

# America

A silhouette of a person stands on a dark shore, holding two flaming torches. The person is facing away from the viewer, looking out over a body of water towards a cloudy sky. The torches are bright orange and yellow, with thick black smoke rising from them. The overall mood is somber and dramatic.

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## The Myth Of Religious Violence

WILLIAM T. CAVANAUGH

First Responses to  
'Light of Faith'

# OF MANY THINGS

**A**part from a few members of Cairo's Muslim Brotherhood, you'd be hard pressed to find anyone willing to defend Muhammad Morsi's record as president of Egypt. Long before he was forced from the Heliopolis Palace last month by a quick and dirty military coup, Mr. Morsi's incompetence had earned him the perfervid distrust of gigantic swaths of the Egyptian electorate, most of whom had voted him into power just 12 months earlier.

And that, as they say, is the rub: Mr. Morsi is Egypt's legitimate, democratically elected head of state. As a general rule, democratically elected governments should be changed by ballots, not bullets. The most unsettling bit, however, is not that the condition of Egyptian democracy has been downgraded from serious to critical, but that there are any number of parties who would be pleased to write a do-not-resuscitate order on the patient's chart.

Even the United States seemed unperturbed by the return of mobocratic rule to Cairo. The U.S. State Department, aware that calling a spade a spade would set in motion a legally mandated response, went to the most incredible lengths to deny that what had taken place was a coup, the sort of forceful denial of an objective reality that in another context might constitute prima facie evidence of one's clinical derangement. For State Department officials, however, such linguistic contortions are an ordinary day's work. And why not? The coup d'état, after all, is an ordinary means of governance in many so-called democracies.

Take Turkey, for example, where this month the Turkish parliament acted to amend army regulations that have often been used as legal justification for the military's intervention in politics. The Turkish military has staged three coups since 1960. Each intervention, the military claimed, was in defense of the state ideology, succinctly expressed in the

Turkish national motto: "Sovereignty unconditionally belongs to the Nation." Turkey, say the generals, is a thoroughly secular democracy; should the "religious fanatics" threaten the public order, then the military will intervene, effectively burning the village in order to save it. While the military has now been tamed, they will surely remain on the lookout for religious interference in government affairs. Religion and government, after all, are a volatile, even dangerous, mix.

Or are they? In this issue William T. Cavanaugh questions some of our basic and perduring assumptions about religion and violence. It's important to get one thing straight from the get-go: Professor Cavanaugh does not deny that some religious people are violent. What he questions is the notion that religion is inherently violent or dangerous. Perhaps the Egyptians and the Turks are right; perhaps certain forms of political Islam, in that particular part of the world, at this particular moment in history, are dangerous. Professor Cavanaugh isn't addressing that issue, merely questioning the notion that such movements are dangerous simply because they are "religious." Between 1998 and 2008, for example, the European Court of Human Rights made more than 1,600 judgments against Turkey for human rights violations; yet no one has suggested that this is evidence that secularism is somehow inherently violent.

One can quibble with Professor Cavanaugh's thesis, but his basic point is compelling: In a strange sort of way, the myth that religion is inherently prone to violence, that religion and politics shouldn't mix, distracts us from the fact that politics and violence almost always mix. The difference is that when violence is done in the name of religion, it's called fanaticism; when it's done on behalf of the state it's called patriotism. In both cases, though, more often than not, God has a different name for it: **MATT MALONE, S.J.**

# America

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## ON THE WEB

**William T. Cavanaugh**, right, talks on our podcast about the myth of religious violence. Plus, Ellen K. Boegel on the **Supreme Court and same-sex marriage** and, from the archives, Richard A. Blake, S.J., on the films of **Woody Allen**. All at [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org).



### Brazil's Progressive Moment

A strange paradox is unfolding on the streets of Brazil. A country with a low unemployment rate and a growing middle class is facing urban unrest not seen in decades. Hundreds of thousands of people have marched in cities throughout the country protesting higher transportation costs and excessive spending on the World Cup, which will take place in Rio de Janeiro in 2014. Observers have long predicted a bright economic future for Brazil, which just surpassed Britain as the world's sixth largest economy. So what gives?

Poverty, for one thing, remains very high at 21 percent. And those who have managed to escape poverty are unsatisfied with the level of government service they are receiving. Brazil's taxes are among the highest in the world at 36 percent of gross domestic product; the public is simply not seeing a return on their investment. Infrastructure, while better than it once was, is still in need of improvement, especially as Rio prepares for an unprecedented string of international events: this month's World Youth Day, next year's World Cup and the Summer Olympics in 2016.

The bishops of Brazil see the protests as the result of Brazil's history of inequality. They are no doubt correct. Democracy cannot flourish when a large gap divides the rich and the poor. The lesson for the international community is clear, if sobering: inequality must be addressed, even if it leads to short-term turbulence. A healthy democracy will endure some growing pains. There are signs that the protesters—peaceful thus far—could bring about much-needed government reforms. If they succeed, Brazil could become a model for fledgling democracies everywhere.

### The Cost of Pregnancy

Everyone knows that raising a child can be exhausting and—considering the price of child care and college tuition alone—expensive. But the cost of giving birth? That can be much harder to nail down. According to a recent report in *The New York Times*, uninsured and underinsured mothers-to-be are struggling to obtain accurate estimates for the cost of prenatal care and delivery. One woman, when inquiring about maternity care at a hospital, was told the price would fall somewhere between \$4,000 and \$45,000. Many hospitals refuse to offer any estimates. Hospitals increasingly bill maternity-related costs item by item. For some women this leads to unexpected additional charges over the course of their pregnancy; others choose to forgo potentially helpful medical procedures. The average payment for routine care during a conventional-delivery child-

birth in the United States in 2012 was \$9,775. For caesarean deliveries it was \$15,041.

Maternity care is crucial to the health of children and mothers. Yet high cost does not guarantee the best care; infant and maternal death rates in the United States remain too high. Under the Affordable Care Act, insurance plans must cover maternity care, but what, exactly, this includes is unclear. Care for mothers-to-be must become more straightforward and comprehensive. Couples should be able to obtain reasonable estimates of costs quickly and easily—and the costs should be reasonable. More hospitals should offer basic maternity care packages for a flat, affordable fee. Making maternity care affordable will help ease the burden on women who may feel they are not financially stable enough to raise a child, or even to give birth to one. This is one way to advocate for life and honor what Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI has described as “the human freedom...to welcome the life of a new human being.”

### ‘Hulk. Catholic. SMASH!’

In the latest cinematic incarnation of the Avengers, the not-so-jolly green giant Hulk made short work of the godling Loki, literally casting him to the ground as a “puny god.” A snarky aside, yes, but perhaps also a small suggestion of the Hulk's true religious sensibilities, which, according to astute observers of American comic culture at *L'Osservatore Romano*, are Catholic.

This is not the first time *L'Osservatore* has discovered Catholics in odd places. A few years back it provided detailed evidence of Homer Simpson's faith; more recently it tracked James Bond's Catholic roots through a Scottish “priest's hole.” Evidence for the Hulk's Catholicism, according to the Vatican paper, are a rosary clutched by a de-Hulking Bruce Banner and his own Catholic wedding.

It's not easy being green, hanging with better-looking Avengers and uttering monosyllables like, “Hulk... SMASH!” But Hulk may have other reasons to be out of sorts. Maybe he's peeved about the new Missal. But a church big enough to tolerate the likes of you and me should be able to handle the Hulk, so let's join *L'Osservatore* and welcome him into the fold. And if the Hulk gets a little unmanageable at the next parish council meeting, consider inviting in the X-Man mutant Nightcrawler to help out. Officially dubbed “Greatest Catholic Superhero” by *comicbookreligion.com*, the rosary-clutching Nightcrawler is famous for his gifted apologetics in speech-bubble standoffs with the tormented skeptic Wolverine, and, bonus, his mutant skill set should make him a winning fund-raiser at the next parish carnival.

# Save Voting Rights

Scholars may debate the constitutional logic of the Supreme Court decision in *Shelby County v. Holder* that gutted the Voting Rights Act of 1965, but what is beyond dispute has been the unseemliness of the political rush soon after the opinion was issued. Just 24 hours after the court struck down the formula used to determine which states and counties require federal clearance in advance for proposed changes in voting and districting policies—a mechanism meant to prevent race-based voting discrimination—legislators in five states formerly subject to preclearance pushed through so-called voting reforms whose net effect will be to limit the ability of African-American and other citizens from minority communities to vote.

The court's decision on June 25 lays the foundation for a renewal of electoral gamesmanship. Members of Congress charged with enforcing the 15th Amendment's injunctions against race-based voter discrimination will be forced into new rounds of legislative "whack a mole" to tap down sporadic innovations in voter suppression—precisely the iniquitous and exhausting conditions that propelled the extraordinary federal intervention established by the Voting Rights Act in the first place.

The abrupt activation of voter identification laws that had been suspended while the court considered the arguments in *Shelby* and the sudden enthusiasm for the termination of early or extended voting schedules in tightly contested Southern states make a mockery of the judges' argument that history and social progress has obviated the V.R.A.'s preclearance formula. Texas is now enforcing the most rigorous voter I.D. requirements in the nation. Texas legislators are also restoring Congressional redistricting maps that, according to a federal court ruling in August 2012 that rejected the gerrymandering, showed a "race-conscious method to manipulate not simply the Democratic vote but, more specifically, the Hispanic vote."

In his majority opinion in *Shelby*, Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. allowed that the problem of contemporary voter discrimination is real but claimed that any reauthorization of the V.R.A. needed to take into account "current conditions"—that discrimination is not as pervasive and flagrant as it was in 1965. In her dissent, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said that the court should have considered preclearance itself as a "condition" that successfully prevented voter discrimination; invalidating it is like "throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet."

The judges' supreme confidence in the unalterable progress of voting rights is misplaced. Now it is up to state and national legislators to fill the regulatory void opened up by the court's decision. Many Republican-controlled state legislatures have been responding to the nation's changing demographics with tortured Congressional districting and new barriers to voting. Rather than make a case to convert voters, these legislators prefer to establish obstacles to voting, cynically promoting voter I.D. laws that "fix" the negligible to nonexistent problem of voter fraud. The revived deployment of such strategies suggests that the problem of racial discrimination in voting has hardly been made to evaporate by improving social conditions and the political empowerment of minority communities.

The Senate has scheduled hearings to review its legislative options toward a restoration of the V.R.A., but the leadership of the Republican-controlled House has shown little interest in revising the act. Some members of Congress have even publicly challenged some provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It may be fair to wonder if, abetted by the current court, some legislators will pursue other policies whose net effect will be to turn back history.

The church may have at times worked at cross-purposes in the early days of the U.S. civil rights movement, but by the time of the Voting Rights Act, it had come to stand firmly with the courageous men and women who were putting themselves on the line in an effort that would change the nation. Since then, the church has been a consistent enemy of racial discrimination and a supporter of the V.R.A. and its goals.

Responding to the decision on the V.R.A., Bishop Stephen E. Blaire of Stockton, Calif., and Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Tex., speaking on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said, "We urge policymakers to quickly come together to reaffirm the bipartisan consensus that has long supported the Voting Rights Act and to move forward new legislation that assures modern and effective protections for all voters so that they may exercise their right and moral obligation to participate in political life."

In defense of the nation's civil rights achievements and remembering the many who made so many sacrifices in that valiant struggle, Congress should heed that call.



# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

EGYPT

## Future Hinges on Consensus and Role of the Muslim Brotherhood

Prospects for a resolution to Egypt's political crisis rest on how well the emerging governing coalition is able to integrate the nation's swirling social forces, including the Muslim Brotherhood. This is the view of James Zogby, author of *Arab Voices* and the founder and president of the Arab American Institute in Washington, D.C. The interim government has made overtures to the brotherhood, he said, "And I hope they accept. For the future of the country a consensus must emerge.... It's going to be a choice that the brotherhood are going to have to make."

On July 12 Cairo streets were again filled with thousands of supporters of the deposed president, Mohamed Morsi, demanding his release—an aim endorsed that day by the U.S. State Department. Efforts to include Egypt's Islamists in a meaningful way in the government that replaced Morsi suffered a severe setback on July 8 after 51 demonstrators were killed and almost 500 wounded by Egyptian military. The mayhem began when soldiers dispersed a crowd of Morsi supporters gathered by a Cairo barracks where many believe the deposed president is being held.

The army claims soldiers were provoked by attacks from the crowd while

witnesses say the attack was initiated by the Egyptian military. Who fired the first shots is irrelevant, said Zogby. "What matters is that the military responded in an absolutely uncon-



scionable manner. The ability to maintain order without taking the lives of that many innocent people is absolutely critical."

The killings in Cairo were not the

COLLEGIALITY

## New Priests' Association Seeks Church Role, Younger Members

The goad that prompted the organization two years ago of the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests was widespread dissatisfaction and pastoral dismay over the new translation of the Roman Missal. While the Missal remained the focal point of a recent meeting of the association in late June at Seattle University, this group of older priests is not against change. They have been through plenty of it. But according to a survey by the Godfrey Diekmann Center at St. John's School of Theology in Collegeville, Minn., 80 percent of priests contend the language of the new

Missal is awkward and distracting.

Throughout the gathering, the pastoral model of Pope Francis gave encouragement to these men, the great majority of them around the same age as the pope. One board member, the Rev. Bernard Survil of the Diocese of Greensburg, Pa., observed, "This assembly was an affirmation that the Spirit of Vatican II can still be a precious asset and living legacy."

One of the organizational goals of the A.U.S.C.P. is to triple its membership and especially to engage some of the younger priests. Members lamented the widening gap between older and

younger clergy.

The association has already made links with similar associations of priests in Ireland, Australia and Austria—all of which were founded for different reasons. The Irish Association of Catholic Priests includes 30 percent of Ireland's clergy and is in regular dialogue with the bishops who recognize the strength of this grassroots effort. The Irish clergy group was formed after the widespread disillusionment about how the church leadership had handled the sexual abuse crisis.

The Rev. Peter Maher of Sidney, Australia, who participated in the Seattle meeting, explained, "We formed because of the lack of due process for the rights of priests." He noted a similar fracture in Australia between

**BETWEEN THE CROSS AND THE KORAN** Egyptians in Tahrir Square.



only violence seen by the nation since the military ended Morsi's chaotic one-year rule. A number of attacks on Egypt's Christians followed accusations by several Islamist sources,

including the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, that Christians were part of a "conspiracy" to remove Morsi. On July 6, in Masaeed in North Sinai, the Rev. Mina Abboud Sharoubim was shot to death; and a spate of other attacks have left at least four other Copts dead and church buildings and scores of Christian homes and shops damaged or destroyed by fire.

Despite the bloodshed, Zogby says there is reason to be hopeful that the turmoil will eventually end and the nation will return to a path of economic and political development. Of the second public uprising, which deposed Morsi just two years after a revolution in the streets ended the three-decade reign of Hosni Mubarak, Zogby noted that some analysts are concerned that Egyptians are exhibiting an impatience that could be harmful to democratization. "But the question is: Was this just impatience," he

said, "or were there signs of a deterioration in the political situation that [Egyptians] feared could become irreversible?"

