not only internally within the framework of its context but also externally by cultivating a deep relationship with its audience. The sitcom slowly, almost imperceptibly, invites the audience to become part of its constructed community. What makes this model of relationship possible is the accessibility of the comedic character and, more significantly, the permission comedy gives us to acknowledge and accept our own failures and even sinfulness.

The distinction between a show like "Mad Men" and a sitcom like "The Office" is rooted in the differences between the dramatic and comedic paradigms. There is a level of identification in comedy that is absent from drama primarily because of the fundamental moral frailty of the comedic character. In his *Poetics* Aristotle differentiates the comic from the dramatic hero by gradations of moral uprightness. The dramatic protagonist is a hero in the literal sense of the word, a moral exemplar with a singular fatal flaw that distinguishes him or her from the divine. The comedic protagonist is an everyman, oftentimes in the most minimal sense: a flawed, vulnerable agent whose desires are primarily pedestrian.

The ethical fragility of the hero not only drives the narrative of the comedic piece but also serves as a point of accessibility for the audience. The apogee of the comedic narrative usually involves the hero in a place of moral conflict, driven equally by his higher and lower desires; but the context is usually of the most ordinary sort, with minimal stakes.

It is much easier to relate to the sitcom hero, like the wonderful buffoon Michael Scott of "The Office," because of his omnipresence and stability. Television viewers can engage with the characters on their favorite show multiple times a week. The first-run episode sometimes becomes an event, an anticipated engagement between viewer and show, which often takes priority in the viewer's life. Something is fulfilled in this "relationship" between viewer and sitcom: a dif-

ferent, but no less valid, form of relationship that depends upon consistency and catharsis.

Perhaps even more significant is the ensemble element of the sitcom, which provides a collection of diverse personalities that allow viewers multiple opportunities to find someone with whom to identify. The cultural phenomenon of the water-cooler show can be linked directly to identification through the ensemble.

Many conversations around that commonplace piece of office furniture revolve around parallels in behavior between the characters and members of the work and family communities. The sitcom audience revels in the foibles of the ensemble; their mirth is founded primarily in the mirror the show provides for their own behavior. Every office has its "Pam" and "Jim." And while no one ever owns up to being the show's "Michael," inevitably there is one of those, too.

ON THE WEB
John P. McCarthy reviews Werner Herzog's film "Into the Abyss."
americamagazine.org/culture

The sitcom, therefore, can be an unlikely vehicle for the development of self-awareness and self-acceptance. Viewers observe and identify particular aspects of their own flawed nature in the onscreen characters, a nature made palatable by the humor and sheen with which it is delivered.

But such identification and awareness are not unique to the sitcom. Television, music and literature also provide ample opportunity for society to identify its core sinfulness. Comedy, however, provides one of the few artistic lenses through which an audience can view its own weaknesses and that of the world without falling into nihilism and despair.

The sitcom is the most populist of genres in the most populist of mediums and has traditionally brought with it a strident, moralistic tone. While other television genres, like the procedural drama and the historical narrative, are infused with moralistic undertones, their quality depends almost entirely upon maintaining a level of ethical nuance and ambiguity that the sitcom does not require.

This ethical overlay was all-encompassing in the sitcom until the advent of "Seinfeld." "Seinfeld" made what appears in hindsight to be a postmodern movement toward deconstruction, with a focus on undermining narrative and archetypal expectations. Few shows have shed more light on the traditional paradigm of the sitcom narrative than "Seinfeld," which intentionally subverted the genre.

"Seinfeld," however, was an aberration; the sitcom continues to be one of the most morally direct of all art forms. The brevity of the half-hour format necessitates conveying meaning

in shorthand; it does not allow for more nuanced and ambiguous narratives. This often leads to low-brow sentimentality of an inauthentic kind or sophomoric malevolence posturing as metahumor. The sitcom's temporal limitations can also bring about an economy that has a richer, fuller impact on the audience.

