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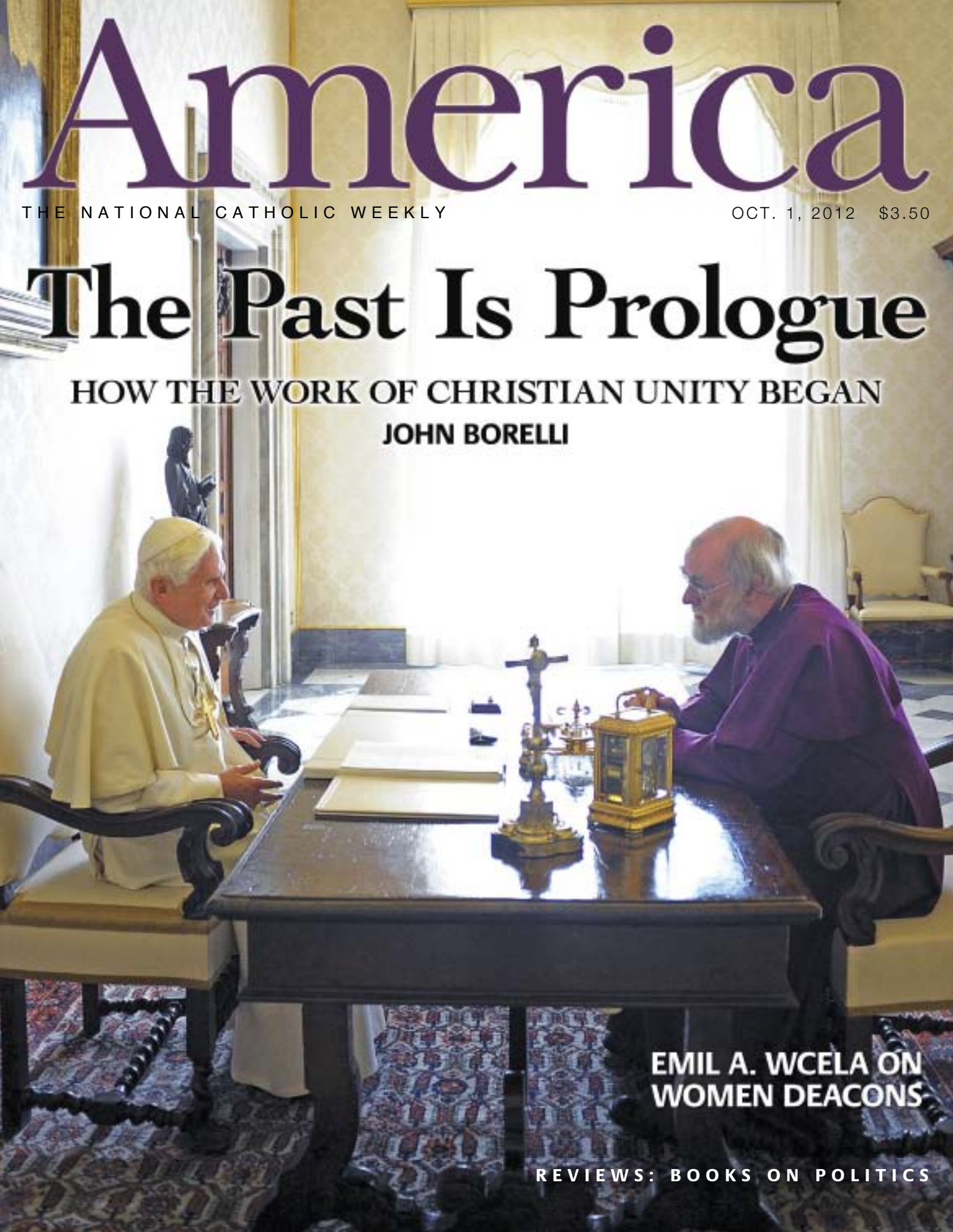
The Past Is Prologue

HOW THE WORK OF CHRISTIAN UNITY BEGAN

JOHN BORELLI



EMIL A. WCELA ON WOMEN DEACONS

REVIEWS: BOOKS ON POLITICS

OF MANY THINGS

I love public transit. I feel a sense of community on bus rides, even as I am squashed into a seat next to a woman using a garbage bag as luggage. I feel a sense of purpose on trains as they speed through the countryside (or, more likely in my travels, through industrial towns in Connecticut). I even look forward to my commute on the subway. There are, of course, frustrations—endless delays, traffic jams, track work—that sometimes make me wish I had a more efficient method of travel. Enter the zip line.

On days when I am pressed into a subway car, uncomfortably close to a strange, sweaty suit jacket or an ill-conceived tattoo, I close my eyes and imagine an improved New York, rigged with a giant zip line system—cables and pulleys and harnesses that could carry me from block to block, offering gorgeous views of the skyline and direct, open-air travel with ultimate efficiency and the elegance of Spider-Man.

I realize this is not normal—mostly because my friends tell me so. Buy a car, they say. Instead, I planned a trip to New Hampshire. This offered both relief from the city and a chance to fulfill my dream. Sort of.

My boyfriend and I signed up for a zip line canopy tour in the White Mountains, which means we signed up to slide along a series of cables linked to platforms built high in the trees; to walk across wobbly rope bridges and, on occasion, swing out from these trees and rappel to the ground.

Upon arrival we readily slapped on helmets and slid awkwardly into our harnesses. Still, it was not until I climbed into the van that would carry us up to the mountaintop that I realized that this experience had the potential to be more terrifying than enjoyable.

We were accompanied by guides, of course, who conducted dozens of safety checks. But in the end, this did not erase the fact that I would eventually jump out of a tree and careen across an 830-foot-long cable 165 feet off the ground. There was a gradual build up to that part of the course, the longest in a series of nine lines, and I found myself surprised at how quickly we reached such heights. Still, as I stood at the edge, I was again surprised. It wasn't the height that overwhelmed me, but rather a feeling I had just before stepping from the platform: the realization that I would be uniquely alone as I hung on and crossed from one side to the other.

As I cut my way through the sky, I took that time to look around me, rather than toward the platform ahead, to take in the green hills, the horses grazing in a field, the low, grey clouds building in the distance. And I felt both removed from it and a part of it all. It was a moment of reflection I don't always take time for in my everyday life, not to mention my spiritual life.

It is all too easy for me to go through the day without taking that wider perspective, to view the world as something I'm fighting against rather than rooting for. It is easy to hold on to fears that keep me from letting God lead me to where I'm meant to be. Feeling alone can feed these fears, but taking time for deliberate solitude, even for a moment in mid-air, can help to quell them.