"The problem was not so much that the other guys won, it was what the other guys were doing when they won," he said. Secular, moderate and Christian Egyptians feared that rule by the brotherhood was "changing the very character of Egypt and making it an authoritarian, religious, rigid state. They didn't want to see Egypt going backwards."

An indication that the nation is on the right track, according to Zogby, will be the nature of the revised constitution that is ultimately passed and the composition of the parliament that is elected. But if in six to 12 months the military is still running the show, Zogby expects that Egypt's self-empowered revolutionaries will again take to the streets of Cairo.

**KEVIN CLARKE**

younger and older priests.

The Austrian priest group, founded by the charismatic Rev. Helmut Schüller, was organized in 2006 because of the increasing priest shortage. The Austrians tend to be much more aggressive in their reform proposals. Their 2011 initiative "Call to Disobedience" calls for lay leadership and preaching in parishes without a priest, permitting divorced and remarried Catholics to receive the sacraments and support for the ordination of women and married men.

The newly minted American association has steered a moderate path and is seeking regular dialogue with the bishops. During the three-day Seattle meeting, members voted to restore the ancient practice of ordination of women to the diaconate, to ini-

tiate a more transparent process of selecting bishops and to reinstate general absolution. They steered clear of red button items, such as promoting discussion of the ordination of women to the priesthood.

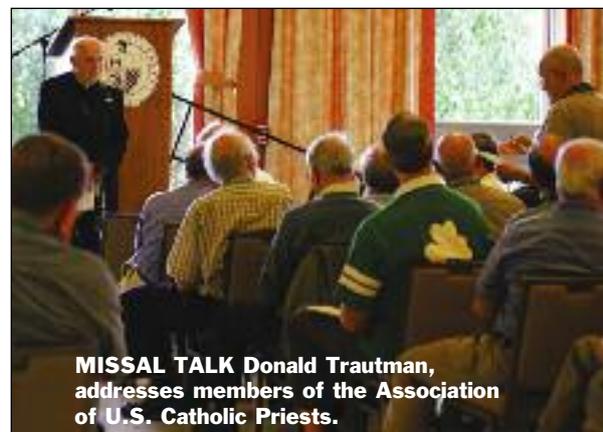
The Rev. Mike Ryan, pastor of St. James Cathedral in Seattle, summed up the meeting: "I came away with the same hope that so many of us are feeling about the election of Pope Francis. The Spirit is breathing new life into the church, and we priests are feeling that."

Father Ryan concluded, "I was especially encouraged by how Bishop Don Trautman [who addressed the conference] took the side of the majority of the priests with regard to the new Roman Missal and the flawed

process that brought it about. The liturgy is right at the heart of our life as a church. The new Missal negates the 'full and active participation by all the people.'"

**PATRICK HOWELL, S.J.**

*PATRICK HOWELL, S.J., is a professor of pastoral theology at Seattle University.*



**MISSAL TALK** Donald Trautman, addresses members of the Association of U.S. Catholic Priests.

## Young, Armed And Dangerous

Gun violence is the second leading cause of death for all youth in the United States ages 14 to 24. In a study reported in the August 2013 issue of *Pediatrics*, published online on July 8, researchers from the University of Michigan Injury Center surveyed youth 14 to 24 years of age treated in urban emergency departments for assault. Firearm possession rates were high (23 percent) for these young emergency room patients. Young people with firearms were more likely to use illegal drugs, to have been involved in a serious fight and to endorse aggressive attitudes that increase their risk for retaliatory violence. Thirty-seven percent reported they had a gun primarily for protection, yet a majority believed “revenge was a good thing” and that it was “O.K. to hurt people if they hurt you first.” The study authors conclude that future injury-prevention efforts should focus on minimizing firearm access among high-risk youth, promoting nonviolent alternatives to retaliatory violence and prevention of substance abuse.

## United Nations Seeks Vatican Answers

A United Nations committee concerned with children’s rights is requesting that the Vatican provide complete details about every accusation it has ever received of the sexual abuse of minors by members of the clergy. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors implementation of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, published on July 1 a list of issues it found lacking in the Vatican’s latest report on its compliance with the international obligations it accepted when it ratified the convention. Among many other items,

## NEWS BRIEFS

A Wisconsin law that requires women to **obtain an ultrasound** examination before an abortion and abortionists to obtain admitting privileges at near-by hospitals was stayed on July 8 by a federal judge. + Pope Francis will be forming a new committee to consider **transparency and accountability** following the conclusion of an external audit of the budgets of Curial offices. + Young people from around the world, including hundreds from Jesuit universities participating in the **Magis 2013 missionary initiative**, are expected to attend the World Youth Day celebration in Brazil, July 23 to 28. + After **serving just under eight years** in prison for the killing of Dorothy Stang, S.N.D., Rayfran das Neves Sales was released on July 4 in Brazil to serve the rest of his 27-year sentence under house arrest. + In a letter to Congress on July 3, the U.S. bishops said that the **Supreme Court’s decision** striking down key components of the Voting Rights Act “necessitates legislative action to assure that no one is denied their right or obligation to participate in public life by voting or speaking out.” + Irish lawmakers on July 12 overwhelmingly **approved abortion** in limited cases where the mother’s life is at risk. + The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs awarded Catholic Charities of Syracuse, N.Y., a grant of \$589,000 on July 11 to help **homeless and at-risk veterans** and their families.



**Magis 2013**

the Vatican is being asked to provide: “detailed information on all cases of child sexual abuse”; how it has responded to victims and perpetrators of abuse; whether it ever investigated “complaints of torture and other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment” of girls in the Magdalene laundries in Ireland; and how it dealt with allegations that young boys who were part of the Legion of Christ were being separated from their families.

## Human Rights in Burma

Anna Roberts, the executive director of Burma Campaign UK, said that it is shameful that the international community is taking such a “rose tinted” view of what is going on in Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, now tending to focus on trade and investment policies while remaining largely silent

on human rights. According to Roberts, despite a public perception of improvements, Myanmar still has one of the worst human rights records in the world. She said that since former General Thein Sein became president, human rights abuses have actually increased, with higher numbers of reports of rape by the Myanmar Army and security forces, hundreds of political prisoners still in jail and almost all of the nation’s repressive laws still in place. Roberts said that while there has undoubtedly been an increase in “civil liberties” in urban centers, things have not changed greatly on the ground; and for many, conditions have actually deteriorated, particularly for members of Myanmar’s ethnic and religious minorities.

From CNS and other sources.



# Shifting Winds

A journalist friend and I have a running debate about whether American politics or the Catholic Church is in more trouble. It's often close, with destructive polarization and enormous difficulties facing both, including the continuing impact of the sexual abuse crisis in our church and the many costs of two wars hurting our nation. Ironically, this summer Pope Francis is making the church a place of "hope and change," while Washington in the Obama era is an increasingly sad place of stalemate and dysfunction.

The Senate has adopted bipartisan immigration reform, but the House will not consider it because it would pass without a majority of Republicans. It is supported by the American people, business and labor, evangelicals and Catholics, but Republicans are worried about challenges in the fall primaries. This dysfunction is not unique. Gun safety measures were defeated by pressure from the National Rifle Association. In the House, the farm bill initially failed because some insisted that food stamp cuts for hungry families were too small. What happened to compassionate conservatism?

Supreme Court rejection of a centerpiece of the Voting Rights Act brought relatively little comment or action. But overturning the Defense of Marriage Act and California's vote against same-sex marriage led to massive celebratory coverage. The decisions

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**JOHN CARR** is the director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University. He previously served, for more than two decades, as director of the U.S. Catholic Bishops' department on justice and peace.

suggest voting rights protections are relics of the past and gay marriage is the wave of the future, holding that traditional convictions on marriage could only be motivated by bias or hostility.

A new heroine is a state senator in Texas who filibustered legislation restricting abortion. Most coverage celebrated her "courage and stamina" with no reference to the lives of unborn children or public opinion. The administration announced its revised contraceptive mandate will be implemented next year, but the employer mandate will not; free birth control is in place, but basic coverage for workers is still on hold.

Unemployment numbers show modest progress, but 20 million people are jobless, work only part time or have given up. Real wages are stagnant and poverty is at historic levels. The elite advocacy of gay and abortion rights is constant and the silence on jobs, wages and poverty is deafening.

President Obama and House speaker John Boehner seem buffeted by forces beyond their control, including a coup in Egypt or a possible coup in the House. They have abandoned the search for a bargain on the budget and live with the sequester they deplored. They recycle their talking points and blame others for Washington's failures.

There is a surprisingly different story in the church. Pope Benedict decided he could not continue to lead and took the selfless step of resigning. An unexpected new pope took the name Francis to lift up the church's commitment to the poor, peace and creation. Francis' new

encyclical shows continuity with Benedict and connections among faith, truth, love and action. Pope Francis advances the canonization of both Pope John Paul II and Pope John XXIII. He responds to Vatican bank scandals with new structures and leadership. He emphasizes Catholic identity and calls the church to get out and stand with "the poorest, the weakest, and the least

important." On his first visit beyond the Vatican, Francis goes to jail to wash the feet of young people. His first trip outside Rome is to Lampedusa, the "Island of Tears," to welcome immigrants and decry "globalization of indifference." He preaches every day in his house chapel, challenging "melancholy

Pope Francis is making the church a place of 'hope and change.'

Christians," "part-time" Catholics, ecclesial ideologues, careerism in the church and greed in the economy.

Francis' amazing appeal may not last as he makes tough choices. The reform of the Roman Curia is still ahead. Symbols are substance in our church, but personnel is policy. The church needs to do more to heal the wounds of sexual abuse and respond to aspirations of women.

The implementation of the Department of Health and Human Services' mandate could threaten our ministries and divide our community. But Pope Francis' simple ways and powerful words remind us why we are Catholic. Washington could use a little of his faith, hope and charity. His commitment to the "least of these" wouldn't hurt either.

**JOHN CARR**

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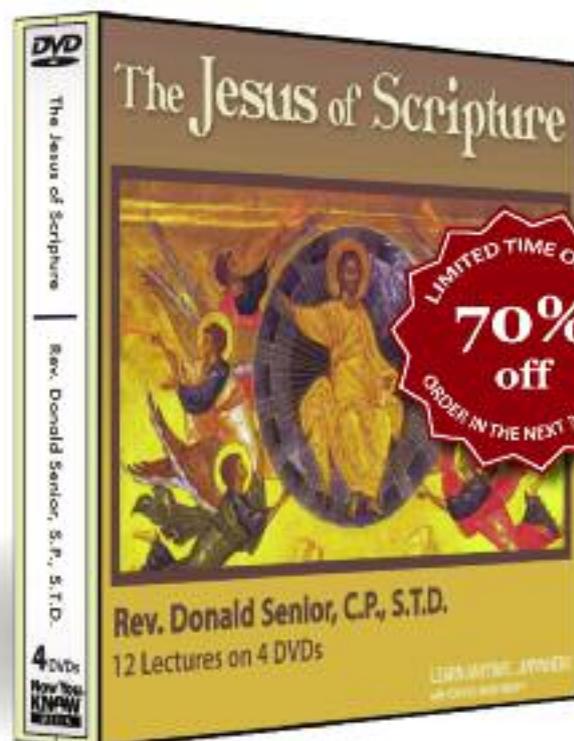
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Makeshift memorial for the Boston Marathon bombing



Does religion promote violence?

# The Root of Evil

BY WILLIAM T. CAVANAUGH

**T**he Boston Marathon bombings have fed fears of terrorism and also given new encouragement to one of our society's preferred ways of dealing with the fear of terrorism: we assign it to the realm of the irrational, to which we oppose the rationality of our own society. The revelation that the perpetrators were Muslims from a part of the world that harbors Islamist militants has refueled one of the most persistent themes in public discourse in the West, the idea that religion has a tendency to promote violence. A spate of articles with titles like "Did Religion Motivate the Boston Bombers?" (The Washington Post) and "Boston Marathon Bombing Suspects Seen as Driven by Religion" (The Associated Press) appeared in the aftermath of the explosions.

What the bombers' motivations were exactly has yet to be pieced together and may never

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be fully known. What drives a young man to blow up strangers is most often a volatile cocktail of hormone-saturated ingredients, not always fully transparent to the bomber himself. What is known, however, is that a version of Islam played some role in the Tsarnaev brother's worldview. This fact is generally regarded as sufficient to count the Boston Marathon bombings as one more grim episode in a long history of religion-related violence. It is common in the secular West to run through a list of such episodes—the Crusades, the Inquisition, Aztec human sacrifices, the European Wars of Religion, the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 and so on—and conclude that religion has a peculiar tendency to lend itself to violent acts.

There is no denying that faith traditions like Christianity and Islam can and do contribute to violence. Some form of Islam appears to have been present in the mix of the Tsarnaev brothers' motivations. It will not get Islam off the hook to say that they were not good Muslims, just as it will not get Christianity off the hook to say that the Crusaders were not really Christians because they did not understand the true message of Jesus. Islam and Christianity are not just sets of doctrines but lived experiences that are constituted in part by what people make of them.

We can grant the commonsense observation that Christianity and Islam and other faith traditions can contribute to violence. The conventional wisdom, however, goes beyond this to claim that religion has a peculiar tendency to promote violence—that is, religion is more inclined toward violence than secular ideologies and institutions. In other words, the idea that religion causes violence depends on contrasting religion with something less prone to violence. That something is the “secular.” Religion is thought to be especially prone to irrationality and fanaticism and absolutism, all of which are root causes of violence, in ways that secular realities are not. It is for this reason that secular societies like our own have tried to tame religion by removing it from the public sphere and erecting high walls between church and state. The Boston bombings seem to provide more evidence for the wisdom of taming religious passions.

## Religion and Nationalism

The more we burrow into the motivations of the Boston bombers, however, the more complicated the matter becomes. The brothers' homeland of Chechnya has indeed become a hotbed of Islamic radicalism. The last decade saw spectacular and horrific attacks by Chechen rebels on a Moscow theater and an elementary school in Ossetia. Traditionally, Sunni Islam in Chechnya has been peaceful, with a strong Sufi presence. Some scholars think that the Chechens converted to Islam from the 16th to the 19th centuries in part to gain Ottoman support against Russian invaders. Russia officially annexed Chechnya in the early

19th century, and Chechen rebels have fought numerous rebellions over the last two centuries trying to break free from Russian domination.

The latest iterations of such rebellion were sparked by the breakup of the Soviet Union. Chechens hoped to secure their independence just as other former Soviet republics did, but their drive toward independence was crushed by two brutal Russian military operations that included direct attacks on civilians. The Russian government saw Chechnya as part of Russia, though now less than 2 percent of its population is Russian. Russia also wanted to discourage other ethnic minorities from seeking their independence. The brutality of the Russian response has inflamed Chechen nationalism, which in the last two decades has been mixed with Islamic jihadism of a Wahhabi strain.