The best sitcoms—"The Mary Tyler Moore Show," "Cheers," "Friends," "30 Rock," "All in the Family" and, yes, "The Office"—are able to move in the space between the sentimental and the disengaged, thereby creating something not only entertaining but also spiritually enriching. The writers and performers on those shows exploit their understanding of the mathematics of comedy while infusing it with a keen sensitivity not only to the failings of the human person but also to the fundamental benevolence that drives and sustains us all.

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BOOKS | KENNETH R. HIMES

STATES AND SIN

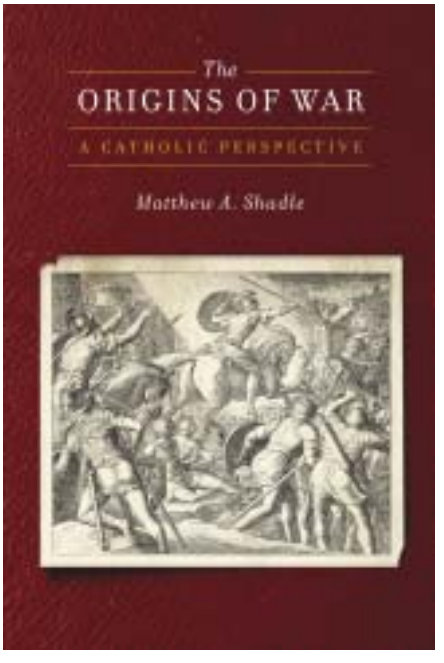
THE ORIGINS OF WAR
A Catholic Perspective

By Matthew A. Shadle
Georgetown Univ. Press. 246p $29.95 (paperback)

War has been a constant source of reflection for the followers of Jesus. After centuries of discourse it is not easy to say something new. Yet in this book, Matthew Shadle, an assistant professor of moral theology at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, offers a thought-provoking argument for a distinctively Catholic perspective on the origins of war.

The thesis of the book can be summarized by four claims: 1) Contemporary Catholic thinkers do not have a theory of war's origins that coheres with basic theological convictions of the Catholic tradition; 2) Early generations of believers did formulate such a theologically and ethically coherent view of the source of armed conflict; 3) A major reason for the loss of a sound theory of war's origins within the Catholic intellectual tradition is that believers have appropriated much of the political theory of secular liberalism; 4) Recent developments in Catholic theology as well as the field of international relations offer an opportunity to correct the errors within the tradition's evolution.

In the first four chapters Shadle describes what he sees as the problem, why it happened and how an interdisciplinary engagement can offer a way forward in resolving the difficulty. Regrettably, the early chapters attempt to cover far too much ground. For example, the author wishes to show there is "a tradition of reflection on the origins of war" to be found in the biblical, patristic and medieval sources. Covering the span from the Old Testament to Dante in 18 pages, however, is not an effective way to retrieve more than two millennia of the tradition. Shadle maintains that in the 14th century European thought began its departure from the Christian tradition's view of politics. An earlier wisdom maintained that human beings are essentially oriented toward the good, that the state cannot be properly understood apart from our ultimate end and that politics ought not be divorced from transcendent claims. By losing sight of these touchstones Catholics have come to misunderstand the problem of war.



In the next two chapters Shadle presents a digest of international relations theory and advocates the theory of constructivism, which he maintains offers a helpful way to reconnect the field of international relations with a renewed Catholic framework for studying the origins of war. Shadle has read a good deal of the relevant literature and makes a serious effort at interdisciplinary work.

Without question there is an important point to this aspect of Shadle's project. For too long, theorists of international relations have presumed that religion is a private affair that should exercise no influence on politics, or that when religion does intrude upon politics it is a negative force. This has led many in the field of international relations to overlook or misinterpret important developments in global politics. So Shadle's attempt to build a bridge permitting theologians and international relations scholars to connect ought to be encouraged.

The crux of the book's argument comes in Chapter Five, in which the author brings together the positive aspects of constructivist theory with

post-conciliar developments in Catholic theology to propose his Catholic perspective on the origins of war. He argues that Catholic theology's understanding of the human person provides a useful stance from which to assess whether a state's identity, interests and norms reflect a sound understanding of human fulfillment, individually and communally.