As I returned to city life once more, I realized that what I long for on the most hectic of days is not necessarily a way to move above the hustle and bustle, but to move through it without losing my sense of peace. I try to see that the seeming chaos, the crowds, the noise are all just as much a part of the creation I felt so in touch with while sailing between trees. There is value in rising above this fray, but there is also value in entering back into it, in embracing the community of busy streets and rumbling trains and long delays, in moving forward with purpose, in taking small steps and trusting that I will be cared for even while stepping off what looks, to me, like an edge.

KERRY WEBER

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Cover: Pope Benedict XVI speaks with Archbishop Rowan Williams of Canterbury, England, head of the Anglican Communion in November 2009. CNS photo/L'Osservatore Romano via Reuters.

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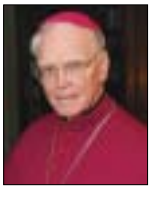


Out, Damned Spot!

It is time for an objective look at America's use of torture. Shortly after Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. announced that no one will be prosecuted for the deaths of two prisoners held in C.I.A. custody—one shackled to a wall in Afghanistan in 2002, the other in Abu Ghraib in Iraq in 2003—news broke of other yet undisclosed cases. According to a new report by Human Rights Watch, C.I.A.-endorsed torture during the Bush administration was more widespread than first believed.

The report is based on documents recovered from Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi's government after its fall and on interviews with 14 former Libyan rebels who opposed Qaddafi before the war, were arrested and detained after Sept. 11, 2011 (when Libya was our ally) and eventually rendered to Libya.

Five of the men now testify that they were abused and tortured at a U.S.-run detention center in Afghanistan, being waterboarded, chained to the wall naked in pitch-black, windowless cells for weeks or months, slammed into walls, enclosed for five months without a bath and denied sleep. The accusation of waterboarding is especially disconcerting; it counters the official U.S. story that only three men had been waterboarded while in U.S. custody.

What else don't we know? Human Rights Watch has called for an independent, nonpartisan commission to investigate all aspects of detainee treatment. They are right. Today some of these victims hold responsible positions in the free Libyan government; and the United States government keeps washing its hands—"Out, out damned spot"—as if it can escape responsibility for its role.

Bishops' Accountability

The case that led to the conviction of Bishop Robert W. Finn of Kansas City-St. Joseph on a misdemeanor count for failing to report suspected child abuse is a grim one. The Rev. Shawn Ratigan, a parish priest who had been previously suspected of inappropriate behavior around children, downloaded pornographic photos of young girls onto his laptop and created some himself, which was discovered when he brought his computer in for repair. Several people tried to alert the bishop to this and other incidents, but, as The New York Times reported, Bishop Finn resisted removing him from ministry in order to, as he told some priests, "save Father Ratigan's priesthood."

The U.S. bishops' "Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People," adopted in 2002, outlines the default response when a credible accusation is made about sexual abuse involving a priest. The details are reported to the police, and the priest is removed from ministry while an investigation takes place. If found guilty, he is removed permanently and is, in some cases, laicized. But what happens when his supervising bishop is found guilty of negligence or malfeasance? Catholics may wonder who determines whether the bishop will be removed, whether and how he is punished or does penance and whether the U.S. bishops' conference or the papal nuncio has any say. So far it seems that any response is left up to the offending bishop himself. The initial response from Bishop Finn's diocese was a statement saying he "looks forward to continuing to perform his duties." But he may be unable to perform those duties if he is under a cloud. As there are clear directives regarding a priest (or a deacon, brother or sister) who has committed a crime related to sexual abuse, there must be equally clear directives about their bishops.

Primary Colors

While swing states are expected to determine the outcome of the presidential election, states with variegated shades of red or blue are making other important choices that may augur future political changes. Take Arizona, a red state known for its extreme conservatism on certain issues. In a recall election last year, Arizona voters ousted from office the former president of the state legislature, Russell Pearce, author of the controversial immigration law S.B. 1070. In August Mr. Pearce entered the Republican primary hoping to make a comeback. But the state's voters spoke again, only this time it was his fellow Republicans who defeated him. Color him redder (and the state a lighter shade of red).

In the U.S. Congress, Ron Barber, who completed the term of Representative Gabrielle Giffords, won the Democratic primary for her seat. He will face Martha McSally, a Republican. With both parties seeking a majority in the House, this race is important.

The biggest gains in Arizona will go to the candidate who replaces retiring Senator Jon Kyl, the minority whip. Jeff Flake, a popular six-term Republican congressman, appears strong. But the Democrats are betting on Richard H. Carmona, a Latino physician and decorated Vietnam War veteran who was appointed U.S. surgeon general by President George W. Bush. Should Dr. Carmona win, he would be Arizona's first Democratic senator since 1988. Call him their great blue hope.

These races in Arizona illustrate a larger point: even in states that appear solidly red or blue, political change takes place one local race at a time, regardless of who wins the White House.

The Real Fraud

Over the past 12 years, Americans have cast hundreds of millions of votes in local, state and national elections. Did you know that in this same time period there have been only 10 alleged cases of in-person voter impersonation? This might surprise you if you have followed the recent flurry of legislative activity to require voters to present state-issued I.D. cards when casting their ballots. Since 2010, more than 30 states have considered more restrictive rules for when and how people can vote.

Litigation is now going on at the state and federal level to challenge some of these new rules. Cases are expected to reach the U.S. Supreme Court before the November election. In Minnesota voters will decide on a constitutional amendment that would require a state-issued photo I.D. with a current address in order to vote.

Advocates of the new laws claim that voter fraud is widespread and that tougher restrictions will help improve the validity of the electoral process. But the specific type of fraud addressed by the new I.D. laws, in-person voter impersonation, is virtually nonexistent. In supporting the new laws, the Republican National Lawyers Association cites 375 cases of election fraud. News21, a Carnegie-Knight investigative reporting project, examined these cases and found that only 33 resulted in convictions or guilty pleas and none involved in-person voter impersonation. It is simply not worth the risk (up to five years in prison and a $10,000 fine) to cast one fraudulent vote. Electoral fraud of other kinds is much more common: absentee ballot fraud and the deliberate miscounting of ballots, for instance. The current wave of voter I.D. laws does not address these legitimate concerns.

It is commonly believed that "everyone already has a state-issued I.D." But research indicates there are millions of eligible voters who do not possess the requisite form of identification in states that have passed more restrictive voter I.D. laws. In Pennsylvania more than 750,000 people, 9.2 percent of the state's voters; in Wisconsin more than 300,000 registered voters; in Texas 8 percent of white voters and 25 percent of black voters. Not having an I.D. card is often related to age, race and economic status.