In the media coverage surrounding the Tsarnaev brothers, the role of religion will continue to be debated at length; the role of nationalism will be passed over in silence. There will be no debates over the fanaticism caused by devotion to the idea of a Chechen nation, nor the violence caused by Russian insistence that Chechnya remain a part of greater Russia. Why is this so? Why does devotion to jihadism strike us as peculiarly dangerous, while the much better-armed devotion to Russian national pride strikes us as mundane and generally defensible? Why do we prefer to talk about the Tsarnaev brothers' relation to Islam and not about their stated political opposition to the American invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan?

Westerners are fascinated by the nexus of “religion and violence.” War on behalf of nationalism and freedom and oil and other such mundane secular matters hardly counts as violence at all. At the U.S.-Islamic World Forum in Qatar in 2007, nearly four years into the U.S. occupation of Iraq, David Satterfield, senior adviser and coordinator for Iraq in the office of the U.S. Secretary of State, gave a speech condemning those in Iraq “who try to achieve their goals through the use of violence.” As the journalist Rami Khouri sardonically commented, “As if the U.S. had not used weapons when invading Iraq!”

Nothing, of course, justifies the Boston bombings. My point is simply that we prefer to locate “religious” causes of violence and become quite incurious when “secular” causes like nationalism are in play. Why? Because we are accustomed to dividing life into separate religious and secular spheres. We have been habituated to think that devotion to one's religion is fine within limits, while public patriotic devotion to one's nation is generally a good thing. We are appalled at violence on behalf of religion, but we generally accept the necessity and even the virtue of killing for one's country.

Are these two kinds of violence—religious and secular—really such different things? There is a growing body of scholars who question whether the binary distinction

between religious and secular is as obvious as we tend to assume it is. There are many scholars, for example, who consider nationalism a religion. It is marked by solemn rituals of sacred communion, salvation from peril and blood sacrifice on behalf of the collective body. Carlton Hayes's book *Nationalism: A Religion* represents one such approach. Braden Anderson writes, "Nationalism is itself a type of revivalist religion." According to Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle, "nationalism is the most powerful religion in the United States, and perhaps in many other countries." Robert Bellah has identified the public religion of the United States as "civil religion," invoking a generic "God" and based on a heavily ritualized devotion to the salvific role of the United States in world events. Traditional religions like Christianity and Judaism are still practiced in the United States, but they belong in the private realm, though they often lend significant support to the public cult of civil religion.

If nationalism is a religion, what does this do to the idea that religion has a tendency to promote violence? That idea depends on a sharp line between religious and secular ideologies and institutions. But if a "secular" thing like nationalism is a religion, then the line becomes blurry, and the notion that religion causes violence begins to fall apart.

### The Meaning of Religion

We are clearly dealing with two different definitions of religion here. In modern Western societies, we tend to assume that religion refers to forms of worship that explicitly invoke a God or gods. This approach is called a substantivist approach because it is based on the substance of people's beliefs. Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and a few others qualify as "world religions." Nationalism, Marxism, capitalism and so on are not religions because they do not refer directly to God or gods. They therefore belong in the category of "secular." Secular ideologies and institutions are generally thought to be more mundane and rational, less absolutist, than beliefs that invoke otherworldly gods. For many people, this explains why religion is more prone to violence than secular things.

When we begin to examine the substantivist approach to religion, however, significant problems appear. Some systems of belief that are usually considered religions—many forms of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, for example—do not refer to God or gods. Substantivist approaches tend to deal with this problem by finding a more inclusive term than *god*—the transcendent, supernatural, transempirical, salvific and so on—to define what qualifies as a religion. But the more inclusive the defining term is, the more difficult it is to exclude things like nationalism from the category of religion. Is nationalism not also transcendent? Are not all values transempirical?

Why exclude godless Marxism from the category if godless Buddhism is included?

The second approach to defining religion deals with this problem by simply expanding the category to include nationalism, Marxism, capitalism and other so-called "secular" ideologies and practices. This approach is called "functionalist" because it defines religion not according to the substance of what people say they believe but by how something actually functions in people's lives. In 2001, when California's recently deregulated electricity supply system experienced rolling blackouts, an economics professor who had been one of the architects of the deregulation was quoted in *The New York Times* expressing his conviction that the free market always works better than government regulation: "I believe in that premise as a matter of religious faith." A substantivist would say he is only speaking metaphorically. A functionalist says it makes no difference if he thinks it is a metaphor or not; what matters is the way he behaves, that is, the way free market ideology actually functions in his life. If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it is a duck. If it acts like a religion, it is a religion. If people pledge allegiance to a flag, salute it, ritually raise and lower it and are willing to kill and die for it, it does not much matter if they acknowledge it is only a piece of cloth and not a god.

This approach should not seem exotic to a Christian; it is the basic approach taken in the Bible. The Bible is not

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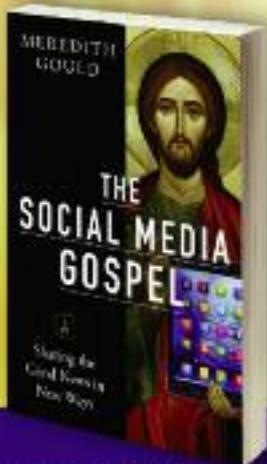
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interested, as functionalists are, in coming up with a definition of religion. But like functionalism, the critique of idolatry that is found everywhere from the First Commandment to the Book of Revelation is based on the recognition that people treat all kinds of things as if they were gods.

Sometimes the Bible criticizes the Israelites for mistaking empty idols for real gods. More often, however, the problem of idolatry is not one of belief but of behavior. Idolatry is not so much a metaphysical error as misplaced loyalty, a lack of trust in the one true God. In the First Book of Samuel the Lord equates the Israelites' request for a king with serving other gods, for they have rejected the Lord from being king over them (8:7-8). Isaiah accuses the Israelites of putting their trust in horses and chariots—military might, in other words—rather than the Lord (31:1-3). Jesus says we must choose between two masters, God and wealth (Mt 6:24). Paul warns the Philippians of those for whom “their god is their bellies” (3:19). Such people presumably do not believe that a deity resides in their breadbasket. Most commonly from a biblical point of view, idolatry is not mistakenly believing that something mundane is a god, but rather devoting one's resources and energies and life to serving something that is not God. Whether or not one claims to believe in the biblical God is not the crucial point.

The crucial point is this: people devote themselves to all sorts of things. People treat all sorts of things as their religion. With regard to the question of violence, people kill and die for all sorts of things; there is no good reason to suppose that people are more inclined to kill for a god than for a flag, for a nation, for freedom, for free markets, for the socialist revolution, for access to oil and so on. In certain contexts, ideologies of jihad or the sacrificial atonement of Christ can lend themselves to violence. In other contexts, belief in the free market or in Greater Russia or in the United States as worldwide liberator is what releases killing energies. If the biblical critique of idolatry is on the mark, there is no essential difference between the two, between religious and secular causes. There is no religious/secular distinction in the Bible. In the Middle Ages, the religious/secular distinction was a distinction between two types of clergy; it meant nothing like what we mean by it now. The way we now use the religious/secular binary is a modern, Western invention; it does not simply respond to the nature of things.

## The Heart of the Matter

So why was this binary invented? It has to do with the separation of church power from civil power in the modern state. After the civil authorities triumphed over ecclesiasti-

cal authorities in early modern Europe, the church would be in charge of something essentially private called “religion,” and the state would be in charge of public, “secular” affairs. The history is a long and complicated one. What is important for our present purposes is to see how the religious/secular divide functions in our public discourse about violence. It serves to draw our attention toward certain types of practices—Islam, for example—and away from other types of practices, such as nationalism. Religion is the bogeyman for secular society, that against which we define ourselves. We have learned to tame religion, to put it in its proper, private place; they (Muslims, primarily) have not. We live in a publicly secular and therefore rational society; they have not learned to separate secular matters like politics from religion, and so they are prone to irrationality. We hope they will come to their senses and be more like us. In the meantime, we reserve the right periodically to bomb them into being more rational.

### ON THE WEB

William T. Cavanaugh talks about the myth of religious violence. [americamagazine.org/podcast](http://americamagazine.org/podcast)

The idea that religion causes violence, in other words, can be used to blind us in the West to our own forms of fanaticism and violence. When we label our own devotions as secular, we tend to treat them as if

they were not the subject of violence at all. We are endlessly fascinated by the violence supposedly hardwired into Iran's Shiite Islam; we prefer not to dwell on the Shah's 26-year reign of U.S.-supported secularist terror. We remember that the ayatollahs imposed an Islamic dress code when the Shah was ousted in 1979; we forget that the first shah imposed a secular dress code in 1924.

It must be repeated—though it should go without saying—that nothing justifies the violence done in the name of Islam or any other faith. My point is simply that nothing justifies violence done in the name of secular faiths either, and that there is no essential difference between the two kinds of faith. Both are based on pre-rational narratives of belonging and deliverance. A sound approach to violence avoids making sweeping statements about religion, as if we knew what that was, and adopts a more empirical, case by case approach, on a level playing field between religious and secular ideologies and practices. Wahhabist Islam will not escape scrutiny in examining the Chechen conflict, but neither will secular, Russian nationalism. Forms of evangelical Christianity may be relevant to American military adventures abroad, but more so are secular, Enlightenment forms of salvation narrative that fly under the dangerously ambiguous banner of “freedom.”

The myth that religion promotes violence depends on dividing the world up into us and them, the publicly secular and the publicly religious, the rational and the irrational. The irony is that violence feeds on such binaries. To do away with such binaries is one small step toward peace. **A**

# From Joplin to Boston

The spiritual trauma of public tragedy

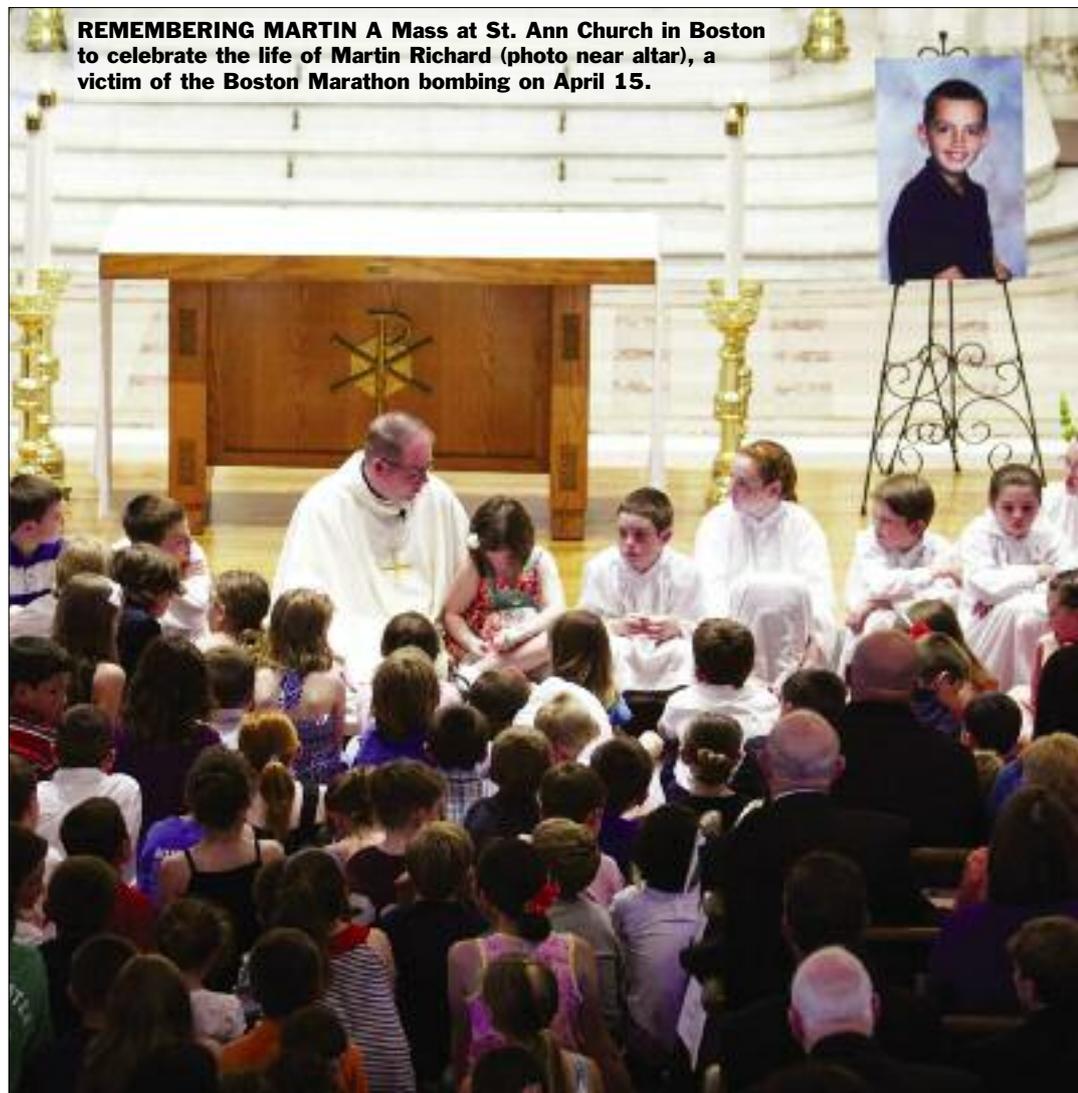
BY PATRICK FLEMING

Soon after the horrific shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., I attended a Christmas concert at our granddaughter's high school. Crowds at such gatherings usually do not bother me, but this evening I felt a low level of insistent anxiety throughout the performance, and when a piece of equipment fell with a muffled boom, I nearly jumped out of my chair. Since the Boston Marathon bombing, my jumpiness has been rekindled. I suspect that many other people feel the same as I do in situations where they once felt safe.

In the last few years, many places seem to have become emotionally linked with the tragedies that have dominated our news and assaulted our weary minds: Aurora, Colo.; Newtown, Conn.; Boston, Mass.; and Moore, Okla. Whether these traumas had human causes or were natural disasters, the psychological impact has been overwhelming for many. Survivors of previous trauma or abuse experience a resurgence of symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, especially increased fear, hypervigilance and depression. They may find themselves—like many Americans—riveted by the ongoing media accounts of these tragedies, sometimes in an obsessive fashion. Although survivors of previous trauma are most susceptible to such emo-

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**REMEMBERING MARTIN** A Mass at St. Ann Church in Boston to celebrate the life of Martin Richard (photo near altar), a victim of the Boston Marathon bombing on April 15.

tions, we all experience some degree of psychological struggle as wave after wave of traumatic news washes over us.

Traumatic events not only inflict psychological wounds, but spiritual injury and trauma as well. Throughout my years of counseling hundreds of survivors of various kinds of abuse and trauma, I have come to see that discernible spiritual scars are inflicted by trauma and that there is a definite need for a spiritual healing process alongside the psychological. When the mind and body are traumatized, the spirit and soul can feel shattered. Survivors of trauma and abuse struggle with despair and hopelessness; loss of life's meaning and purpose; reduction of trust in life and in God;

ONS PHOTO: GREGORY L. TRACY; THE PILOT

an inability to be mindful and in the present moment; a struggle to trust joy or feel gratitude; and either an addictive clinging to religion or a loss of faith altogether. Listening to my own soul, and to the souls of my clients, friends and family, I identify three primary areas of spiritual trauma: fear, shaken or broken trust, and struggles with meaning and hope.