Catholic theology on sin and grace offers a critical view of the forces that give rise to war as well as the means whereby states and sub-groups may organize to prevent the outbreak of war. In sum, Catholic theology and constructivism "together suggest a Catholic perspective on war and its origins that recognizes that culture is a human creation that nonetheless plays an important role in creating, or constituting, human persons and their identities, interests, and norms of behavior." Culture plays a vital role in forging the social institutions, like states, through which individuals satisfy their interests. Shadle concludes, "when speaking of states, then, this means that war is ultimately caused by clashing cultural practices that foster sin, particularly violence."

Subsequent chapters serve as case studies, examining a variety of Catholic thinkers—popes and other authors—who have shared a mistaken approach to war's origins. These final four chapters do not add substantially to the basic argument presented earlier so much as they illustrate it.

ON THE WEB
Selected articles for use in the classroom.
americamagazine.org/education

Two questions might be posed. First, granted that religion ought not be ignored in discussions of war, should we argue for a distinctively Catholic perspective on the origins of war? Shadle believes such a theory existed in the first centuries. Suggesting that the Bible has a thesis about war's origins beyond some broad comments regarding idolatry, the principalities and powers that resist God, and human sinfulness, however, is problematic. Shadle also has insufficient appreciation for the apologetic, as distinct from analytic, intent of patristic writings on war. The patristic aim was to discredit paganism, not provide an accurate account of war. The author appears to confuse an affinity within the Catholic theological imagination for some claims about war with the existence of a developed perspective on war's origins within the tradition.

A second question is whether we need a distinctive Catholic theory of war's origins. Do we need Catholic theories of poverty or disease? What is the difference such theories make? In the end, Shadle's approach to understand-

ing war's origins does not add much to our thinking about war. The final pages of the volume reflect this conclusion, as his analysis of the Iraq war adds little beyond what many other commentators, Catholic and non-Catholic, have already offered.

Throughout the volume the author's intelligence, wide reading and clear prose are on display. I fear, however, those qualities are put at the service of a project that will leave readers unconvinced.

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TOM DEIGNAN

IRISH GOTHIC

SAINTS AND SINNERS
Stories

By Edna O'Brien
Back Bay Books. 272p $13

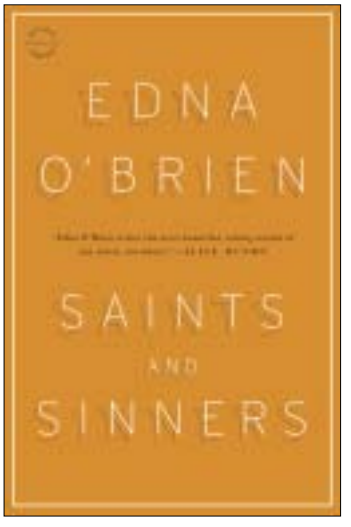
Every year, speculation swirls that brand-name authors such as Philip Roth or Amos Oz or Haruki Murakami will finally win the Nobel Prize for Literature. Why is Ireland's Edna O'Brien, now 80 years old, never included in this elite group?

O'Brien is one of the most respected fiction writers of her generation, but that is merely the tip of her Nobel credentials. She hails from a post-colonial nation and has challenged cherished mores and taboos of that nation. Her fiction confronts hot-button topics, including terrorism and abortion, and she has been both provocative and substantive on the complicated topic of sexuality.

It is also worth noting that only 12 women have won the Nobel since the Swedish Academy began handing out the literary prize in 1901.

O'Brien's latest book, a collection of stories entitled *Saints and Sinners*, can only serve to boost her credentials for any major literary award. The diversity of topics and characters explored in this collection will be familiar to O'Brien's fans, yet I should add that they are positively dizzying in their breadth and richness.

"Black Flower" is a bleak romance about a woman dating an IRA man just out of prison. "Shovel Kings" is a long study of Irish laborers in London. "Manhattan Medley" has the gleam and fizz of a (dark and literary) episode of "Sex and the City." And "Green Georgette" is a closely-observed study of class and manners with a conclusion that puts a new spin on the famous Edward Arlington Robinson poem "Richard Cory."