Legal precedent requires states to offer free I.D. cards for voting, but other legal documents like certified birth certificates or marriage licenses—which cost between $8 and $25—are usually required to obtain the I.D. cards. The notorious poll tax prohibited by the 24th Amendment cost only $10.64 in current dollars, according to the Brennan Center for Justice. Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. has referred to voter I.D. laws as "poll taxes." In late August a federal court struck down the Texas voter I.D. law for imposing "strict, unforgiving burdens on the poor." In some states, the voter I.D. must include a current address. This can create difficulties for students, military personnel, elderly in nursing homes and those who are homeless. Where such laws have withstood legal challenges, states should enact a "grace period" to allow adequate time for citizens to obtain the proper identification.

Catholic social teaching strongly emphasizes that all people of goodwill should participate in civic life and political processes to promote the common good. In Minnesota a faith-based community organization called Isaiah has built a coalition of Jewish, Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist and African-American religious groups to oppose the voter I.D. amendment. The collaboration is inspired by a shared commitment to "the least of our brothers and sisters," who are disproportionately affected by the new laws.

There are real threats to electoral integrity that should be studied and addressed. Measures are necessary to reduce fraudulent absentee ballots. Polling stations should be carefully monitored so that voters are not unfairly turned away without an opportunity to cast even a provisional ballot. There should be more uniform electoral processes across the 13,000 voting precincts in the United States; Election Day should be a mandatory national holiday to make it easier for people to vote; and there should be a federal constitutional amendment to protect the right to vote for all citizens.

In Minnesota, former Vice President Walter Mondale, a Democrat, and the former governor of the state, Arne Carlson, a Republican, have teamed up to oppose amending their state's constitution to require voter I.D. They insist that "election laws be designed in a bipartisan fashion," since no single party should be allowed to create rules for an electoral advantage. We should honor the hard-fought battles for women's suffrage and civil rights by returning "to a legislative process that studies a problem first and then creates a sensible and affordable bipartisan solution," as Mondale and Carlson wisely suggest. Reform efforts should bolster, not restrict, democratic participation.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Loss of Life in Libya Illustrates Mortal Risks

Reality intruded darkly on a symposium convened in Washington to discuss the challenges facing religious freedom worldwide when news alerts reported the killing of J. Christopher Stevens, 52, the U.S. ambassador to Libya, and three other Americans at the U.S. consulate in Benghazi on Sept. 11. The Americans were killed, along with several Libyan security officers, when the consulate became the target of mob rage, perhaps exploited by a coordinated terrorist attack. An amateurish YouTube video, produced by an American, denigrating Mohammed and the Muslim faith had generated outrage throughout the Middle East.

Academic presentations on threats to religious expression at the symposium, titled "International Religious Freedom: An Imperative for Peace and the Common Good," were quickly revised on Sept. 12 to include messages of dismay and prayers for the fallen ambassador.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, called violence in the name of religion the "ultimate oxymoron." He said the day's events in the Middle East lent urgency to the discussion of religious freedom. "We need to be respectful of other religious traditions," said Cardinal Dolan, "at the same time that we unequivocally proclaim that violence in the name of religion is wrong." Around the world, he said, 150,000 Christians, one of the most persecuted faith groups, are killed every year. This means, Cardinal Dolan said, "we have 17 new martyrs every hour of every day."

A presentation by Denis McDonough, the national security advisor, was delayed by events in Libya as the Obama administration grappled with the unfolding crisis. McDonough's well-scripted appearance wavered only briefly when he seemed to struggle to keep his composure during a small tribute to

U.S. POVERTY

Candidates Speak Out—Finally

It is an ongoing criticism this election season that the problem of poverty in the United States is not being addressed by either campaign. The Circle of Protection—an ad hoc coalition of religious groups organized to protect antipoverty programs—prodded the presidential candidates Barack Obama and Mitt Romney to speak to the issue. On Sept. 12 both candidates did so in video presentations released along with the Census Bureau's annual report on U.S. poverty.

According to the report, 15 percent of Americans—including one in five children—lived in poverty in 2011. The census data was accompanied by a U.S. Department of Agriculture announcement that 14.9 percent of American households—including 16.7 million children—suffered from food insecurity in 2011.

"Last year," the president said in his video, "I promised to protect vital assistance for the least of these. I've kept that promise.

"We can pay down our debt in a balanced and responsible way, but we cannot balance the budget on the backs of the most vulnerable and certainly can't ask the poor, the sick or those with disabilities to sacrifice even more...just so we can offer massive new tax cuts to those who've been blessed with the most."

"A strong economy will reduce our budget deficits, and it will reduce poverty as well," said Romney. "But at this point, budget cuts are also going to be necessary and I intend to make them. Here you have my word: I'll proceed carefully.... Our government rightfully provides a safety net...and we have a responsibility to keep it intact for future generations."

The candidates "agreed on a lot of things," said the Rev. David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World: "the importance of jobs, the importance of

Demonstrators at a rally on Sept. 12 in Benghazi, Libya.

Ambassador Stevens. Later he shared some thoughts about the nation's loss.

"I was really blessed," McDonough said. "I had the opportunity to work with him, and I got to know him over the course of the last year and a half. He's a guy for whom I had a tremendous amount of respect; we're going to miss him a lot."

McDonough described the killing of Ambassador Stevens as a tremendous setback for the people of Libya, particularly for the people of Benghazi, where the resistance to Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi had first coalesced. McDonough said, "He in many ways gave his life for the freedom of Benghazi," recalling that Stevens was in the then beleaguered city when Qaddafi threatened to obliterate the resistance "in those tenuous days in February and March 2011 when we thought Benghazi was going to be reduced to rubble."

The president's decision last year to throw U.S. military might behind NATO forces in a "responsibility to protect" air campaign to defend Libyan noncombatants, then the resistance itself, was controversial. Now McDonough anticipates that decision will be second-guessed because of the violence. He remains confident it was the right call.

"We're working every day to make sure that the Libyans, who have a unique opportunity now, make everything of that opportunity," he said. "There are going to continue to be Libyans who choose a path of hate and violence, and it's our job to make sure that we promote the kind of security that the overwhelming majority of Libyans want."

McDonough noted that both President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had that morning underscored the continuing U.S. support of the Libyan government. He added, "That said, we need to see some progress on the investigation of this heinous attack; we need to bring the perpetrators to justice. We're going to rely on our Libyan partners in that regard, but I'll also say this: we're not going to rest until we find these guys."