The kind of fear I experienced at my granddaughters' high school, while understandable, can become insidious and can even become a spiritual illness, a sickness of the soul. Fear becomes a soul sickness when it becomes our basic stance in and against life. Fear drives us to hold on for dear life, to try to grasp and control even the uncontrollable. If we let fear control us, paralyze us and rob us of joy, peace, serenity, connection and joyful mingling and assembly, our very souls are constrained and constricted. If we stop doing what our soul desires and needs because of insistent fear, then we give the terrorists, abusers and shooters control over our lives—and our spirit is diminished.

Fear and the soul are antithetical to each other. Our soul is and desires for us freedom, openness, connection, vulnerability, oneness, letting go, living in the moment, transcendence and love—all spiritual characteristics that fear tries to steal from us. Fear says, "There is danger everywhere, so pull in, hole up, harden up, trust no one, build a fortress." Our soul says, "Trust, grow, keep your heart open, remain vulnerable, build a safe house; but be sure it has plenty of windows and doors to let in the light and fresh air." Our soul wants to lead us to the spiritual courage that does not let fear, or the purveyors of fear, prevail. I love this anonymous text I first heard at a 12-step meeting: "Fear knocked at the door; faith answered. No one was there."

Shaken or even broken trust is a related spiritual trauma created by these awful events. We ask, "Where was God?" when these things happen. How can I continue to trust in the goodness of life and the love and providence of God? How can I trust anyone when humans can be capable of such abuse, cruelty and evil as in Tucson, Aurora, Newtown, Boston and Cleveland? These questions shake us to the core. They can leave us feeling profoundly vulnerable, alone and lost in what appears to be a hostile world. It can feel like the once solid foundations of our lives have turned to sand and mud, and we are sinking in the muck, with nothing to trust or to believe in.

This in turn leads us to struggle with questions of meaning and purpose and pushes us into the valley of despair and loss of hope. In the face of such tragedy, the dreaded, circu-

lar and often unanswerable "Why?" questions consume and torment our minds and spirits. Followed soon by "What's the use?" "What can we believe in?" "What does it all mean anyway?" "Is there any hope?" These questions can leave us feeling helpless, alone, without a future and even de-souled.

Our mind tells us that if we can only find the answers to some of the existential questions raised by these traumatic events, then we will be all right. Some answers offered by

faith and spirituality can help to some degree, although fully satisfying answers often do not come. My own observations while counseling clients has led me to believe that the healing answer is really found in

certain kinds of personal experiences and the opening of our spiritual vision to see those experiences in ourselves and in other people. These are experiences of two kinds: 1) soul resilience and 2) the transcendence and ultimate triumph of love.

### **The Force of Love**

Soul resilience is based in the felt knowledge of a deep part of us that we call soul, which always remains whole, untouched, alive and seeking a pathway to healing and life. It is the consciousness that at our core there is a wellspring of energy, hope and purpose, that ultimately cannot be shattered, even by the worst of traumas. Although I have seen this soul resilience especially in clients who have survived and transcended abuse and trauma, it is a basic human, spiritual capacity. We all possess this inner spiritual resilience, this lifspring of soul that we can tap to carry us through and beyond our personal traumas and trials and those occurring in our society.

In each tragedy, we have seen this incredible human capacity for soul resilience: Representative Gabrielle Gifford's courageous recovery; the teachers of Newtown who sacrificed their lives to protect their students and the parents working for gun safety in memory of their children; the first responders and medical personnel in Boston who worked so quickly to save lives and the runners and survivors who weeks later ran the last mile of the marathon so they would triumph over violence and hate and finish the race; the three women in Cleveland who survived 10 years of horror to finally escape their captor. These survivors banded together to help each other to heal and their communities to recover. All of us can tap into this same resiliency of soul to overcome and heal from the spiritual trauma of these horrific events.

Our soul leads us to the second set of experiences, the

## **If we let fear control us and rob us of joy, peace, serenity, connection and joyful mingling and assembly, our very souls are constrained.**

transcendence and triumph of love, even in the face of these tragedies and in their very midst. Our soul can provide the spiritual vision to enable us to see that despite the apparent darkness, the light of love—whether we name it God or a force of the universe—still shines forth. Love is always present, even when we do not feel it. We are never alone in the darkness, although we feel lonely. Love is beyond, beneath, within and all around these traumatic events. Love is working within and against the darkness of these events to restore life, to bring healing, to give meaning and purpose to the seemingly senseless, to restore hope. Our soul yearns to show us this love and its triumph and its transcendent energy even in the midst of the most awful of events.

### Everyday Moments

Days after the story broke about the three women in Cleveland who were abducted and held as sexual slaves for 10 years, my own soul opened my eyes to see an example of both soul resilience and the triumph of love right before me. I was walking into my second floor office with a client—who has her own story of deeply wounding trauma—when I happened to glance out my window to the sidewalk leading from the small office building next door. The elderly psychiatrist who practices there was slowly walking backward down the sidewalk guiding his patient, who was paralyzed on his left side, apparently by a stroke, and was strug-

gling to make the short walk to his car. The patient’s daughter was steadying and holding her father from behind. The psychiatrist and the daughter patiently and gently helped the man into the car. They hugged and parted, and the psychiatrist returned to his office. My client and I stood there for a few minutes in awe-filled silence taking this in and then began our session. This scene has been repeated every week for the past year or more below my office window. The doctor and the daughter’s kindness and love and the man’s courage and determination touch and inspire me each time.

These moments of soul resilience and love are all around us every day, millions of times a day. They are rarely reported in the media; and yet they are, I believe, much more common than the moments of trauma, darkness or evil. They are so common that we fail to see them. Our sight is blinded by the glare of publicity for the dramatic tragedies. We have only to learn to see with the eyes of our soul to become conscious of these small miracles of kindness that surround us everyday. So when the next traumatic news story assaults your mind and spirit, remember to look within you to your soul and its amazing resiliency and to look around you for the many manifestations of love and kindness that are in your midst. Then hear your soul say to you, “Fear not, for you are not alone; despair not, for soul and love will overcome and will lead you through; trust and hope again; love, in time, will show you the way.” **A**

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# On the ‘Light of Faith’

## First responses to ‘Lumen Fidei’

America invited several writers, theologians and church leaders to respond to Pope Francis’ first encyclical, “Lumen Fidei,” “The Light of Faith.” Visit [americamagazine.org](http://americamagazine.org) for additional contributions.

### Knowing the One Whom We Love BY DREW CHRISTIANSEN

‘Lumen Fidei,’ Pope Francis said, would be an encyclical written “by four hands”—those of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI and his own. Much of the encyclical shows the thinking of Benedict: extensive appeal to the doctors of the church, a sacralizing of Hellenistic philosophy and a preoccupation with 19th-century atheism. With these come a concern for (unitary) truth as the object of faith, defense of the integrity of the deposit of faith, the ecclesial context of faith and the responsibility of the magisterium to guard the wholeness of faith against attrition over time.

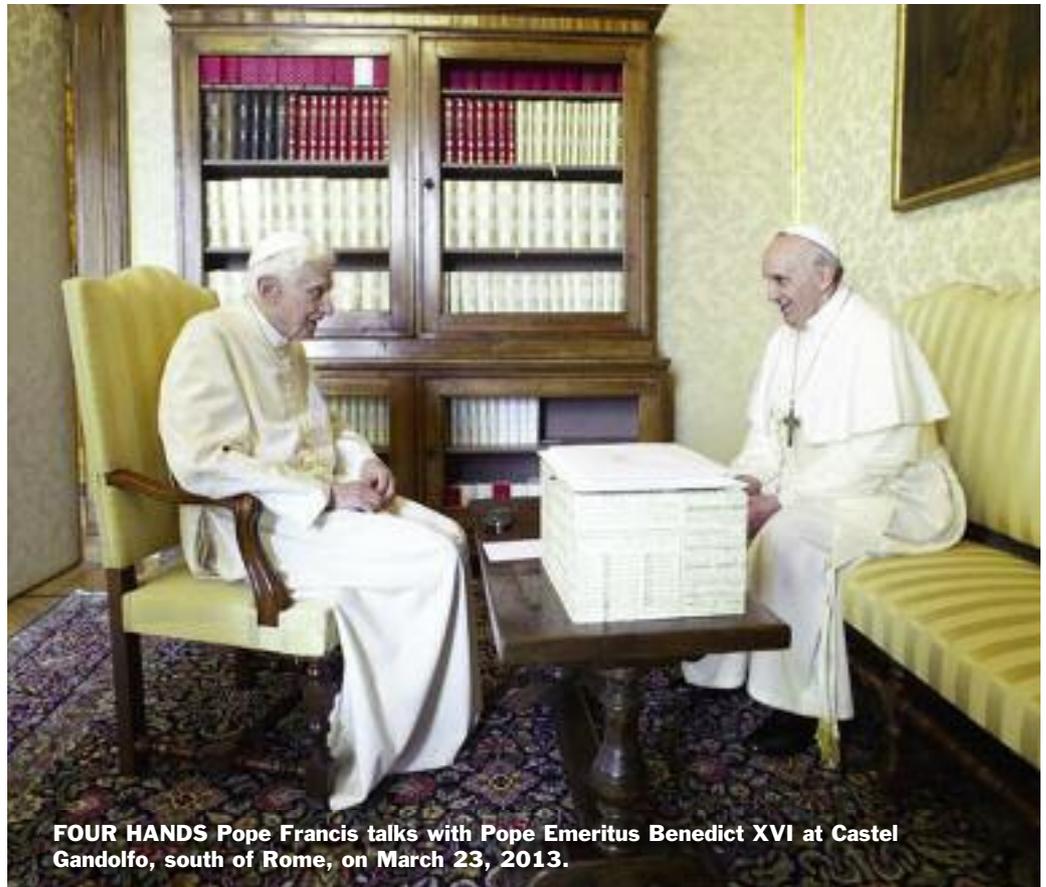
Naturally enough for a text begun by Benedict, the letter also touches a number of times on the modern antagonism between faith and reason. At the same time, there are splendidly positive passages on the human search for God and on the penetration of science by the light of faith.

With a bow to the religious sensibility of searchers who lack explicit faith, the letter recognizes that “religious man strives to see signs of God, in the daily experiences of life, in the cycle of the seasons, in the fruitfulness of the earth and in the movement of the cosmos” (No. 35). It continues, “To the extent that they are sincerely open to love and set out with whatever light they can find,

[searchers] are already, even without knowing it, on the path leading to faith.”

According to the letter, moreover, faith illumines the whole of life, including scientific inquiry. “Faith encourages the scientist to remain constantly open to reality in all its inexhaustible richness,” the popes write. “By stimulating wonder before the profound mystery of creation, faith broadens the horizons of reason, to shed greater light on the world which discloses itself to scientific investigation” (No. 34). In fundamental theology these dynamics propelling the advancement of science may be interpreted as manifestations of implicit faith apart from Christ. But when viewed with the eyes of faith by a believing scientist, like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., for example, they gain a Christic depth. It is to that greater depth of life lived in faith that the two popes want to draw our attention.

Except for one introductory passage in which Pope Francis speaks of Benedict’s preparation, it is more difficult to make out Francis’ own contribution. I suspect it includes



**FOUR HANDS** Pope Francis talks with Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI at Castel Gandolfo, south of Rome, on March 23, 2013.

PHOTO: REUTERS/OSSERVATORE ROMANO

elements of two chapters: Chapter 3, “I Delivered to You What I Also Received,” treats the transmission of faith; and Chapter 4, “God Prepares a City for Them,” treats the vivifying role of faith in family and society. To this reader’s consternation, however, the ecclesiology of the encyclical is not that of a servant church (or, as Pope Francis has described it, a church in the street where accidents happen), but of a church that guards the faith against error. The faithful would have benefitted here from some revision on Francis’ part in keeping with his homiletic teaching on the church’s vulnerable engagement in the world.

Pope Francis had indicated that he would fold the recommendations of the last synod of bishops on evangelization into this encyclical rather than issue a separate apostolic exhortation closing the last synod. Yet only three numbers (Nos. 37 to 39) touch on the sharing of faith; and these stress the communal, ecclesial nature of faith rather than the mission of evangelization. Most of Chapter 3, a baptismal catechesis, treats the transmission of faith in the sacrament. Chapter 4, on the church’s service to the world, hints of the present pope’s pastoral touch, especially the closing section (Nos. 56-57) on the consoling role of faith in suffering and dying.

This would have been the fourth encyclical prepared by Pope Benedict XVI. It completes a trilogy on the theological virtues. Since two of the previous three—“God Is Love,” on the mystery of God, and “Love in Truth,” on truth and love in the moral life—dealt with dimensions of Christian love, it should be no surprise that love plays a central role in this joint encyclical’s treatment of faith as well.

It is ultimately the love of God, which comes to us by grace, the encyclical affirms, that enables us to believe. Quoting St. Paul, “One believes with the heart” (Rom 10:10), the letter says: “Faith knows because it is tied to love, because love itself brings enlightenment.” It is love that opens the eyes of the mind. “Faith’s understanding is born,” it says, “when we receive the immense love of God which transforms us inwardly and enables us to see reality with new eyes” (No. 26). It is remarkable that Pope Benedict, for all his concern with the truth content of faith, not only must turn to love to seal his argument about faith, but that it is with his description of love’s knowledge that the argument of the encyclical is most convincing. God, the encyclical confesses, “is a subject who makes himself known and perceived in an interpersonal relationship” (No. 36).

In the end, the image of sight that was the starting point for “Light of Faith” proves insufficient to capture the fullness and vitality of faith. The biblical witness itself, the

popes remind us, speaks of faith as hearing and even as touch. The Gospel testifies to “what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life” (1 Jn 1:1; *LF* No. 31).

True love, the encyclical tells us, “unifies all the elements of our person and becomes a new light pointing the way to a great and fulfilled life” (No. 27). Appealing to all the senses and the whole person, the Gospel invites us to encounter Christ (No. 31). Love yields knowledge because it alone embraces the whole person. The love at the heart of faith is the love that unites us with Christ.

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## An Extraordinary Collaboration

BY ROBERT P. IMBELL

**A**t the end of the new encyclical, “Lumen Fidei,” the simple signature appears: “Franciscus.” Officially, it is thus the first encyclical of the new pope.

Yet things are not as simple as they appear. In the encyclical Francis writes: “[Benedict] himself had almost completed a first draft of an encyclical on faith. For this I am most deeply grateful to him, and as his brother in Christ I have taken up his fine work and added a few contributions of my

own” (No. 7). Thus we are witnesses to an extraordinary collaboration that might equally be called the Testament of Benedict and the Inaugural Address of Francis.

Those familiar with the three encyclicals and other

writings of Benedict will quickly recognize favorite themes and sensibilities. In many ways, this lovely exposition of Catholic faith can serve almost as a “Summa” of Pope Benedict’s magisterium, written in a lucid, inviting style. Indeed, the 60 succinct paragraphs beg to be pondered and prayed.