The cumulative effect of this can be disorienting, but only in the most impressive way. Moving from one story to the next, you can feel as if you are reading works by different authors. This is simply because O'Brien is capable of moving so deftly from the romantic to the grotesque, from the everyday to the gothic.

"Shovel Kings" begins "in a massive pub named Biddy Mulligan's, in North London, on St. Patrick's Day." The female narrator happens upon Rafferty (the subject of this complex story) and asks why he wears a harp pin. "To prove that I'm an Irishman," Rafferty replies. What could veer off into snide satire, however, becomes a heady meditation on identity, alienation and assimilation.

As Rafferty's friend puts it later: "'He doesn't belong in England and ditto Ireland,' …and, tapping his temple to emphasize his meaning, added that exile is in the mind and there's no cure for that."

The realism of "Shovel Kings" gives way to feverish works like "Plunder," a sort of nightmare about a rural town suddenly invaded by "rampaging soldiers" and their "huge dogs." The unnamed narrator longs to challenge the "hooligans in their camouflage."

O'Brien writes: "How beautiful it would be if one of us could step forward and volunteer to become the warrior for the others. What a firmament of love ours would be." But this is no heroic Irish epic about victory over the oppressed or even noble defeat. The story, instead, slides inexorably toward its horrific conclusion.

O'Brien also revisits, in this collection, the semi-autobiographical turf she explored in her 2006 novel, *The Light of the Evening*, a book dedicated to her "mother and motherland." In that book, O'Brien explored a mother who fiercely disapproves of her daughter's writing career, which has been marked by frank sexuality and love of, yet criticism toward, Ireland. (Sound familiar?) In the new story "My Two Mothers," a daughter is told "literature [is] the precursor to sin and damnation."

Dream imagery also pervades "My Two Mothers." Early in the story the slumbering narrator offers this: "My mother's hand is on the razor and then her face comes into view, swimming as it were towards me, pale, pear-shaped, about to mete out its punishment, to cut the tongue out of me."

Again and again, however, O'Brien resists sliding into rage. Her career

could have been spent lamenting, or flatly ignoring, Ireland. She examines it, instead, with sympathy and honor and, yes, rage, but also wit. (The domineering parent in "My Two Mothers" says: "Life…was one big battle. Because no matter who wins, no one wins.")

In an illuminating interview with Patricia Harty of Irish America magazine (included at the end of *Saints and Sinners*), O'Brien says this about her mother: "She disapproved of writing and feared the written word, feared that its essence was sinful.…And yet as you can see from her letters, she was a born writer herself."

O'Brien may or may not be comfortable with such contradictions, but she has made great art out of them for five decades now.

It might have been interesting if *Saints and Sinners* could also have included another recent work by O'Brien, entitled "A Poem for Barack."

This poem may not be everyone's taste. ("You glided on/ A swank/ With a lava of language,/ Prince Hamlet himself in Illinois.") But it is about confronting adversity with art and dignity, themes O'Brien has explored her entire literary life.

It is also worth noting that Barack Obama was once awarded a Nobel Prize.

TOM DEIGNAN, *author of* Irish Americans: Coming to America, *is working on a novel about a New York City high school.*

DAVID CARROLL COCHRAN

CIVIC CONSCIENCE

THE ETHICS OF VOTING

By Jason Brennan
Princeton Univ. Press. 222p $29.95

You've taken Tuesday off to volunteer on a Habitat for Humanity build. The house is almost finished, and your responsibility is completing the bathroom's tile work. It is also Election Day, and your hope was to finish the bathroom and get back across town to vote before your polling place closes. As is often the case when volunteers do tile work, it has taken you much longer than expected, and you won't have time to finish it tonight and vote.

Do you have a duty to stop work and go vote in an election in which, mathematically speaking, your ballot is almost certain to make no difference, or can you do more good staying to finish the bathroom and keeping the house project on track? Say you are uninformed about the candidates and their positions, or you intend to vote for your own narrow interests rather than the good of the whole country. Do you now have a duty to actually abstain from voting? Say you are well-informed, have the common good in mind and are committed to helping the right candidates win, but you also know the house needs to be finished on time. Can you call a friend, whom you trust but know is too lazy to vote, and offer her $100 to vote your preferences, essentially casting a substitute ballot on your behalf?