The meeting was sponsored jointly by the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies at the Catholic University of America, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services.

charity, the importance of government programs. But they also both agreed to not talk about poor people in other countries.... For us, as people of faith, compassion doesn't stop at the border."

Meanwhile the best that could be said about the census report was that it could have been worse—and was widely expected to be so. More than 46 million Americans are living below the federal poverty threshold, but 2011 became the first year since 2007 that did not record a significant increase in poverty. "With poverty holding at such a high rate, the importance of federal safety net programs is clear," said Beckmann.

The official poverty numbers do not account for programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the food stamp program), the Earned Income Tax Credit or the Child Tax Credit. If the data accounted for SNAP, it would show 3.9 million fewer people in poverty, including 1.7 million children. If it accounted for the E.I.T.C., the number of people in poverty would fall by 5.7 million people, including 3.1 million children.

"Federally funded programs play a tremendous role in reducing poverty and helping to keep hunger at bay, but the official data often excludes their impact," said Beckmann. "As Congress works to reduce the deficit, we urge members to not cut these programs, as it would do more harm than good as our economy continues to rebound."

Nicaragua Ends U.S. Military Training

Nicaragua can now be added to the list of countries that no longer send soldiers for training to a U.S. Army school in Georgia. School of the Americas Watch reports that Nicaragua's President Daniel Ortega decided on Sept. 6 to end his country's participation in the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. The institute was formerly called the School of the Americas, and many S.O.A. graduates had been associated with human rights abuses in Latin America. A delegation of S.O.A. Watch activists, including its founder, the Rev. Roy Bourgeois, met with Ortega in September to push for the withdrawal. "We're very encouraged. This has energized our movement," Father Bourgeois said. "To have Daniel Ortega...say that Nicaragua will not participate in the future is a big deal." Nicaragua joins Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Uruguay and Venezuela in withdrawing from the school.

Contraception Mandate Challenged

The Missouri Legislature voted by wide margins on Sept. 12 to override Gov. Jay Nixon's veto of a bill meant to prevent employers or health insurance providers from being compelled to provide coverage for contraception, abortion or sterilization. The Missouri Catholic Conference, the public policy arm of the state's bishops, strongly supported the bill, saying that it "upholds religious liberty in a very practical way. Under this bill, no one can be forced to pay for surgical abortions, abortion-inducing drugs, contraceptives or sterilizations when this violates their moral or religious beliefs." Nixon said in July that he had vetoed the bill because Missouri law already protected employers and individuals who had ethical or religious objections to contraceptive coverage, and he objected to the bill's extension of those protections to insurance companies. The Archdiocese of St. Louis said in a statement that the legislation "does nothing to make contraceptives illegal; in fact, they are widely available and affordable. It does, however, assert conscience rights for Missouri citizens when those rights are in jeopardy due to the federal Department of Health and Human Services mandate."

Vatican Hires Financial Crime Watchdog

In an effort to comply more fully with international standards against financial criminal activity, the Vatican has hired an outside expert. René Brülhart, a 40-year-old Swiss international lawyer, started working as a consultant to the Vatican in September on "all matters related to anti-money laundering and financing of terrorism." Brülhart's role is to assist the Holy See in strengthening its framework to fight financial crimes. A report by European finance experts released in July said the Vatican had passed its first major test toward becoming more financially transparent and compliant with international norms. But the report by Moneyval, the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism, said there were still critical loopholes that needed tightening and other "important issues" to be addressed.

From CNS and other sources.

NEWS BRIEFS

Pakistan flooding

About 30,000 families in southern Mozambique have been in a **state of famine** since March, and many are now reduced to feeding on leaves, roots and wild fruits. ✦ As Caritas Pakistan workers entered the worst-hit areas in that country to assess damage, government officials reported on Sept. 12 that **monsoon rains** have devastated communities, claiming at least 78 lives and damaging or destroying 1,600 homes. ✦ **Youcef Nadarkhani**, the Church of Iran pastor sentenced to death for apostasy from Islam, was released from prison on Sept. 8 and is at home with his family. ✦ **Ukrainian bishops** from around the world convened in Winnipeg, Manitoba, on Sept. 9 for the worldwide Ukrainian Catholic Synod of Bishops. ✦ The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has launched a **Spanish-language page** on Facebook (www.facebook.com/USCCBEspanol) that will feature news updates and faith-building resources. ✦ **Mary Rose McGeady**, of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, who took over New York's Covenant House after its founder was accused of financial and sexual improprieties, died in Albany on Sept. 13 at the age of 84.

THOMAS MASSARO

The Home Stretch

Why am I so distressed by this presidential campaign? Let me count the ways.

First, the lowest of the low-hanging fruit involves the overblown rhetoric about how crucial this year's race is. How often can we hear the phrase "the most important election of our lifetime" without rolling our collective eyes? Can anyone name even one unimportant presidential election?

Second, the attack ads. How glad I am not to live in a battleground swing state! I hear from friends in Ohio and Florida that the ubiquitous ads are both objectionable and mind-numbing, regardless of whom you might support. Evidently, "going negative" must pay off. Otherwise, why would both sides resort to character assassination and name-calling to the tune of millions of dollars?

Third, let's consider those millions of dollars. The cover of the Aug. 13 issue of Time featured a picture of the White House with a "for sale" sign on the front lawn and the chilling description: "Asking: $2.5 Billion." The unseemliness of this state of affairs is hardly offset by the fact that the major donors to both major parties largely cancel each other out. Recent judicial decisions unleashing new torrents of cash into the political process have reinforced decades of legislative gridlock on campaign finance reform. Our system of democracy appears to be thoroughly broken.

Fourth, neither the Obama nor the Romney campaign has passed the smell test for truthfulness. Emanating from both camps (and especially from the vice presidential candidates) is an avalanche of misleading statements intended to discredit the opponent. Voters should not have to race to fact-checker Web sites after every stump speech to evaluate the truth of candidates' claims.

Perhaps the childish partisanship that breeds exaggeration and fabrication is a function of how close this election is expected to be and how few truly undecided voters remain as we enter the home stretch. In making a pitch for the support of the shrinking sliver of the electorate that will determine the outcome, is there anything that these politicians won't say in order to gain an advantage?

> Neither campaign has passed the 'smell test' for truthfulness.

Fifth, the campaign has become not only fierce and bitter, but utterly joyless. Neither presidential candidate appears to be comfortable enough to muster up any spontaneity or to speak out of credible conviction. Despite an above average acceptance speech at the Democratic convention, Obama has so far failed to hit his stride in making the case for why he deserves a second term and has not described what he will do with four more years. Romney continues to struggle mightily with the charge that he is "un-genuine" and unable to empathize with ordinary Americans. Not much uplift on either side.