At the heart of the encyclical’s meditation on faith is this conviction: “In the love of God revealed in Jesus, faith perceives the foundation on which all reality and its final destiny rest” (No. 15). Christian faith arises from the loving encounter with Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Thus it engages the whole person: understanding, will and affections.

As a result, before being formulated in propositions (necessary though these be), faith is a deeply experiential reality that sets the person on a new way, enabling him or her to see reality in a new light, the light of Christ, and opening up a

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new horizon and mission. “Those who believe are transformed by the love to which they have opened their hearts in faith” (No. 21). They are being transformed by the indwelling of Christ in the Spirit.

The I of the believer becomes incorporated into Christ’s ecclesial body, the “I believe” of the individual situated in the “we believe” of the community. In a rich passage, the encyclical teaches: “This openness to the ecclesial ‘We’ reflects the openness of God’s own love, which is not only a relationship between the Father and the Son, between an ‘I’ and a ‘Thou,’ but it is also, in the Spirit, a ‘We,’ a communion of persons” (No. 39).

Moreover, the ecclesial communion experienced and enjoyed is not self-enclosed but impels us to our responsibilities for the common good. “[Faith’s] light does not simply brighten the interior of the Church, nor does it serve solely to build an eternal city in the hereafter; it helps us build our societies in such a way that they can journey towards a future of hope” (No. 51).

Rooted in the soil of Christ’s paschal mystery, faith does not deny or ignore the sufferings of the world. It seeks to bring the service of hope and love, especially to the most needy and abandoned. “Faith is not a light which scatters all darkness, but a lamp which guides our steps in the night and suffices for the journey” (No. 57).

“Lumen Fidei” offers challenging and enriching spiritual exercises for the contemporary church and the wider world. *Tolle, lege*—take it up and read!

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

## The Unity of Faith

BY CHRISTIANA Z. PEPPARD

When reading “The Light of Faith,” the first encyclical of Pope Francis’ pontificate, it can be tempting to speculate about what Pope Benedict XVI wrote and what Pope Francis added. But does authorship make a difference here?

Readers may observe that early references (to Nietzsche, Justin Martyr, Dante and Dostoevsky, among others) resonate with the style of Benedict XVI; likewise, key terms surface later that evoke themes of Francis’ early pontificate (relationships, the common good, economy and creation). But to interpret this document in this manner is problematic. Encyclicals are not fragmentary documents. Even when written by collaboration or committee, there is a unity of authoritative voice. The genre brooks no majority opinion and minority dissent.

Unity and univocality are important themes of “Lumen

Fidei,” which strives to affirm, “The light of faith is unique, since it is capable of illuminating every aspect of human existence” (No. 4). Cognizant of contemporary realities, it worries about the “crisis of truth in our age” and “relativism,” which present a fundamental challenge to the relevance of “the question of God” (No. 25). It notes the importance of the new evangelization; it specifies that science and faith are complementary: “By stimulating wonder before the profound mystery of creation, faith broadens the horizons of reason to shed greater light on the world which discloses itself to scientific investigation” (No. 34). Certainly these are all topics worthy of further conversation.

But the encyclical—both its authorship and its topic—prompts another question for me: What does it mean to speak univocally and universally about faith in a time when the global church is becoming conscious of its own internal diversity? Two issues are worthy of further exploration.

First, the encyclical views truth as a straightforward and univocal endeavor. In this view, truth is magisterial; through apostolic succession, “the magisterium ensures our contact with the primordial source and thus provides the certainty of attaining to the word of Christ in all its integrity” (No. 36). This is by no means a new claim. But it is noteworthy in light of ongoing conversations about the role and authority of theologians vis-à-vis the hierarchical magisterium.

Second, how is Catholic unity understood? Of course, “Lumen Fidei” explains that liturgy, sacraments, biblical witness, prayers and creed are how the church preserves and transmits the foundational claim: “The history of Jesus is the complete manifestation of God’s reliability” (No. 15). These features endure across space and time and are foundational sources of Catholic unity.

But what is the topography of unity in a global church? This is an important and complicated question. The church may be unified in faith, but it is not uniform in its constitution. How, then, is the diversity of human experience in a global, pluralistic church incorporated into—or omitted from—the univocal utterances of magisterial teaching? Such reflection is absent from “Lumen Fidei,” which offers affirmation of unity without delving into the church’s constitutive diversity. This is unfortunate, because unity is not necessarily reducible to uniformity.

Perhaps the plurality of the contemporary—and future—body of Christ will be addressed in other ways during Francis’ pontificate. But readers will not find it in “Lumen Fidei,” where Benedict and Francis speak with unity about the uniformity of faith.

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ON THE WEB  
Additional commentary  
on “The Light of Faith.”  
[americamagazine.org/light-faith](http://americamagazine.org/light-faith)

# Shelter From the Storm

An education in violence and the Gospel

BY RANDALL WOODARD

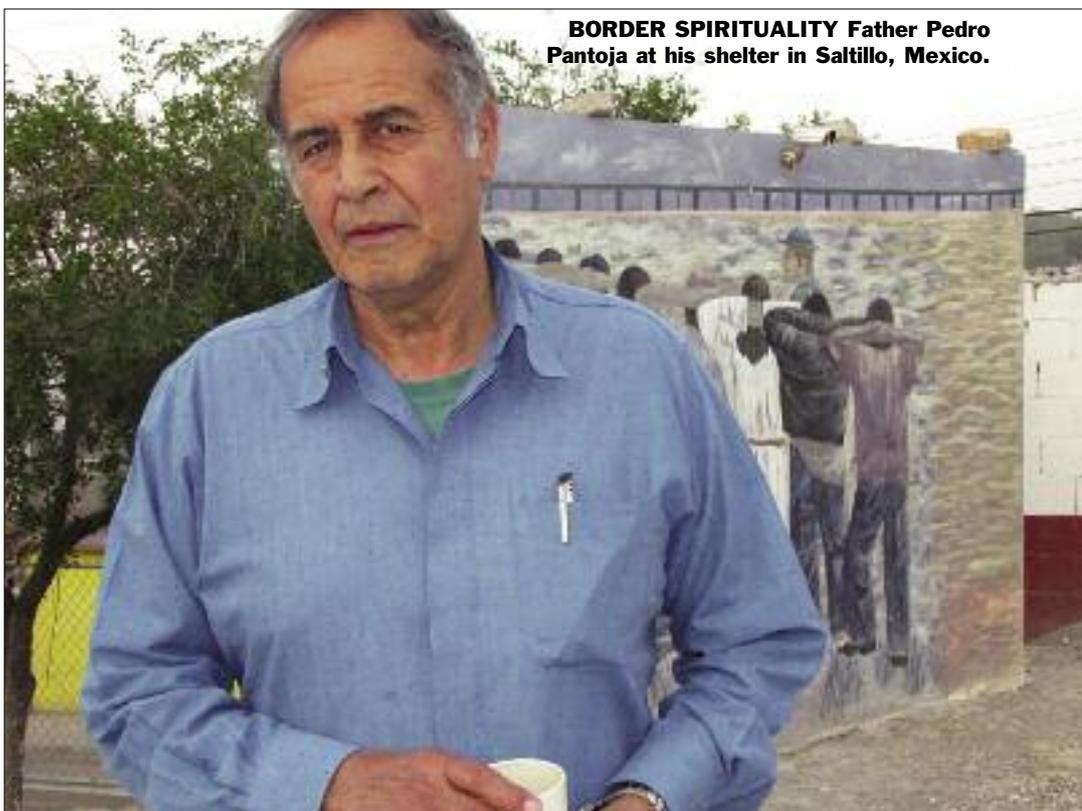
Father Pedro looked at me with saddened eyes. “One hundred seventy people dead, with a sledgehammer,” he explained. My Spanish was poor, but I understood what he said. I met Father Pedro Pantoja in July while traveling in northern Mexico with my pastor, Dan Kayajan, C.S.C. Meeting Father Pedro was like visiting a modern-day prophet. We sat together in a large room—a room later used to serve lunch to about 45 migrants from Central America who were making their way through northern Mexico, an area Father Pedro called the “territory of blood and death.” Here, Father Pedro and others serve many migrants seeking a new life in the United States.

That afternoon in Saltillo, Mexico, Father Pedro told the story of the 170 people whose lives were brutally and senselessly cut short last spring by the notorious gang, Los Zetas. The bodies of the Central American migrants—mothers, fathers, children and grandparents—were pulled from large dirt pits last April, leaving behind the evidence of a truly barbaric mass-murder.

Father Pedro shared eyewitness testimony from others who described how

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**BORDER SPIRITUALITY** Father Pedro Pantoja at his shelter in Saltillo, Mexico.

the men, women, children and elderly were abducted and then separated from one another to face different, cruel deaths. The men were taken to die by sport. They were forced to fight one another in gladiatorial-like death matches with sledgehammers. If they refused, they were shot. The women were raped and then murdered after being told they deserved to die because they were prostitutes. Small children were killed with acid, while the elderly were lined up and run over by the very buses they had hoped would take them to freedom in El Norte.

That afternoon, the men staying at the shelter shared nearly identical sto-

ries of poverty, fear and violence. Daniel, 38, left his wife and three children in Guatemala to search for work in Mexico or the United States. Although he and his wife both worked, the pay was so meager they could not afford to feed and clothe their children. He desperately wants to work in order to provide a basic standard of living for his family. Because of this he felt forced to leave them to find work that would pay a living wage.

Nelson fled Honduras after taking his wife and four children to a safe house. His brother and father had been murdered, while his sister was raped and murdered by the Zetas.

CNS PHOTO/DAVID AGREN

Their “crime” was not being able to pay the war tax levied by the Zetas against those in his village. “They gave me three days to pay or they would kill me,” he explained. “There are neighborhoods that are empty because people couldn’t pay the tax and were forced to flee.”

The desire to provide their families with basic necessities motivated these migrants to take on the enormous risks associated with the journey through Mexico, where an estimated 10,000 people are murdered each year. Additionally, the migrants have become a source of easy money for organized crime and gangs like the Zetas. Father Pedro estimated that about 12,000 people will be kidnapped this year and ransomed back to their already impoverished families after being tortured and abused. “Although the migrants are poor, they are still bait for the criminals,” he explained. “They are like merchandise, just a way to make money.” The danger

of violence on the way north is shocking—entire busloads are taken—but little is done about it. Many accuse law enforcement and government officials of complicity in the crimes.

At Casa del Migrante, Father Pedro and his group of volunteers provide a safe environment, hot food, showers, rest, basic social services and advice for migrants. People from the shelter protect the migrants from traffickers as they disembark from trains nearby and bring them back to rest and prepare for the last leg of the journey. Most migrants pass through Mexico on the roofs of trains. By the time they reach Saltillo, they are only about two hours from Texas and many are physically and emotionally exhausted.

Father Pedro told us about the numerous threats he has received because he runs the migrant shelter. Father Pedro, the volunteers and staff live in constant danger of death. When I walked into the shelter, a police officer patrolling the area demanded my identification and inquired about my business at the shelter. When gang members shot up the shelter last year, however, the officer seemed to disappear quickly, explained Father Pedro. Not only are people like Father Pedro vulnerable to the gangs and organized crime rings, they have also been mocked by their communities and even by those in the church, once being told it was a sin to help illegal migrants. When asked why he risks his life to carry on this ministry, Father Pedro offered a powerful response: “If we didn’t do it, we wouldn’t be faithful to the Gospel.”

His words have stuck with me. I struggle to develop a personal response to this crisis. Like many others, I can support Casa del Migrante or other places like it financially and with prayer. But there may be something more at stake. Although I do not feel I

have any power over immigration law, control over global economic markets that change human migration patterns or any way to stop the Zetas, I can re-evaluate my understanding of how to live the Gospel. Father Pedro opened his eyes to the situation of immeasurable suffering and abuse in his community and became actively engaged in

protecting and promoting the dignity of his migrant brothers and sisters.

Since I have returned from

Saltillo, I have become more aware of attitudes and prejudices held deeply within our society and secretly within my own heart. I have been forced to confront the idea that the commodification of human life is real, pervasive and horribly destructive. The migrants, because of their vulnerability, are seen as a target for abuse and a source of profit rather than persons with intrinsic value. So often we brand others as undeserving of our unconditional love, mercy and compassion because we refuse to understand their dignity and our connection to them as brothers and sisters.

As in the parable of the good Samaritan, Father Pedro and many others throughout the migrant trail in Mexico risk their lives to serve the vulnerable community passing through their midst. St. Paul writes, “Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). In our Christian lives, as we work to turn away from sin and follow the Gospel, let us remember that in so many ways, Nelson and Daniel are present in our midst. Returning from my brief journey through the territory of blood and death, I knew that I did not have to be in a different country to meet those who have been oppressed by injustice and violence, those who have been robbed of their basic dignity. May we rededicate ourselves to ending the grave injustice and violence in the world. **A**

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FILM | ROBERT E. LAUDER

## WOODY ALLEN'S WORLD

*The bleak, brilliant vision of 'Blue Jasmine'*

Years ago in these pages, Richard A. Blake, S.J., crowned Woody Allen as the most outstanding American film director then working in films. He even suggested that some day Allen might be proclaimed the finest American director ever. At the time, the evaluation may have seemed an exaggeration. These days, Blake would have plenty of evidence to support his case.

Allen has written and directed approximately 45 films, and though there was a brief period when he did not quite maintain the level of excel-

lence we had come to expect of him—I am thinking of such films as “The Curse of the Jade Scorpion” (2001), “Hollywood Ending” (2002), “Anything Else” (2003) and “Melinda and Melinda” (2004)—his abundant output includes an impressive number of exceptionally fine films. His best work includes “Annie Hall” (1979), “Manhattan” (1979), “Stardust Memories” (1980), “Zelig” (1983), “The Purple Rose of Cairo” (1985), “Hannah and Her Sisters” (1986), “Radio Days” (1987), “Crimes and Misdemeanors” (1989)—which I con-

sider his masterpiece—“Alice” (1990), “Match Point” (2005) and “Midnight in Paris” (2011), his biggest commercial success. In his latest film, **Blue Jasmine**, Allen continues to give evidence of his complete mastery of the medium of film while both surprising and delighting the viewer with an imagination that is insightful and fresh.

“Blue Jasmine” is bleak but brilliant. The plot is centered around the title character (played by Cate Blanchett), whose personality seems to have no center at all. In the course of the film we learn that she has changed her first name from Jeanette to Jasmine and added the name Blue because when she and her wheeling-and-dealing husband, Hal (Alec Baldwin), first met, Rodgers and Hart’s song “Blue Moon”



Cate Blanchett as Jasmine

was playing. Hart's opening lyrics could be taken as a description of Jasmine and eerily prophetic of her future: "Blue Moon/ You saw me standing alone,/ Without a dream in my heart,/ Without a love of my own."

We also discover that Jasmine has suffered a total breakdown after learning that her husband has been having multiple affairs and is leaving her to marry a teenage au pair. In a fit of anger, Jasmine, who has always had the ability to disregard anything that does not go along with her self-image or her vision of her future, finally faces her husband's thievery, and he ends up in jail.