In *The Ethics of Voting*, Jason Brennan—assistant professor of philosophy at Brown University—offers a thoughtful exploration of these kinds of questions. While his argument can get technical in places, Brennan is a good guide through philosophically complex territory. He writes clearly, uses analogies well and includes some nice humorous turns. It is a worthwhile book, if not ultimately convincing.

Brennan's argument falls into three main areas. First, he claims that in liberal democracies citizens do not have a duty to vote. Most directly this is because the likelihood of any one vote determining the outcome of an election is "vanishingly small" (usually smaller in fact than a voter killing someone in a car accident on the way to vote), and we can use the time and energy involved in voting to do other worthwhile things. More broadly, however, Brennan argues that there is no duty to participate in politics at all, whether by voting or in other ways. He offers an "extrapolitical" understanding of civic virtue where people contribute to a society that is prosperous, culturally dynamic and rich in opportunities in a variety of ways, including "stereotypically private activities." Being a good doctor, farmer, entrepreneur, parent or artist can be just as important a social contribution as political participation, and since we need not all contribute in the same way, some can focus on political activities while others, who may find politics distasteful, stressful or just boring, can focus on other things.

Second, Brennan argues that if citizens do vote they have an obligation to do it well. You don't have a duty to become a doctor, but if you do you should be a good one. For Brennan, voting well means looking beyond personal self-interest to support candidates whose policies are best for the common good. Furthermore, your beliefs about these policies and their impact on the com-

mon good must be "epistemically justified," meaning you should be informed, reasonable, free of wishful thinking or bias and open to persuasion by evidence. If you don't meet these requirements—and according to Brennan there is good reason to believe that many, if not most, voters don't—then you have a duty not to vote. While Brennan is careful not to argue against the right to vote or for measures preventing unqualified citizens from exercising it, he is skeptical of efforts to increase voting rates.

Third, in the book's most challenging section, Brennan claims that buying and selling votes is not inherently wrong. While conceding that large-scale schemes to do so are almost always corrupting in practice, he argues that as long as individual buyers and sellers conform to the requirement that voting be done for candidates who are justifiably likely to contribute to the common good, buying and selling votes is not wrong in principle.

While he doesn't mention Plato, Brennan's arguments do echo some of those made in the *Republic* about the social importance of divisions of labor among those with different skills and virtues and the claim that wise political participation is demanding. Like the *Republic*, this book helps those committed to democracy, as Brennan himself claims to be, recognize some of its internal tensions and weaknesses. It is also a welcome reminder about the limits of voting and of politics generally. Like baseball fans, we political junkies often imbue our passion with more transcendent meaning than is warranted.

But politics isn't baseball. In a flourishing democracy political participation will not dominate the lives of citizens, but it should play at least some role. Brennan's understanding of democracy in this book is a thin one. It is instrumental, minimal and individualistic. The common good is important, but it is undefined beyond the accumulated interests, often financial, of individuals. Brennan rejects the "thicker" communitarian or republican understandings that many Catholics, both left- and right-leaning, find more compelling.

While it is true we don't have an absolute duty to vote—some may be unable to vote for any candidate in good conscience, some may reject conventional politics for other forms of social justice witness—Brennan's revised notion of civic virtue goes too far toward privatizing it. This preference for a "thin" over "thick" civic perspective may be why he leaves little room for religious faith as the basis for arguments for the common good, or why he simply dismisses arguments that certain things—sex, organs, votes—should not be for sale based on the inherent sacredness and dignity of persons. While specific concepts of human dignity, solidarity and community are central to a Catholic understanding of civic life, these concepts play little to no role in Brennan's more individualistic account, leaving it interesting but incomplete.