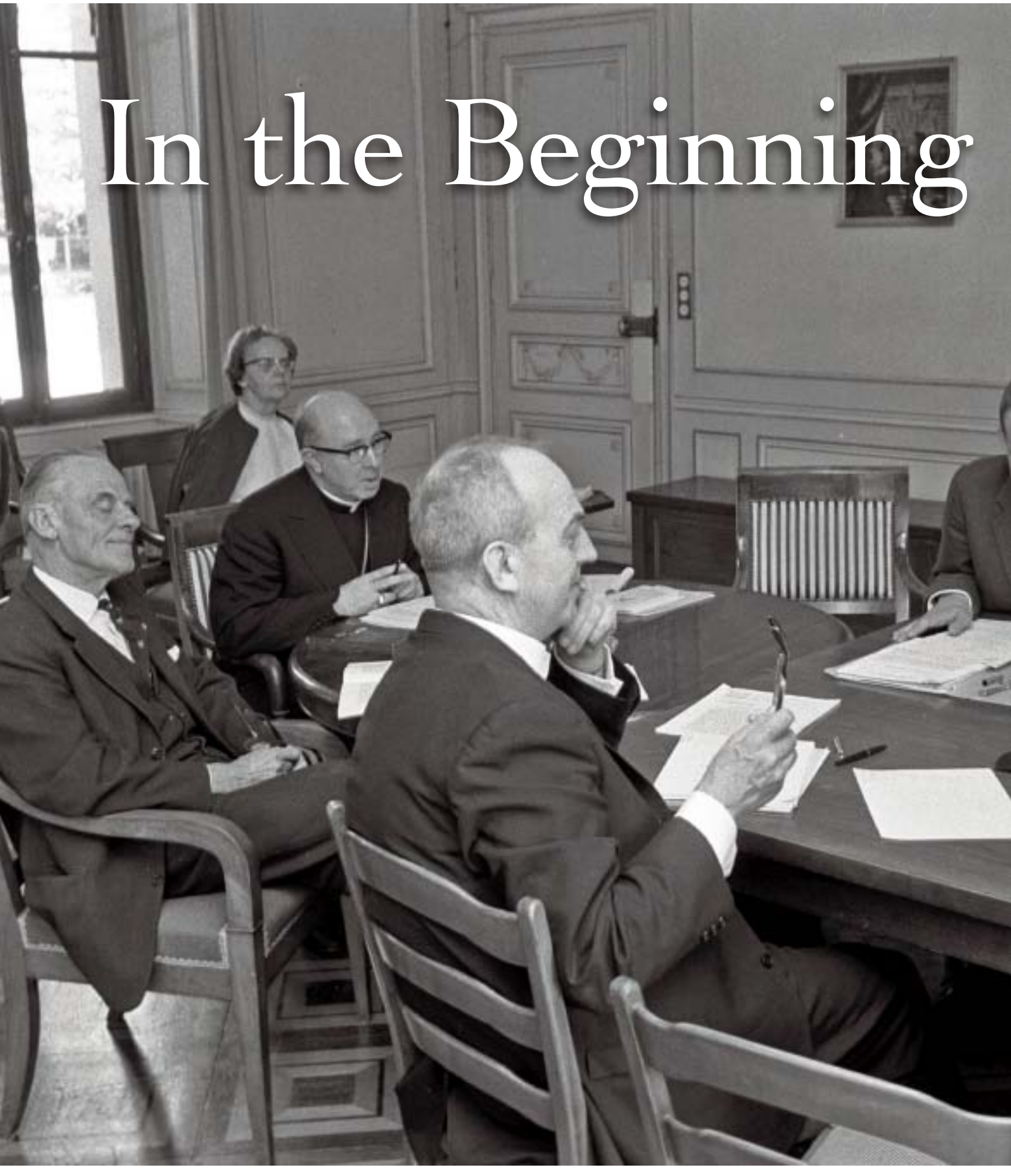
As they hit the stump, both candidates assume the grim demeanor of a person with something to hide. I think this reflects the vulnerability of the flawed parties they represent. The Republicans are eager to whitewash their embarrassing complicity in the serious domestic and foreign policy failures of the Bush years. Note how the party occasionally betrays awareness of its soft underbelly—by arranging, for example, to keep George W. Bush way, way out of sight. By contrast, the Democratic leadership openly flaunts what it should be most embarrassed about: nearly unconditional support for abortion-on-demand policies in the party platform, despite the fact that a majority of Americans register serious doubts about abortion rights and prefer more restricted access to it.

Conventional wisdom offers the oversimplification that every election is a mere referendum on the economic policies of the incumbent. This election is surely about many distinct things, but much rightly hinges on the state of the economy and the vision not only for economic growth but also for economic fairness proposed by each candidate. In the closing weeks of the campaign, I for one would be delighted to see much greater attention to the often overlooked issue of reducing poverty. As the U.S. bishops said in their Labor Day statement: "In the current political campaigns, we hear much about the economy, but almost nothing about the moral imperative to overcome pervasive poverty in a nation still blessed with substantial economic resources."

Let the debates begin.

THOMAS MASSARO, S.J., *is the dean of the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University, in Berkeley, Calif.*

In the Beginning



The first meeting of the Joint Working Group, with representatives from the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, in Bossey, Switzerland, May 1965. Far left: Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft and Msgr. Jan Willebrands.

PHOTO COURTESY OF OIKOUMENE.ORG/JOHN TAYLOR/WCC

How the work of Christian unity got started

BY JOHN BORELLI

In mid-20th-century Oklahoma, when I was finishing high school and starting college as the Second Vatican Council unfolded (1962–65), Catholics represented only 2 percent of the population of the United States. There was a steady stream of televised Protestant services, and I remember vaguely a local Sunday broadcast that featured a panel of Protestant ministers. The panel became interesting when, unexpectedly, one of our few Catholic priests appeared on it wearing a Roman collar, when clergy of other denominations usually did not. The visual message was clear—though other Christians are similar to us, we Catholics are different.

All this changed with the council. We need not stand apart. We were actually closer to other Christians, the council explained, than we had imagined. Vatican II's 1964 "Decree on Ecumenism" summarized it this way, "For those who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect."

Despite a healthy preoccupation at Christ the King, my home parish, with liturgical participation and sermons on justice and civil rights in the decade before the council, ecumenism was not on the agenda. Our priests' liberalism extended only so far. Annually they railed against parents who enrolled their children at the prestigious Episcopal Cassady Day School. Chapel was required at Cassady, and for Catholics that presented a problem. Our priests resisted our parishioners' attending services regularly in other churches. The "Decree on Ecumenism" undid those reservations and even encouraged Catholics to join other Christians regularly in prayer, especially for unity.