After her breakdown, Jasmine, who has spent her married life mingling with Manhattan millionaires, leaves New York and visits her sister Ginger (Sally Hawkins), who lives in San Francisco in much less affluent surroundings. Adopted from two different sets of parents, the sisters had a sibling rivalry; Jasmine was their adoptive parents' favorite. Ginger tries to help her deeply wounded sister even though Ginger's divorce from Augie (Andrew Dice Clay) was precipitated to some extent by Jasmine's criticism of Ginger's choice in men and by Hal's dishonest dealings.

Jasmine has another chance at marriage when she meets Dwight (Peter Sarsgaard), a millionaire diplomat interested in entering politics and in the fact that Jasmine's good looks and ability to seem at home with those in the wealthiest social class will benefit his career. However, Jasmine's distorted version of reality thwarts this relationship, too.

Throughout the film Jasmine self-medicates with anti-depressants washed down with vodka. By the end of the movie Jasmine is on the brink of another total breakdown; her rupture with reality has led her into her own solipsistic world.

Both Allen and Blanchett have offered comments on Jasmine's woundedness. Allen says in the press materials

for the film: "[H]er story isn't just about economic deprivation, it's about a tragic flaw in her character that made her the instrument of her own demise.... She is someone who chose not to look too deeply at the source of her pleasure, her income, her security, and because of that paid a terrific price."

Blanchett has said: "We all to a certain degree see what we want to see in the people who we are surrounded by and certainly in ourselves. It's very, very difficult for a human being to truly look at themselves in the mirror, to truly see who we are, warts and all—and it's very difficult to change. In the end, Jasmine is a product of all the delusion and evasion that we all have to some degree, but as time has passed she's become deluded on an epic scale."

Every member of the cast in "Blue Jasmine" is exceptionally good, but Blanchett is something special. That she is an outstanding actress is obvious in this film.

Allen has made a habit of working with some outstanding actresses, like Meryl Streep, Diane Keaton, Geraldine Page, Mia Farrow, Mira Sorvino, Dianne Wiest and Scarlett Johansson. Four Academy Awards were won by actresses directed by Allen:

Diane Keaton ("Annie Hall," 1977), Mira Sorvino ("Mighty Aphrodite," 1995) and two by Dianne Wiest ("Hannah and Her Sisters," 1986, and "Bullets Over Broadway," 1994).

Allen is known for giving what seems like little direction and for encouraging performers to be creative and even to change lines if they feel uncomfortable with what he has written. Blanchett, who likes to receive suggestions from a director, has said she found Woody's approach difficult at first, but she has turned in a performance worthy of an Academy Award.

Yet one wonders: If Allen is so laid

back in dealing with actors, how does the magic happen? It might be that he has written wonderful parts in which talented actors can shine forth. It also might be that Allen casts his films very carefully, perhaps even having a particular actress in mind when he is writing. It might be part of the mystery of artistic creation that even artists do not fully understand.

Allen's films are filled with psychological insights, sometimes played for laughs, sometimes played more seriously. There are also provocative insights into morality. As an astute observer of the human condition, Allen, an avowed atheist, remains very sympathetic toward his characters (witness the ending of "Deconstructing Harry," 1997). Nevertheless, he depicts moral failings honestly. Though in interviews Allen denies that there is an objective morality or anything resembling the natural law, and certainly no divine reward or punishment beyond the grave, his films suggest that there are people who act not only foolishly but immorally, and that true evil exists. I think of Monk

(Danny Aiello) in "The Purple Rose of Cairo," 1985; Judah Rosenthal (Martin Landau) in "Crimes and Misdemeanors,"

1989; Doug Tate (Jonathan Rhys Meyers) in "Match Point," 2005; and others.

Although Allen may already have won a place in the pantheon of such great American directors as Orson Welles, John Ford, Frank Capra, Howard Hawks and William Wyler, there is no sign that he is resting on his laurels. Word is that Allen is spending this summer in the south of France making his next film.

#### ON THE WEB

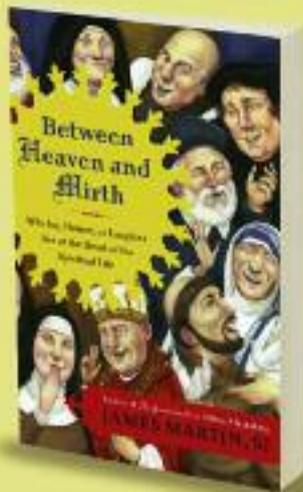
Richard A. Blake, S.J.,  
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**REV. ROBERT E. LAUDER** is professor of philosophy at St. John's University in New York. His most recent book is *Love and Hope: Pope Benedict's Spirituality of Communion* (Resurrection Press).

# From *New York Times* bestselling author James Martin, SJ. . .

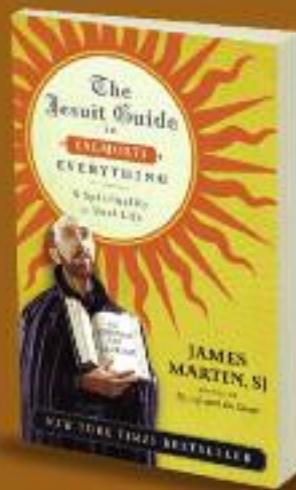
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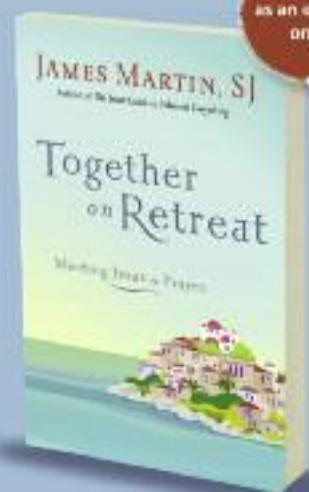
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## FINDING MELVILLE AT WOODLAWN

**O**n a sunny Saturday morning not long ago, I set out early for Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx. This may seem an odd way to spend one's day off, but, truth be told, I find cemeteries strangely consoling. Perhaps this comes of being raised Catholic, taught from early on that the dead do not stay dead, which makes the cemetery a pleasant stop along the road to eternity.

It also comes of my childhood memories associated with the graveyard. Every Sunday, my mother would drive our family to St. Mary's Cemetery to visit the graves of our grandmother and our father. My grandfather, an Italian immigrant with a passion for gardening, would labor around the big family stone, mulching the soil, planting geraniums, pruning the roses and evergreens. My little brother and I would fill the metal watering can from one of the spigots that studded the cemetery road, tote it back to the grave and water the thirsty plants. This was our contribution to the business of caring for the dead. It made us feel necessary and useful. Afterward we would wander among the tombstones, reading the names of strangers and inventing stories about them. Occasionally, we would run races, choosing a prominent stone as "home," a safe haven that protected us from the invisible "It" we imagined pursuing us. Even the word *graveyard* suggested the place's paradox. For us, St. Mary's was a space for serious play, a proving ground where we tested the limits of human life and faced the brute fact of mortality.

My reason for heading to

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ANGELA ALAIMO O'DONNELL is a poet, professor and associate director of the Curran Center for American Catholic Studies at Fordham University, New York.

Woodlawn this past Saturday was not to visit family, but to see a friend—Herman Melville. It might seem presumptuous to regard a celebrated 19th-century American novelist so familiarly, but reading a great writer across the decades is a means of conducting conversation with him and, inevitably, leads to intimacy. As a long-time English professor, I have taught Melville's masterpiece, *Moby-Dick*, to thousands of students, (re)read it some 50 times and written a score of poems and a play inspired by the book. Its language and rhythms are inscribed in my mind, carved in my heart, and have formed my imagination.

Melville's mighty book shares a key quality with the work of our finest American Catholic writers, including Flannery O'Connor: it is God-haunted. Melville's infamous Ahab is a man in search of meaning. His rage is the rage of every human being who has felt wronged by God, and his revenge is both heretical and heroic. Here I think of O'Connor's character Ruby Turpin, in the short story "Revelation." As she enacts the evening ritual of hosing down her prize hogs, Mrs. Turpin challenges God for a perceived insult she has suffered, bellowing at last, "Who do you think you are?" O'Connor once said of Ruby, "You got to be a very big woman to shout at the Lord across a hogpen." Ahab too is larger than life and does his share of shouting. His quarrel with God is Melville's as surely as Ruby's is

O'Connor's, all four demanding enlightenment in language as grand as it is ungodly.

It seems fitting to visit a God-haunted man in a God-haunted place, and, happily, I was accompanied in my graveyard pilgrimage by some fellow friends of Melville. As we wended our way among the rows of stones, I was struck by the similarities among my three companions: all are fiction writers, all are authors of historical novels (a genre dedicated to the resurrection of the past), and all are Irish Catholics. As a poet, an avid reader rather than writer of novels and an Italian Catholic, I was the odd woman out. Yet our common reverence for the ties that bind us to the dead and our (un)common devotion

It seems fitting to visit a God-haunted man in a God-haunted place.



to Melville's work made a community of us that morning. Our visit was ritual homage to a mortal man whose words had achieved immortality, fulfilling the deepest desire of every writer.

At last we reached the graveside. Each of us had brought a small token and placed it beside the offerings made by previous pilgrims. At the behest of my friends, I recited a poem I had written after my first visit to his grave, "St. Melville." (This was my adult version of emptying the metal watering can. I felt necessary and useful.) Then we said our farewells, bowed in deference to our friend and parted company, making our way back to our lives—and to our words—awaiting us beyond the graveyard gates.

## ACROSS GREAT DIVIDES

### HOPE SINGS, SO BEAUTIFUL Graced Encounters Across The Color Line

By Christopher Pramuk  
Liturgical Press. 224p \$19.95

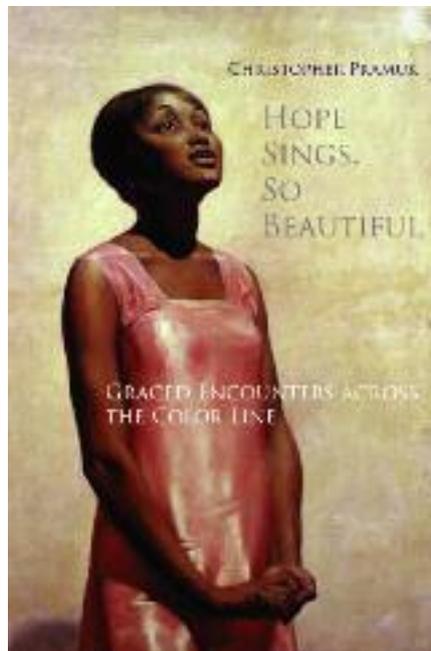
As everyone was scrambling for information after the bombing at the Boston Marathon, CNN announced that “a dark-skinned individual” was seen leaving the area. Recently, in an article on wealth in the United States, The New York Times reported that white families are about six times as wealthy as black and Hispanic families. There is a color line. It divides people and is an obstacle to social justice. Christopher Pramuk, a theology professor at Xavier University in Cincinnati, invites us to face the complexities of race in the United States with truthfulness and hope.

In *Hope Sings, So Beautiful*, Pramuk expresses hope’s power to resist the polarizing rhetoric that so often imprisons discussions of race and invites fresh thinking and fruitful dialogue in the face of it.

This book, well written and deep, is spiritual reading. It engages one’s spirit and calls the reader to reflection and meditation. Drawing on the writings of a variety of poets and theologians, the author raises up a “most daring and revolutionary concept... God is love” as the foundation for a spirituality on the ground that crosses race lines and social locations and facilitates insight into worlds hidden from provincial and conventional thought. Awareness of God helps us guard against the “constant threat of error” that can turn a person’s limited perspective into an idol or a prison.

The book amplifies the tensions of human experience and reflects on them theologically. Christ’s body is

both united and broken. While Jesus heals blindness, he does not spare us the tension of experiencing the process. Though everyone stands in a social location, we can visit and be marked by other similar locations. Pramuk admits: “Whiteness is and is not my point of entry.” He and his wife



adopted two children from Haiti, and he says, “The color line passes right through our family.” The problem of racial justice is more personal when you have some “skin in the game.” In many ways, he draws our attention to the flesh and blood reality of the incarnation. The children of adoption are transformed and transforming.

Pramuk introduces us to women and men of vision and imagination. We meet Etty Hillesum, a young Jewish woman murdered at Auschwitz whose diaries reveal God in images of warmth, fleshiness and femininity. Pramuk fuses a connection between the poetry of Thomas Merton and the lyrics of Stevie

Wonder that take us out of our comfort zones into suffering and the hope of a world made new. Both resist commodification and alienation and call us to human solidarity.

M. Shawn Copeland’s story of a Somali woman, taunted by a crowd as she gave birth to a child unassisted along the side of a road in Italy, reminds us of Christ who was taunted as he carried the cross and drew this woman and all despised bodies to himself. Billie Holiday’s song “Strange Fruit” pushes the margins of white consciousness and links the realities of lynching and crucifixion. Between Good Friday and Easter, the first disciples experienced the crucifixion as lynching, a scandal of senseless suffering and death. The religious imagination bears hope where despair is warranted, but it is not fantasy that is untethered to history, memory and experience.

Where do we stand today? Hurricane Katrina continues to stand out as evidence that the color line remains. The privileged white barkers of the airwaves clutched it as they took an opportunity to kick the vulnerable and charge that they were at fault for the problems of New Orleans and of race itself. The problem of racism in the United States is not only a black or brown problem arising from destructive behaviors in the ghetto but a crisis woven into the very fabric of civilization.

Citing Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the African-American theologian Howard Thurman, Pramuk reminds us that the movement toward racial justice and integration is a spiritual movement rooted in a biblical vision of the dignity of all life within the “inter-related structure of all reality.”

So how do we respond? Radical problems require radical responses. In conversation with Pramuk, William Hart McNichols, a priest and iconographer who lives outside of Taos, N.M., reminds us that the Western mind investigates and analyzes, but the

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Indian mind sits in and with mystery. Perhaps we are called to do what Jesus did—"wait in the quietness for some centering moment that will redefine, reshape and refocus our lives." Pramuk offers the witness of his own radical and prophetic efforts to create cross-racial solidarity in a racist culture by building a multiracial family. Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A., believed Catholicism had the power to forge empathetic relationships across the color line. This is not work left to individuals; it takes a church. How can the church make it more possible for people to cross the color line? The spirit of Catholic Action, "see, judge, act," is relevant here.

The first step is repentance. We have maintained segregated parish

boundaries. In conversations about parish and diocesan reorganization today, is racial solidarity a consideration? Pramuk reminds us that the church is "called to a radically inclusive way of being in the world because of who God is!" St. Francis heard the command, "Repair my church." How do we repair the structures of church and society to help people move beyond racist behaviors? Pramuk suggests that in this regard we suffer from a poverty of imagination. The quest for racial solidarity needs to be pursued in thought, word and deed.

**ANTHONY J. POGORELC, S.S.**, is a research fellow at the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.

PETER WOOD

## HAUNTED BY THE RING

### THE GOOD SON

**The Life of Ray  
 "Boom Boom" Mancini**

By Mark Kriegel  
 Simon & Schuster. 336p \$15.99

Boxing is the best friend a writer ever had. Despite its squalid reputation and moral haziness, it has continued to inspire memorable prose by many gifted writers—George Plimpton, Budd Schulberg, Joyce Carol Oates, Robert Lipsyte, A. J. Liebling, David Remnick and Wilfrid Sheed. That's because boxing is a sport that allows an angry young man to rise out of his own smoldering personal slum to become victorious.