DAVID CARROLL COCHRAN *is co-author of* The Catholic Vote *(Orbis Books, 2008) and a professor of politics at Loras College, Dubuque, Iowa.*

LETTERS

I Can No Longer Listen

Re "Pope Promotes 'Unworldly' But Open Church" (Signs of the Times, 10/10): I would like to hear Pope Benedict's message with a joyful, open heart. I would like to welcome the good news of Jesus into my life as it is proclaimed to me by my church and its pastoral leaders.

But in key respects, the church has made itself a countersign to the Gospel it preaches for me as a gay Catholic, but also as a Catholic who felt great hope when the Second Vatican Council took place, who believes in the equality of men and women, who sees the spirit at work in both the church and the world, so that the church can learn from creative, respectful dialogue with the world.

In my view, the last two papacies have betrayed the promise of Vatican II. So now, sadly, I tend to no longer listen to what the church has to say when pastoral leaders make the church a countersign to the Gospel they preach.

WILLIAM LINDSEY
Little Rock, Ark.

Before Earth Day, Genesis

I thank Drew Christiansen, S.J., for making the connections between faith, justice and the environment so clear (Of Many Things, 10/24). Many citizens are doing right by the environment. Catholics should do this even more. Before Earth Day there was Genesis. We are called to care for creation because it honors the creator and because our actions have consequences. As Blessed John Paul II said, "We cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying attention both to the consequences of such interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations." The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change is working to help Catholics link their environmental concern with our faith. See: catholicclimatecovenant.org.

DAN MISLEH
Executive Director
Catholic Coalition on Climate Change
Washington, D.C.

Debate, Yes; Abuse, No

Re "Church, Not State?" (Editorial, 10/24): No one suggests that we should depend on charitable donations to maintain roads, schools or fire departments. We maintain these things for the common good. Taking care of the disabled, elderly and poor is also done for the common good and therefore deserves government support. Debating whether programs are effective or not is certainly reasonable, but verbally abusing the unfortunate is not.

LISA WEBER
Spokane, Wash.

Good Move

In response to Maurice Timothy Reidy's Of Many Things (10/17): Joanne Simpson was a young, unwed college graduate student and pregnant. She might have aborted her child. She decided instead to put him up for adoption. Paul and Carla Jobs adopted her child and named him Steven—yes, Steve Jobs. Wise decision, Joanne.

LARRY LORENZONI, S.D.B.
San Francisco, Calif.

St. Paul: Print or TV Journalist?

Mo Guernon's "The Forgotten Pope" (10/24) reminded me of the installation of Pope John Paul I, which I attended as a reporter for The Brooklyn Tablet, and his first press conference. As he sat facing the enthusiastic press corps, print journalists filled about two thirds of the room, electronic reporters the remaining third. Smiling radiantly, the pope said, "If St. Paul were alive today, he would be a journalist." Applause and shouts cheered the pontiff on, and he laughed along with his admirers.

But then he said, "No, I take that back." Surprised groans came, but he raised his hands and, still laughing, continued, "If St. Paul were alive today, he would be the head of the largest television network in the world, the better to proclaim God's love to all people."

If only this pope of 33 days and a mysterious departure had lived to carry on Paul's mission.

CAMILLE D'ARIENZO, R.S.M.
Glendale, N.Y.

A Voice From Shantytowns

Thanks for the wonderful article by John O'Malley, S.J., "A Lesson for Today" (10/31). Since the 1960s, when I worked in the shantytowns of São Paulo, Brazil, I have opposed the absolute centralization of the church, with the Roman Curia in the dictator's seat. The article may change my mind on one point. I had thought the trend toward centralization began with Trent and then got worse. Maybe I was wrong to be so assertive; but Vatican II, in my opinion, hurt the diversity of spiritualities around the world. I remember seeing a priest tear out the statues in a little chapel in rural

Brazil in the name of a more "rational" Catholicism proposed by Vatican II. It is not just the free voices of theologians that must be heard, but also the poor and those who criticize the church and their social, political and economic environment. That was the lesson of the '50s and '60s. Then along came Rome.

PATRICK HUGHES
St. Augustine, Fla.