In Oklahoma, most of our neighbors, acquaintances and business associates were not Catholic, and the few ecumenical initiatives took place among Protestants. Nationally, the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America was organized in 1908, which in 1950 gave way to the National Council of Churches of Christ. While the religious freedom created by such Protestant diversity allowed Catholics to flourish, warnings would periodically arrive from the Vatican reminding us to hold discussions of

JOHN BORELLI, *special assistant to the president for interreligious initiatives at Georgetown University, is working with Thomas Stransky, C.S.P., as he prepares a full account of the genesis and development of the Second Vatican Council's "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions."*

faith and morals apart from Protestant ecumenical efforts.

These warnings began arriving as early as 1895, with an expression of displeasure to bishops over Catholic participation in the 1893 Parliament of Religions in Chicago. In 1928, shortly after the ecumenically planned first Faith and Order assembly in Lausanne, Switzerland, Pope Pius XI issued an encyclical warning the whole church about "pan-Christians who turn their minds to uniting the churches" but whose ecumenical effort "tends to injure faith." Another warning arrived in 1948 anticipating the organizational assembly of the World Council of Churches that year in Geneva.

Early Interfaith Cooperation

Interaction between Catholics and Protestants and Jews, too, had to take place on the edges of formal church structures. Founded in New York in 1927, the National Conference of Christians and Jews (called the National Conference of Jews and Christians until 1938) was the world's flagship interfaith organization. Yet Catholic priests had to justify any involvement in the conference. The Paulist John Elliot Ross, who served on the N.C.C.J. executive committee, was also the first priest to join a Protestant minister and a rabbi in cross-country speaking tours. Father Ross defended himself by distinguishing interfaith activities dedicated to eliminating prejudice and promoting the common good from discussions on Christian unity, faith and morals, which were banned.

With World War II the need for ecumenical and interfaith teamwork grew exponentially. The Jesuit John Courtney Murray, who later contributed substantially to the council's "Declaration on Religious Liberty," urged "intercredal cooperation" in 1942, appealing to the "Sword of the Spirit" initiative of Christian communions in besieged England. Military service also inspired greater mutual respect. In 1943 four U.S. military chaplains (two Protestant, one Catholic and one Jewish) went down arm-in-arm on the troop ship Dorchester after surrendering their life vests so that troops could survive. Later, stained glass chapel windows and a U.S. commemorative stamp honoring their shared heroism became symbols of a new era of what Father Murray called "Christian co-operation."

By 1950 the Vatican gave qualified acceptance to the assignment by bishops of "trustworthy and sufficiently educated priests" to attend ecumenical meetings as observers. Even before that, in 1948, the bishops of Holland allowed Msgr. Johannes Willebrands to develop ecumenical relations there. In 1952 he and the Rev. Frans Thijssen formed the Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Questions, attracting Catholic ecumenists to follow the World Council of Churches agenda and other developments. Several of these theologians later served as officials or experts for commissions at the Second Vatican Council. One of these specialists was a young Paulist, Thomas F. Stransky, who had been sent by his superiors to Europe for graduate study in Protestant missiology. Attending liturgy at St. Peter's Basilica on Pentecost Sunday in 1960, when Pope John XXIII announced the preparatory commissions for the upcoming council, he was surprised to hear that among them was a secretariat for Christian unity. He had no inkling that before summer's end he would be among the four members of the secretariat's initial staff.

ON THE WEB

Robert J. Nogosek, C.S.C., remembers the early days of Vatican II.
americamagazine.org

First Steps

Pope John appointed the senior biblical scholar Cardinal Augustin Bea, a Jesuit, as the secretariat's president, and Monsignor Willebrands as its secretary. Msgr. Jean-François Arrighi, a skilled veteran of the Roman Curia, and Father Stransky rounded out the original four. The Rev. Joseph Komonchak, a leading American historian of the council, has concluded that Vatican II represented the vision of this secretariat more than that of any other preparatory commission. Mauro Velati, the best informed historian of the secretariat's early history, has identified its three documents on ecumenism, interreligious dialogue and religious freedom as "most central to the *aggiornamento* [updating] desired by John XXIII." Only two years after the secretariat's founding, as Vatican II was convening in 1962, Father Stransky described the secretariat as "an active symbol of Pope John's loving concern to promote Christian unity." Speaking in 2006 at Georgetown University, the Paulist recalled how the secretariat became "the trusted darling among the [council's] bishops."

The secretariat first gathered its bishop members, consultors and staff in November 1960. Only three of those who were present at that first meeting are alive today: Josette Kersters of the Grail Movement, whom Monsignor Willebrands had invited to help with secretarial work; Gregory Baum, then an Augustinian priest and now still active as a professor emeritus at McGill University; and Father Stransky. Father Baum was noticed because his doctoral thesis, published in 1956, scoured the works of the five popes before John XXIII for the slightest ecumenical inclinations. Father Stransky saw a copy of Father Baum's book, marked prodigiously with reader's notations, in Pope Paul VI's private collection, which is now at the Instituto Paolo VI in Brescia. In November 2010 Professor Baum spoke at Georgetown University, marking the 50th anniversary of the secretariat's first meeting. He reminisced that his thesis on "pre-ecumenical signs" would have been very different if he had written it only four years later, in 1960.

With regard to the eventual declaration on the Jews, or what became "Nostra Aetate," Professor Baum remembered his impression after its first meeting that the secretariat was

going to offer a post-Auschwitz reading of the New Testament, avoiding "any interpretation of a biblical text that could legitimate the humiliation of the Jews and justify their exclusion or marginalization." The secretariat's work reached fruition in three conciliar acts: on ecumenism in 1964, on the Jews and interreligious dialogue in 1965 and on religious liberty in 1965. In collaboration with the theological commission, the secretariat also contributed to the "Constitution on Divine Revelation" of 1965.

Three Key Interlocutors

Contact with outsiders in 1960 also directed the secretariat's work and affected the outcome of the council. On June 2, 1960, Monsignor Willebrands, by then the official ecumenical representative of the Dutch bishops, the first such national officer, was in Rome with Father Thijssen to report on C.C.E.Q. activities and plans. He records in his diary how Cardinal Bea told them that the pope would soon announce the secretariat and that he, Cardinal Bea, would be its president. He asked the Dutch priests to convey this confidential information to Geneva to another Dutchman, Willem A. Visser 't Hooft, the first general secretary of the World Council of Churches. They were also to tell Dr. Visser 't Hooft that Cardinal Bea wanted to meet with him soon, even if unofficially. Monsignor Willebrands and Dr. Visser 't Hooft, already friends for several years, could mend any problem, conversing in Dutch.