Prizefighters are a colorful tribe. Above—or below—all other athletes,

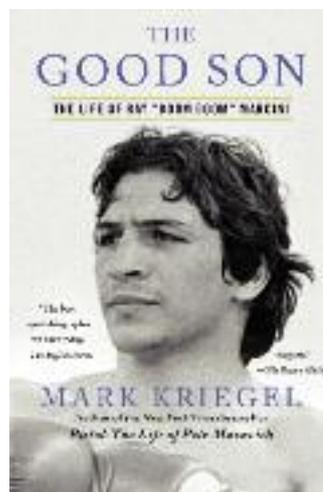
prizefighters are a driven lot.

But the boxing world has never known anything quite like Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini. His charisma went far beyond the boxing ring, and the media reveled not only in the thrill of his success but in the exciting personality of a champion whose appeal transcended the public abhorrence of such a violent sport.

Until it all came crashing down in heartbreak and tragedy.

*The Good Son*, by Mark Kriegel, tells the story of young Ray, who grew up idolizing

his father, Lenny, a lightweight boxer in the 1940s who was on the cusp of winning a world championship when duty called him to World War II. While Lenny continued his boxing career after the war, the shrapnel



implanted in his body by a German mortar shell ensured that he would never reach his championship dream.

The idea of his father's thwarted boxing career always burned red hot in Ray's mind. A grisly black-and-white photo of his father following a fight, eye swollen shut, mouth bloodied and bruised, exhausted in victory, would epitomize for him heroism, pride and honor.

"That picture was beautiful, it's all I ever wanted to be," Kriegel quotes Mancini as he recounts how winning the championship became his *raison d'être*. Devoted to his father's thwarted dream, Ray became a professional boxer and lived the same bare-knuckle life as his father on the rough streets of Youngstown, Ohio. The battered and beaten city carved his personality as much as his battered and beaten father had. But his will to win was stronger than any geographical location or physical disability. Ray turned his back on Youngstown's world of Mafia-influenced crime, where over a 10-year period 82 car bombings occurred. Fueled by staggering levels of unemployment as the local mills failed, Youngstown earned nicknames in the national press like "Murdertown" and "Crimetown USA."

While Lenny had fought out of hunger and poverty, Ray fought out of love and devotion—to his dad.

The young Mancini followed his older brother, also named Lenny, to the Youngstown Navy Reserve gymnasium, walked up to trainer Eddie Sullivan and told him plainly, "Mr. Sullivan, one day I'm going to be the best fighter you ever had."

Kriegel juxtaposes Ray's life with that of his brother, who succumbed to a life of crime. The circumstances remain murky decades later, but ultimately crime is what led to Lenny's death. He was shot in the back of the head in a hotel room. It would be the first death, but not the only one, that affected Ray's burgeoning professional career.

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*The homilies will be posted two weeks prior to these scheduled Sundays:*

**AUGUST 4**  
Luke 12:13–21  
*Possessions do not guarantee life.*

**SEPTEMBER 1**  
Luke 14:1,7–14  
*Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*

**SEPTEMBER 29**  
Luke 16:19–31  
*Parable of the rich man and Lazarus.*

**OCTOBER 13**  
Luke 17:11–19  
*Cure of the 10 lepers.*



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At the age of 20, after 20 pro fights, Ray challenged the legendary Alexis Argüello for the World Boxing Council lightweight crown. He fought bravely, too bravely, and lost a brutal and bloody 14-round war.

But Ray, handsome and articulate, remained a star in the making. He possessed all of the virtues needed and admired. It wasn't long before he was being featured on nationally televised fight cards. He was the all-American kid from the forgotten steel city of Youngstown, the insatiable brawler and battler.

Ray soon got his second title shot, and he wouldn't let this one pass him by. He KO'd World Boxing Association titleholder Arturo Frias at 2:54 of the first round to become the champion he was destined to be.

After making one title defense, Ray was on top of the world. But he never could have imagined the way his life would change following his

next title defense against an obscure South Korean opponent named Duk Koo Kim.

Kriegel explains how it all came apart on Nov. 13, 1982, in their brutal battle at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas. Duk Koo Kim went down in the 14th round after absorbing 44 unanswered punches, never regained consciousness and died four days later. Three months later, Kim's despondent mother took her own life. The deaths would haunt Ray and ruin his carefully crafted image, suddenly transforming boxing's all-American boy into a pariah.

Surprisingly, Mancini was back in the ring just three months later in a non-title fight, but he fought without his signature aggression and power. He won a decision, then stopped undefeated challenger Orlando Romero. He fought another non-title contest, and then KO'd Bobby Chacon in January 1984, stopping him in three rounds. It would be the last win of Ray's career.

Kriegel describes how Mancini ultimately lost his title to Livingstone Bramble in his next fight, the fateful moment again proving to be the 14th round.

Mancini would later mount a brave but futile effort to regain his title against Bramble in Buffalo, N.Y. The immediate result of that bout was an overnight stay at a hospital and 71 stitches around his eye.

In 1992, after being knocked out by Greg Haugen, Mancini retired, leaving a record of 29-5, with 23 knockouts.

But retirement for a 24-year-old ex-athlete is problematic. The Rev. Tim O'Neill, Ray's confidant throughout his career, understood his new dilemma: the shelf-life of a professional boxer is extremely short. "This wasn't the normal sense of loss brought on by an athlete's retirement.

Rather, it was an acknowledgement, at only 24 years old, that he had already played out the role of a lifetime. It was an existential dilemma, a question of mortality." Father O'Neill was brutally honest, telling Ray: "You accomplished your lifelong dream at a very young age. Everything else from here on will be anticlimactic." It was something Ray would have to live with. "Nothing ever will give me that same feeling," he said of boxing.

While Kriegel's book continues through the end of Ray's career, the culmination of the story is the touching meeting between Mancini and Jiwan Kim, Duk Koo's son, who was born after his father's death. Ray carried an unbearable load of guilt for Kim's death and its effect on his family. But by meeting each other, both Mancini and Jiwan were able to find much needed closure and healing.

There is an undeniable jolt to watching violence in the ring, an almost electrical charge composed of equal parts beauty and savagery, and it can stir the poet in a talented writer like Mark Kriegel.

The history of boxing is wonderfully artful and woefully gruesome. Kriegel brings beautiful prose to this ugly sport. Poetry meets pugilism, eloquence meets brutality and brains meet brawn.

Joyce Carol Oates once said, "For all its shortcomings and danger, the ring is a perfect kind of sanctuary, a precious counter-world to the chaotic world that exists outside of it. The ring is less verbally brutal, less economically unfair and less politically abusive."

*The Good Son* tells an unforgettable story of tragedy and triumph, heart-break and inspiration, fathers and sons.

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TOM PULEO

## HE'S NO HERO, IT'S UNDERSTOOD

### BRUCE

By Peter Ames Carlin  
Touchstone. 512p \$28

Bruce Springsteen once said that countries, like people, can lose the best of themselves. Along the way he has also claimed to be nonpolitical, a Democrat, scared of his myth, an attention whore, vain, clueless, restless, monogamous, horny, strong, weak, drunk, sober smart dumb and not keeping track.

In other words, he is a walking, stage-strutting, backstage-hiding contradiction who sheds artistic skin faster than Dylan and presents a moving—but, come on, fairly simple—target to any biographer who can shoot a little.

So why do we have multiple top-shelf works on Bob Dylan and not one on his only (living) American peer? Someone should ask Peter Ames Carlin, whose best-selling 2012 biography, *Bruce*, left us with more dangling string than a Pete Townshend Rickenbacker.

Carlin's book arrived on the hype of Springsteen's first-time-ever cooperation with a biographer. But if access equaled insight, then who would get backstage passes? In fairness to Carlin—a former *People Magazine* writer who has written biographies of Paul McCartney and Brian Wilson—*Bruce* is a capably written primer for anyone new to Springsteen or recently roused from a 40-year pop-culture coma.

Beyond that, *Bruce* is a missed opportunity, the literary equivalent of David Sancious' 1974 exit from the E Street Band. Carlin rarely takes over the story to tell us what this guy is really all about. Among the gaps is Springsteen's political transformation from self-conscious waif who left "Roulette"—a brilliant early '80s song about Three Mile Island—off an

album because he didn't trust his civic voice to becoming a willing campaigner for both John Kerry and Barack Obama.

After Kerry's 2004 loss to Bush, wasn't it Springsteen who in "Livin' in the Future" sang of personal regret? "I got all damaged and undone/ My ship Liberty sailed away/ on a blood-red horizon/ The groundskeeper opened the gates/ and let the wild dogs run."

Wasn't it Springsteen—on that same 2007 album, "Magic"—who preached about President Bush's wars of choice: "We don't measure the blood we've drawn anymore/ We just stack the bodies outside the door"?

How does Springsteen square those words with his ongoing bromance with drone-strike Obama? Does Springsteen, the man who professes to hate hero worship, need a hero? Is this Bruce again circling back to his childhood—something he's talked openly about with his shrink and a busload of writers? Then synthesize the stuff and tell us something.

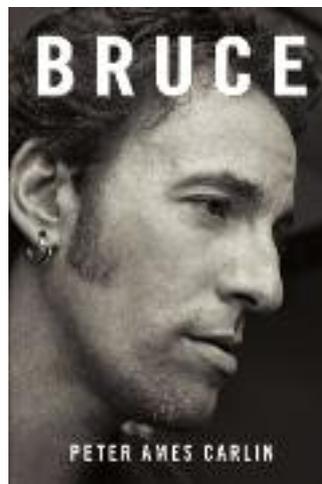
Springsteen—by any rational account a genuine American hero—has never been well served by his bottomless well of fawning press. Everything the guy does is ground-breaking and transcendent. He never misfires, never strikes a false note. Don't we need a skilled biographer to stage a critical intervention?

Where's Carlin in his analysis of "American Skin (41 Shots)"—Springsteen's bravest song of recent vintage, written after the 1999 police shooting death of the unarmed Amadou Diallo outside a Bronx apart-

ment building? Carlin is so quick to defend Springsteen from the city police union that threatened to pull security from concerts at Madison Square Garden that he forgets to tell us Bruce's take on the art, on the song, a brilliant meditation on skin color, on the veil of racism through which even the best of us view Michael Harrington's *Other America*: "You can get killed just for livin' in/ your American skin."

Carlin's book does contain some nuggets of new and insightful material—including anecdotes about Springsteen's Jersey childhood, the artist's thoughts of suicide, his decades of psychotherapy and the antidepressants he began taking in 2003. But two thirds of the book's 467 pages cover Springsteen's life through 1988 (Springsteen recorded his first album in 1973). Then Carlin races through all the rest, including Bruce's political evolution.

Another question: What about the infidelity lawsuit *The New York Post*



splashed on its cover in 2009? Okay, forget *The Post*. What about Springsteen's second wife, Patti Scialfa, who did not grant Carlin an interview, and the couple's marriage in general? Wasn't it Springsteen—on the cusp of 40 and middle-age—who ventured into those same dark rooms in his 1988 divorce album "Tunnel

of Love"? "Then the lights go out and it's just the three of us/ You me and all that stuff we're so scared of."

Books about Springsteen are legion, and few worth the time. Dave Marsh—a trenchant rock critic married to one of Springsteen's co-handlers—wrote two bestsellers, *Born to Run* (1979) and *Glory Days* (1987). Both works, though ultimately

deemed hagiographies, are essential reading. Another gem is Eric Alterman's *It Ain't No Sin to Be Glad You're Alive: The Promise of Bruce Springsteen*, a 1998 appreciation and mini-classic.

To that short shelf I would add Clinton Heylin's 2013 biography, *E Street Shuffle: The Glory Days of Bruce Springsteen and The E Street Band*. Heylin—best known for his books on Dylan—burrowed deep under the Springsteen facade, showing us the artist's obsessive-compulsive streak and other workaday instincts that ill serve even the best-intentioned. For the years he covered anyway, Heylin puts Carlin's work to shame.

It will likely take an Alterman or a Heylin to pen the definitive biography of Springsteen, a man whose myth hardened long ago. The chisel is still there for the taking.

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**TOM PULEO** is an adjunct professor of journalism at Central Connecticut State University and a former staff writer at *The Hartford Courant*.

## REPLY ALL

### Godly Lives

Re "Christian Complicity" (6/17): Stephen Bullivant has a very interesting point about our complicity in alienating unbelievers, but the problem is much deeper. The whole church, top down, needs to see faith as a transforming journey through life and see all the challenges we face as opportunities to follow the example of Jesus. Jesus didn't evangelize by defining doctrines; he lived a life of love, compassion and mercy toward the least in his society.

If we Christians worked on transforming ourselves and our communities to opt for the poor and broken among us, I guarantee the unbelievers would see this Godliness and be drawn to explore it.

ELAINE BERNINGER  
*Cleves, Ohio*

### Faith and Science

The photo accompanying "Christian Complicity" shows a young man wearing a t-shirt emblazoned with the words, "Atheists: In Science We Trust." My response as a Christian: "I also trust in science. But science does not have all the answers." Science cannot explain why we are here on earth or what our final destiny might be. Science cannot provide a basis for moral or ethical behavior.

Stephen Bullivant is correct in cautioning Christians not to use the Bible as science; but unlike him, I am more concerned with the mockery of religion by atheists. Modern media—movies, television, music—use every opportunity to belittle those who hold religious beliefs of any kind.

WILLIAM COONEY  
*Philadelphia, Pa.*

### Know Your Limits

In "The Land of the Gerasenes" (5/27), James Martin, S.J., asks, "What is the best way to deal with emotionally unstable people?"

Know your limits. Know what you can handle and when to say "enough" and step back. Know your limits as a clinician. Know you will occasionally get the F-bomb, no matter how hard you try to help. Know that you don't know all there is to know about that person in front of you. Take time to listen, and then do whatever you can to make a referral to someone who can help that person and be willing to follow up.

Ultimately though, the times I really helped someone were the times I got out of the driver's seat and let God work through me. Often, after the fact, I don't even remember what it was that I said that was so helpful—a great ego-deflator and a great way to live one's priesthood.

(REV.) GEORGE STAMM  
*Chippewa Falls, Wis.*

### Worse Than Death

Re "Life, Not Death" (Editorial, 5/20): I am no believer in the death penalty but rather a kind of "devil's advocate," trying for many years to stimulate the neglected but critical other half of the issue: What is the alternative?

"Life without parole" is the usual answer, especially for serious cases. The authors quote Pope John Paul II saying that punishment should offer the offender "an incentive and help to change his or her behavior and be rehabilitated." What incentive remains for those serving life without parole? Where is the "hope" that is so essential to human dignity? Can we ignore the question of whether there are things worse than death? In "The Bad Thief" (*Am.* 12/6/04), Jens Soering wrote, "But we lifers, we are the dead. Our executions may be stretched out over four or five decades, but in the end, life without parole produces exactly the same result as lethal injection: 127,677 human beings killed by their government."