Not Proud

Re "Conscience in the Mud" (Editorial, 10/31): Your comments on all three topics—overseas bases, drones and human rights—are accurate. I am not proud of much of what the United States is doing these days.

LISA WEBER
Spokane, Wash.

A Call to Conversion

In response to your editorial "Conscience in the Mud" (10/31), on America's loss of moral authority, I believe this is a timely comment on a situation that seldom makes it into the popular media. Somehow, as a nation we constantly notice the speck in others' eyes, especially the eyes of the so-called enemy, yet seldom if ever the plank in our own eye. The truth does hurt, but it demands either a conversion on our part or the destruction or vilification of the messenger.

SEAN KENNELLY
Coventry, Conn.

Nonsense

Your whole assessment in the editorial "Conscience in the Mud" (10/31) is based on the premise that this is a police action, not a war. Your premise is wrong. This is a war involving both transnational groups and national states. The 9/11 attacks, the attempted assassination of the Saudi prince on our soil and the Cole attack were acts of war.

Your view of the laws of war is nonsense. Spies and those not in uniform can be legally executed out of hand. Treason is aiding the enemy and is legally punished by death—by drone or otherwise.

HAROLD HELBOCK
Vacavill, Calif.

A Flight to Happiness

"Goodbye to Happy" (Current Comment, 10/24) really hit close to home. After 30 years in the suburbs of our diocese we moved out to the country. I spent a year in the church in our town listening to music that was a dirge and to uninspiring homilies and enduring ushers whose behavior bordered on that of a sergeant-at-arms instead of ministry. I left—more like fled—Mass unhappy and angry. The parish we left behind when we moved had been no better.

Fortunately, we live only a few miles from the state line. Like a siren's song, the parish just over the border called me. I found a home after leaving my diocese of 31 years. Now I'm part of a joyful celebration of the Mass and leave Mass spiritually fed and content. Yes, my new parish will learn the new translation of the Mass; they have no choice. As part of the 23 percent who saw this coming, do I look forward to it? Absolutely not. With all the problems in the world, you'd think the church would find something better to do.

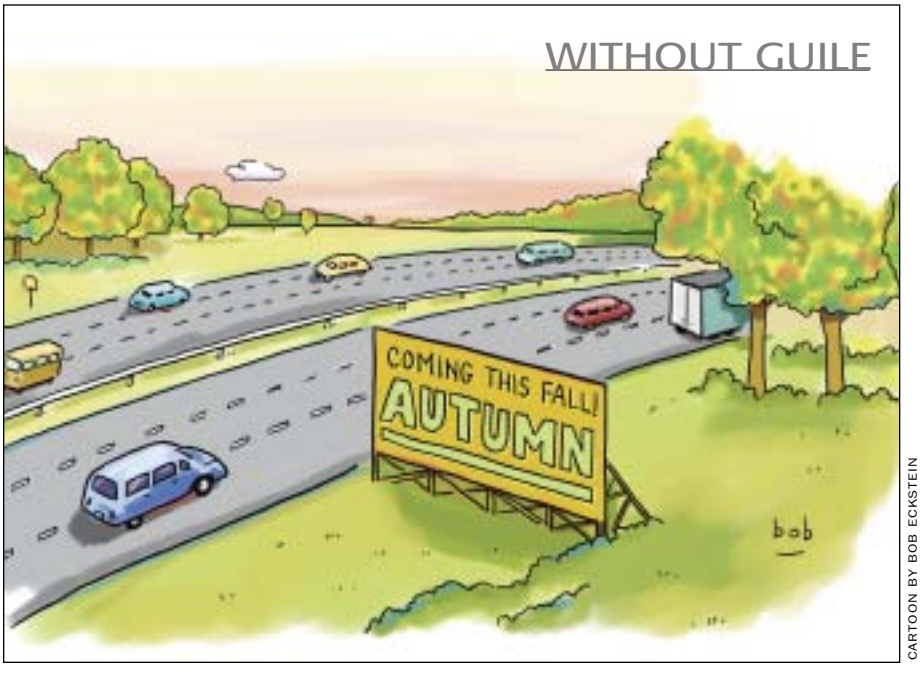
TRISH CONK
Winchester, Va.