A private meeting between Dr. Visser 't Hooft and Cardinal Bea took place on Sept. 22, 1960, at a convent in Milan. The local archbishop, Cardinal Giovanni Montini, was in on the plan too. As Pope Paul VI, Montini would guide the council to completion after the death of Pope John XXIII in 1963. In hindsight, the requirement that the meeting be secret seemed "ridiculous," as Dr. Visser 't Hooft later noted, but he agreed that the delicate process of establishing relationships could easily have been complicated by public discussion at that point. Dr. Visser 't Hooft's first recommendation to Cardinal Bea was that the council must address religious freedom to ensure that future Catholic statements promoting Christian unity would be taken seriously.

More out in the open was the visit to Rome of Dr. Geoffrey Fisher, Archbishop of Canterbury, on Dec. 2, 1960. Monsignor Willebrands again served as an intermediary, conveying to Cardinal Bea Archbishop Fisher's desire to stop for a meeting with Pope John after visits to Jerusalem and Istanbul. Anglicans and Catholics alike criticized Archbishop Fisher for wanting the meeting. Cardinal Domenico Tardini, the Vatican Secretary of State, toned down the visit—not allowing press coverage, photos or any official visit with Cardinal Bea. Again, good will prevailed over the awkwardness in establishing church relations. Archbishop Fisher reported that Pope John at one point read from an address, in

which he referred enthusiastically to that time when other Christians could return home to Mother Church. The archbishop courteously corrected him: "Not return.... None of us can go backwards." He then explained, "We are looking forward until, in God's good time, when our two courses approximate and meet." After a moment's pause, Pope John replied, "You are right." When the archbishop thanked him for establishing the secretariat, Pope John replied, "Yes, and this afternoon you shall see Cardinal Bea." The reception was offsite at the college where Cardinal Bea lived.

Even more significant for the outcome of the council was the visit to Rome of Jules Isaac, a week and a day after Pope John had announced the secretariat. An official of the pre-war French government and a Holocaust survivor, Professor Isaac had lost his wife, daughter and son-in-law in the death camps. He had dedicated his remaining years to dissolving Christian anti-Semitism and the pervasive anti-Jewish theology that supported it. There were interfaith meetings at Oxford in 1946, in Switzerland in 1947, the establishment of his own French association of Christians and Jews in 1948—all with Catholic participation—and a less-than-satisfactory meeting with Pope Pius XII in 1949. Unsure but encouraged by his Catholic friends, Professor Isaac had an audience with Pope John XXIII on June 13, 1960, and with Cardinal Bea two days later. The professor proposed that the pope form a commission to look at the problem, and the pope confirmed he was thinking the same thing. Pope John's assurances gave Professor Isaac more than he had hoped for.

In 1960 it came down to three 80-year-old men—a Holocaust survivor, a pope who had called a surprise council and a Jesuit cardinal and biblical scholar who headed the council's most unanticipated commission. In September 1960, Pope John approved Cardinal Bea's suggestion that a statement on religious relations with Jews could be written. By 1963, when the second session of the council got underway and the statement on the Jews was at last on its agenda, two of the three were dead. Cardinal Bea lived until 1968. Perhaps the greatest of his many achievements was guiding such a controversial statement as the "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" to completion.

The involvement of the Catholic Church in ecumenical and interreligious relations in the 50 years since Vatican II has been an enormously important factor affecting renewal of Christian life, ecumenical advances and greater interfaith mutuality. In his 1995 encyclical on ecumenism, "That They May Be One" (No. 78 and 84), Pope John Paul II acknowledged, perhaps more plainly than the bishops at Vatican II could have done in 1965, that the experience of ecumenism has enabled us to understand better how the Spirit is often able to pour out grace in extraordinary ways and how sublime is the mutual help Christians receive from one another in their search for the truth. A

Why Not Women?

A bishop makes a case for expanding the diaconate.

BY EMIL A. WCELA

Can women receive sacred orders? Let us consult several authoritative sources. Canon 1024 of the Code of Canon Law states, "A baptized male alone receives sacred ordination validly." In 1994 Pope John Paul II said, "I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful." And the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has weighed in on the issue more than once. A statement in 1995 read, "This teaching requires definitive assent, since, founded on the written word of God and from the beginning constantly preserved and applied in the tradition of the Church, it has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal magisterium." And in 2010 the doctrinal congregation stated, "both the one who attempts to confer sacred ordination on a woman, and she who attempts to receive sacred ordination incur a *latae sententiae* [automatic] excommunication reserved to the Apostolic See." And so the issue is settled.

Or is it?

Development of Early Church Ministries

Jesus chose the Twelve and others to help spread the word that God was working in the world uniquely through him. After his death and resurrection, local communities of believers formed; and within them leaders emerged or were chosen. In a natural way, the shape of such leadership was often borrowed from contemporary society. There were *episkopoi*, or "overseers," in synagogues, who managed finances and sometimes settled disputes, and overseers in the civic world responsible for community projects, like the building of a road. There were *presbyteroi*, or "elders," councils of men who formed administrative boards in synagogues and other religious institutions. Adopted by the Christian communities, these offices would develop into the episcopate and priesthood.

Very early in the life of the church, around A.D. 55, the Letter to the Philippians names the *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* among its addressees. This latter group is our focus. Many ministries contributed to the fruitful life of the community. Some were transient, like speaking in tongues or prophecy, while others, like teaching, required more permanence. In the New Testament, a whole range of such contributions to community well-being are clustered under the heading of the Greek verb *diakonein* and its related nouns. An inclusive translation of these words would be "to minister," "ministry," "minister." A *diakonos* in the secular society of the day was someone chosen and entrusted by another person with carrying out a specific task. This meaning carries over in the ministry words found in letters written by or attributed to St. Paul. Such services entrusted to a believer by God and/or the community could range from preaching the Gospel to encouraging the community to taking up a collection for hungry believers in Jerusalem during a famine.