A possible Band-Aid to the dilemma could be abolishing both the death

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penalty and life imprisonment. This has been done by Mexico and other countries. Maximum sentences of about 30 years would restore that element of hope and (hopefully) some chance of rehabilitation.

(REV.) JOHN KOELSCH  
Jerome, Idaho

### Too Soon?

I am writing to express my surprise and sadness after reading, "The Divided Kingdom," by James Hanvey, S.J. (5/20). One does not have to embrace Margaret Thatcher's political and economic philosophies in order to recognize that she had a remarkable career as a public servant and important national leader of the free world. Father Hanvey clearly had difficulty with that recognition and allowed his unbridled contempt for her political achievements to run throughout his article.

Your readers have come to expect the highest standards of professional judgment and Christian sentiment by your editors and contributors. They also expect at least a modicum of

restraint against criticizing an honored and honorable person who can no longer defend herself. You have done a clear disservice by attacking the legacy of a (three-time) democratically elected leader who so recently passed away.

JERRY BOWERS  
Elk Grove, Calif.

### Alternative Model

Re "Just Economics" (5/6): One way to respond to Stacie Beck's critique of "wealth redistribution" is to look at different economic systems. An economic system is the way a society distributes its resources to its citizens. In our present system of corporate capitalism we channel rewards (profit) to those who have invested money and pay those who invest labor as little as possible.

A possible alternative to this system is the co-operative model in which workers are owners and reap the profits of the business. This model accounts for the prosperity of some third-world countries. The micro-loan system works on a co-operative model.

MARY CASPER  
Bailey, Colo.

### Theological Issues

Neither "Just Economics" nor the letters in reply (State of the Question, 6/17) deal with two fundamental theological issues.

Number one: What constitutes a moral claim to wealth? Our society tends to equate a legal acquisition with a moral claim. Is that theologically defensible? Should the wealth be going to those making a positive contribution to society or to those skilled at acquisition? Are the rich acquiring more wealth not because they are contributing more but because they largely control the distribution?

Number two: How about a theology of ownership? Jesus said, "Woe to you rich!" Is the possession of great wealth in itself an evil? Or is there an obligation of stewardship that goes along with possession of wealth? Might taxation be used as a means of encouraging that stewardship?

Let's have a serious discussion of these issues.

JOSEPH H. WESSLING  
Cincinnati, Ohio

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## f STATUS UPDATE

In "Christian Complicity" (6/17), Stephen Bullivant asked whether Christians are partly responsible for the mockery of their own beliefs. You responded:

Yes, we are complicit! The "higher" Christianity of a few generations ago gave rise to a "higher," more sophisticated and thoughtful atheism. The low, anti-intellectual, uninformed religious climate in this country has given rise to a low, uninformed, mocking atheism. We seriously need to catechize better, increase religious literacy and increase understanding of what we do and why we do it. Apologetics classes wouldn't hurt. *Elliott Smith*

Wow! If that wasn't a Catholic guilt

trip par excellence, I don't know what else is. The author states, "If caricatures of Christianity are prevalent and seem plausible, then Christians themselves are surely partly to blame." Really? O.K., let's replace "Christians" with "African Americans," "Latinos" or "homosexuals." See what I mean?

*Paul Stolz*

Believers and nonbelievers routinely and maddeningly argue at cross-purposes. It is foolish to reject what empirical science tells us of how the world works; its answers represent the evidence of our own (extended) senses, which believers themselves concede are God-given gifts. Yet science can only explain how. It never asks the "Great Why," nor does it express any interest in the question. There should be no encroachment by either camp on

the domain of the other.

*Keith H. Peterson*

Gross generalization and refusal to perceive nuance are problems that go both ways. For instance, it's easy to read the signs held by Westboro Baptist picketers and map that garbage onto all Christians. By the same token, the absurdly simplified "arguments" of a Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens surely don't stand for all those of no faith. Reasoned argumentation must spring from engagement with specific concepts or at least abstract ideals, not cherry-picked examples of the worst offenders from either side.

*Michael Skaggs*

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### Primary Relationship

Re "Of Many Things," by Matt Malone, S.J. (4/22): The discourse on gay and lesbian Catholics seems stuck on the way some men and women in the church are in relationship with one another. But as baptized Catholics, whether homosexual or heterosexual,

our way of being in relationship is first of all with God, and consequently with others. We all share a core identity as baptized men and women of God. This inviolable identity must be the starting point of every real conversation in the church with respect to anyone who is "not just like us." We can no

longer afford the unholy camps we have created for ourselves.

Our real pastoral stance must be an insistence that every baptized man and woman live richly and rightly in the power of their anointing. Pastorally we must defend a space for everyone to grow to full stature in Christ, engaging the unique gifts and characteristics of each one's authentic personhood. Each of us has been anointed to stand in the place of the risen Lord himself. Let's fix our attention on who we are: the body of Christ for this world today. God has urgent work to accomplish through each one of us.

MARY SHARON MOORE  
*Eugene, Ore.*

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**America** will also consider the following for print publication: comments posted below articles on America's Web site ([americanmagazine.org](http://americanmagazine.org)) and posts on Twitter and public Facebook pages.

All correspondence may be edited for length and clarity.



CARTOON BY HARLEY SCHWADRON

# The Inheritance

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), AUG. 4, 2013

Readings: Ecc 1:2; 2:21–23; Ps 90:3–17; Col 3:1–11; Lk 12:13–21

*“One’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions” (Lk 12:3)*

The Preacher, Qoheleth, says that “all things are vanity!” His intent is not, I think, to be cynical, though Qoheleth can provoke this among the world-weary. His wisdom is rather the product of a hard-boiled realism, which knows the truth of desires and ambitions that often consume us. He speaks of the shortness of life and the ambitions that have driven us, only to have found them unsatisfying. “Here is one who has labored with wisdom and knowledge and skill, and yet to another who has not labored over it, he must leave property. This also is vanity and a great misfortune.” Does this reality bother you? Make you sad? “This also is vanity.”

Here is the wisdom of this ancient Sam Spade in a nutshell: the things you thought would make you happy probably will not. And if they do make you happy, it will be for only a short while because soon you will die. What seem like the musings of a melancholic scribe, however, are transformed into a bracing wake-up call for those with their eye on the living God. Vanity is vanity, but those who act with God in mind and heart know that their desires and ambitions can be transformed from that which consumes them to that which awakens them to truth.

In the Gospel of Luke, someone makes a request of Jesus that on the surface seems like a reasonable request to make of a teacher known for his

wisdom: “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” Jesus’ reply evinces more of Qoheleth than might initially be apparent, as he gets behind the request for equality to a desire for things that indicate a life in tune with vanity, not with God. Jesus warns the petitioner, and through him all of us, “Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” The bluntness of Jesus’ response is still bracing—a statement we ought to repeat quietly to ourselves anytime we become convinced we need more money and possessions.

Jesus then tells a parable, his way of speaking across time to every class, gender and generation, about a rich man. The rich man had land that “produced abundantly.” In thinking rationally about the situation, the rich man decided to expand his operations, so he determined to “pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.” It is hard to see much wrong with this plan of action. His crops were successful; he needed bigger barns, so he planned to build bigger barns. The parable, found only in Luke, gives us a significant clue, though, as to why this rich man’s plans are evidence of vanity and not just good planning.

Considering his plans for new barns to house his abundant crop, the

rich man said, “I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” One word here opens us up to his foolish vanity and to a vanity so many of us do battle with regularly: soul (*psyche*). He was not vain because he had many physical goods and would have his earthly needs cared for—God knows we need these things—but because he equated his financial success and security with the well-being of his soul.

The fool saw his goods as his alone, not as the product of God’s bounty intended for him but also for all who are in need. In the parable he twice addresses his soul’s health and mistakes his



## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

As you stand in the crowd, listening to Jesus’ parable, what sorts of vanity do you most need to be on guard against?

success on earth for his eternal well-being. It is because of this basic confusion that God in the parable said to him: “You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?” We could easily add to the parable a closing epitaph: “This also is vanity.”

This life offers numerous paths, and we all must travel one with greater or less success according to the standards of this world. It is not the fact that we must travel a path that creates a fog of vanity, but that we see our earthly rewards as the measure of our life, storing up physical treasures and thinking they purify our souls, while God is asking us to be rich to those in need and rich in the ways of God.

JOHN W. MARTENS is an associate professor of theology at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minn.

# An Alert Faith

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (C), AUG. 11, 2013

Readings: Wis 18:6–9; Ps 33:1–22; Heb 11:1–19; Lk 12:32–48

*“For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be” (Lk 12:34)*

People of faith find themselves often, perhaps daily, tottering on the precipice of disillusion, swaying from their own questions, wondering if they have been suckered by some mug’s game that tells them to be satisfied with God’s promises instead of the cold, hard reality of this world’s guarantees. Still, the claims of faith are not so easy to shake, not in spite of the cold, hard reality of this world’s guarantees but because the guarantees of this world are so cold and hard. Sober reflection allows us to see that faith, supposedly ephemeral, vague and airy, grounds itself on the rock of history, masterfully building on the hope and love of those who have come before us, who have heard, recorded and lived God’s word.

Yet even among the earliest Christians, faith could waver, replaced by the concerns and worries of the day. The time of Jesus’ parousia, or “return,” which all his earliest disciples hoped was imminent, would work itself out, as it still is working itself out in history. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples to “sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” The strong contrast between earthly wealth and heavenly treasure was essential, for the heavenly vision

demanding faith; and in the interim between Jesus’ ascension and his return, weariness in the contemplation of unseen promises could drag down faith. Jesus pleaded that we be diligent in seeing where the true treasure is.

Alertness is essential for maintaining faith in the true treasure. Drowsy disciples, then and now, need to be awakened, “for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.” The prophecy of Jesus’ return claims us, for it is a divinely given word that remains in effect throughout history until it comes to fruition at the end of history.

It is not as if this task were given to us alone. All who came before us needed to maintain the same faithfulness and alertness. The author of the Letter to the Hebrews says about the cloud of witnesses who had come even before the apostolic age, “All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return.” This is the key for the faithful witnesses of old, that the promises of an unseen home were accepted in faith and maintained throughout their lives in the hope of faith.

Their earthly vision had been

adjusted so that they could see the truth through the ephemera of hard facts. The author of Hebrews proclaims that “they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.” These promises have found faithful witnesses not only in the ancient past, but throughout history. Faith is not a dead letter, but a lived experience.

Years ago, when I was a teenager, my great-aunt Sarah, then in her 90s, hugged me for what would be the last time and whispered something in my ear that made me cry. She was born in Russia and lost her fiancé in the chaos of the Russian Revolution. She never married and lived on a small farm with two of her unmarried sisters, victims themselves of the travails of the revolution and emigration to a foreign land, whose language they never

## PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

Think of God’s faithfulness to you and how God has been able to assure and comfort you even in the midst of wavering.

spoke. This is what made the tears I cried so remarkable. I could not understand what my Tante Sarah had said to me in Low German. I turned to my mother and asked, “What did she say?” Mother explained: “She said, ‘If I don’t see you here on earth again, I will see you in heaven.’”

That is faith. And as the years go by, whenever heaven or the God who calls us home to dwell there seem like illusions, that faith becomes more solid, more real to me, for “faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

JOHN W. MARTENS

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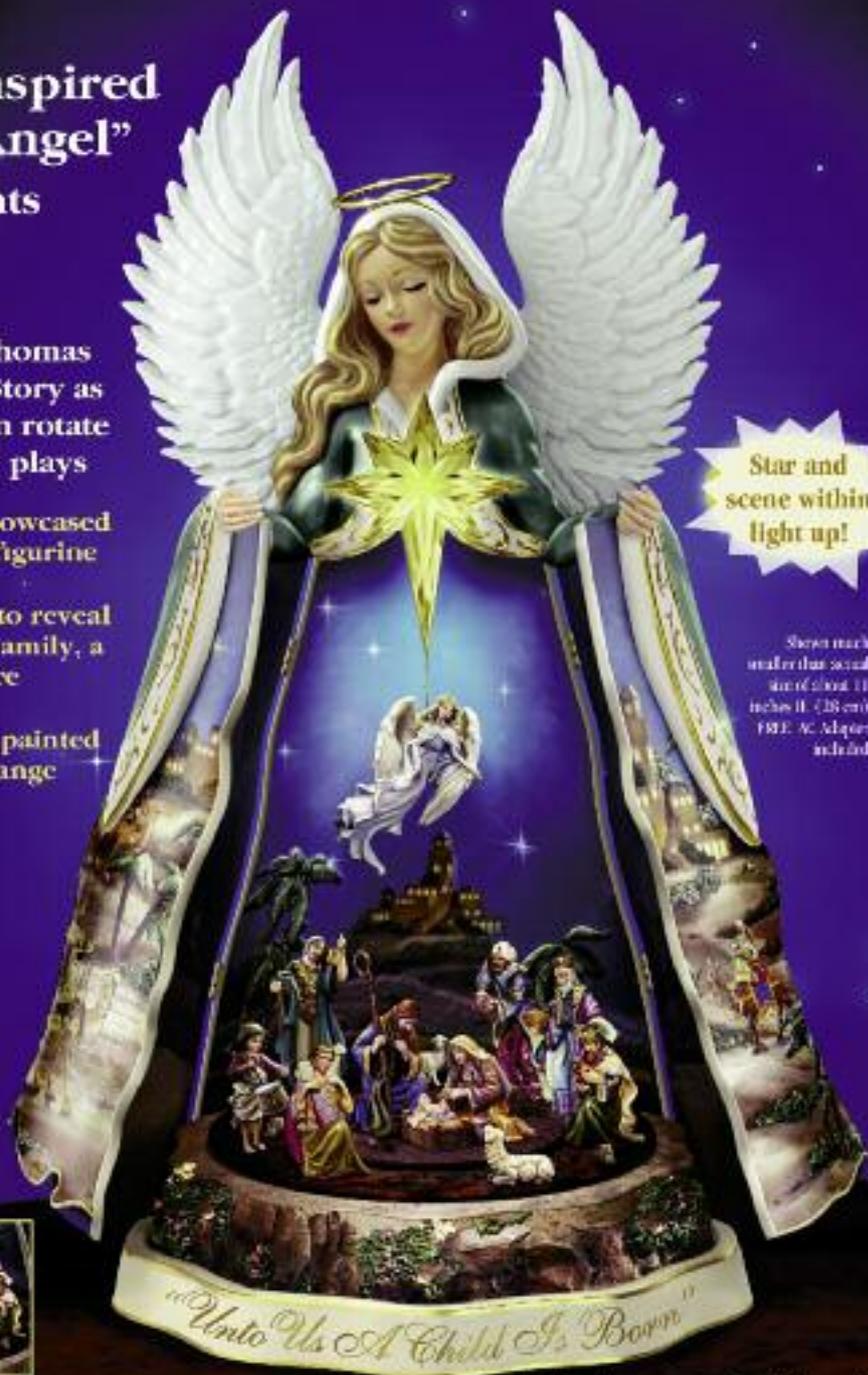
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