Common Sense Morality

Your editors showed courage in publishing John and Charles MacCarthy's "Life or Death Decisions" (10/31). The opinions of the authors reflect the ethics practiced by virtually every physician I have encountered during my many years of medical practice. It is a disgrace that we have so many bishops who lack the common sense that could influence prudent moral judgments.

WILLIAM D. GREEN, M.D.
Springfield, Pa.

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



CARTOON BY BOB ECKSTEIN

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The Shepherd King

CHRIST THE KING (A), NOV. 20, 2011

Readings: Ez 34:11-17; Ps 23:1-6; 1 Cor 15:20-28; Mt 25:31-46

"He will sit upon his glorious throne...as a shepherd" (Mt 25:31-32)

Classic works of art and literature, like Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel and Dante's *Inferno*, reflect an enduring fascination with the final judgment. Juxtaposed in vivid contrast are angels and devils, fire and clouds, the anguish of the damned and the joy of the redeemed. There is something satisfying in the thought that at the end time those who have done good will be rewarded and those who have not will be punished. To have a king who keeps an account of each one's actions and who then decrees who is blessed and who is cursed has appeal. This image is most satisfying, of course, to those who consider themselves upright and who suffer because of this, while observing that evildoers often prosper.

The image of an all-powerful, punishing divine king stands in strong contrast, however, to the image of God as shepherd in the first reading and the responsorial psalm. These depict God as personally tending the sheep, going after the lost ones, gathering them in from every place they have wandered, binding up the injured ones, healing the sick and leading them to green places with plentiful food, restfulness and refreshment—a very different approach to addressing those who miss the mark than fiery banishment. Many times in Matthew's Gospel as well, Jesus speaks of himself as shepherd and teaches his disciples how to be like him. He has compassion on the crowds when they are like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9:36). He sends disciples to seek out the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:6) and urges them to leave 99 sheep who are safe to seek out the lost one (18:10-14).

In today's Gospel, Matthew holds in tension both his eschatological theme that there is an end time when one's life choices become final and irreversible, while at the same time reprising his theme of Jesus as compassionate shepherd. Jesus is both an all-powerful monarch who sits upon a glorious throne and a loving shepherd. What stands out most vividly in Matthew's parable is not other-worldly visions of eternal glory or unrelenting damnation but the face of the hungry, thirsty, immigrant, naked, sick and incarcerated Jesus. The fourfold repetition of this list underscores that Jesus is present and unavoidable at every turn, in those crying out to be shepherded. As often as Jesus' followers respond to these sisters and brothers in the way the divine shepherd did, he lives.

The shepherd's power over the sheep, as described in the Gospel of John, comes from intimate union (10:14), knowing each one by name (10:3), and from an unsurpassable love that impels the shepherd to lay down his life wholly for the sheep, even to the point of death (10:11). This is power fueled by love, a shared and persuasive power, quite different from that of a monarch who is removed from the people and who makes unilateral pronouncements. Today's parable warns not of a king who wields frightening power over unsuspecting subjects who did not realize their actions or omissions could damn them for all time, but of the deadly consequences if one ultimately rejects the shepherd's gracious beneficence. Such persons seal their own fate, choosing to be separated for all time from that empowering love.

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. Her latest book,* Abiding Word: Sunday Reflections for Year B *(Liturgical Press), is a compilation and expansion of articles that first appeared in* ***America****.*

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Ask the compassionate Divine Shepherd to help you relinquish the image of God as a stern, punishing king.
- Let Jesus show you how to be a compassionate shepherd like himself.
- How does your faith community work for systemic change to benefit those who are hungry, thirsty, immigrant, naked, sick and incarcerated?

ART: TAD DUNNE

* * *

If I may be permitted a personal note: It has been a great grace and privilege to share reflections on Scripture with you each week during my three-year tenure as the Word columnist. I am grateful for the many messages from readers, and I continue to pray for you as you break open God's word with others.

BARBARA E. REID

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