In the First Letter of Timothy, which most scholars date

CNS PHOTO/KAREN CALLAWAY, CATHOLIC NEW WORLD

THE MOST REV. EMIL A. WCELA, *auxiliary bishop of the Diocese of Rockville Centre from 1988 until his retirement in 2007, served as president of the Catholic Biblical Association in 1989-90. He also served on the Pastoral Practices, Liturgy and Doctrine committees and the Translations subcommittee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.*

at the end of the first century, the word "deacons" appears to be used in a more narrow way. Requirements for the office (3:8-12) are not especially "spiritual" but basic to living with integrity: "dignified," "not deceitful," "not addicted to drink," "not greedy," "holding fast to the mystery of faith," "tested first," "must be married only once and manage their children and their households well." What exactly the deacons did is not spelled out, although in Acts 6 and 7 they care for the needy and preach.

1 Timothy also stipulates that "women, similarly, should be dignified, not slanderers, but temperate and faithful in everything." Much has been written about whether these women are the wives of deacons or deacons themselves. There is good reason to believe that they, too, are deacons. Paul in the Letter to the Romans famously calls Phoebe a *diakonos*, the only named individual explicitly so designated in the New Testament.

Bishops and priests represent 'Christ the Head,' but iconic maleness for deacons is not a requirement.

Here a note of caution is called for. It would be premature to make judgments about the diaconate today from these passages, since the specific nature of this ministry is not clearly defined.

What Deacons Did

By the third century, the hierarchical structure of church communities had developed into the now familiar pattern: bishop at the top, then priest, then deacon. Deacons, ordained with an imposition of hands, taught, cared for the needy and assisted in the celebration of the Eucharist and baptism. In some places they administered the finances of the community.

Circumstances also created a need for women to serve as deacons. Since persons were unclothed when they were baptized, having men ministering to women would have been highly improper. The same reservation would apply to men visiting sick women in their homes.

Women deacons instructed women converts and greeted women who came to the Christian gatherings. There is no evidence that they had a public role in teaching or preaching. By the end of the fourth century in the Eastern churches, they were considered part of the clergy, made so through the laying on of hands.

Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek in *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History*, sum up the situation in the East: "Female deacons…exercised liturgical roles, supervised the lives of women faithful, provided ongoing care for women baptizands, and were seen going on pilgrimage and interacting with their own families and the general population in a variety of ways."

Testimony about women deacons in the West is much scarcer and does not appear until the fifth century. Inscriptions from Africa, Gaul, Rome and Dalmatia, for example, each name a woman deacon. The decrees of three church councils in France, in 441, 517 and 533, prohibiting their ordination are testimony that the institution continued for at least 80 years after its prohibition. It is remarkable to note that in 1017, Pope Benedict VIII wrote to the bishop of Porto in Portugal giving him authority to ordain presbyters, deacons, deaconesses and subdeacons.

By the end of the sixth century, however, the office of deacon for women outside monasteries was already in decline. One of the reasons given for this is the notion of cultic purity, meaning a suitability to approach sacred places and objects. It was believed that menstruation and childbirth made a woman ritually "impure." Another factor was the move away from adult baptism—with its attendant nudity and need for modesty—to infant baptism. Communities of nuns would take over the nursing, charitable and teaching ministries without being ordained deacons. By the 12th century, women deacons anywhere were rare.

The permanent male diaconate was also disappearing. Tensions arose over the understanding and practice of the ministry of priest and deacon. Many of the services of the deacon were gradually absorbed into the priesthood or taken up by other orders: subdeacons, acolytes, doorkeepers. The diaconate changed from a permanent office into a step on the way to priesthood.

The Current Situation

In recent years, several Eastern Orthodox Church conferences have called for the ordination of women to the diaconate. The Armenian Apostolic Church, which is not in union with Rome but is recognized by Rome as being in the line of succession to the apostles, with mutual recognition of sacraments and orders, has always had women deacons, though only a few serve today. Their ministry includes service at the Eucharist.

But what about the Roman Catholic Church?

The Second Vatican Council opened a new era by returning the diaconate to a permanent order. Today about 40,000 men throughout the world are deacons. Knowledge of the historical presence of women deacons would raise the issue of their ordination. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a declaration in 1976 that reaffirmed the exclusion of women from the priesthood. The official com-

mentary commissioned by the C.D.F., however, had acknowledged the existence of "deaconesses" in the early church but was uncertain whether they had received sacramental ordination. The congregation had decided that this discussion "should be kept for the future."

The first draft of what was to be a pastoral letter by the bishops of the United States on the role of women in society and the church appeared in 1988. It stated, "we recommend that the question of the admission of women to the diaconal office" be submitted to thorough investigation and that "this study be undertaken and brought to completion soon." Differences of opinion emerged as the letter worked its way through discussions by the full body of bishops. When the letter was finally approved in November 1992, it noted that admission to the diaconate was among the concerns women had brought to the committee. The letter acknowledged "the need for continuing dialogue and reflection on the meaning of ministry in the church, particularly in regard to the diaconate, the offices of lector and acolyte and to servers at the altar." The document was approved for release not as a pastoral letter of the episcopate but as a committee report. The sense of urgency or priority had disappeared.

Obstacles to considering women for ordination to the diaconate were formidable. Canon 1024 limited sacred ordination to males, as we have seen. This exclusion was based on the practice of Jesus and the church's long tradition of ordaining only men and on the so-called iconic argument. Articulated regularly, as in Pope John Paul II's "Letter to Women" of 1995, the reasoning is that the person ordained is to be an icon, or living representation, of Jesus as bridegroom and shepherd and therefore male.

In 2009 a very significant paragraph was added to Canon 1009 of the Code of Canon Law. It states that bishops and priests "receive the mission and capacity to act in the person of Christ the Head; deacons, however, are empowered to serve the People of God in the ministries of the liturgy, the word and charity." This wording had already appeared in the modified *Catechism of the Catholic Church* issued in English in 1997. In other words, the diaconate is a sacred order but with a difference from the episcopate or priesthood. Bishops and priests represent "Christ the Head," but this characteristic is not included in the description of deacons in their service to the people of God. Iconic maleness is not a requirement for them.

The International Theological Commission advises the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on important doctrinal matters. In 2002, it issued the results of its study on the diaconate under the title "From the Diaconate of Christ to the Diaconate of the Apostles." This study also anticipates the change in Canon 1009 by emphasizing that "the unity of the Sacrament of Holy Orders, in the clear distinction between the ministries of the bishops and priests

on the one hand and the diaconal ministry on the other, is strongly underlined by ecclesial tradition, especially in the teaching of the magisterium." As for the ordination of women to the diaconate, it concludes, "It pertains to the ministry of discernment which the Lord established in his Church to pronounce authoritatively on this question." It leaves the ordination of women to the diaconate an open question. It is rumored that more than one bishop, from the United States and other countries, has raised the issue during *ad limina* visits to the Vatican.

Why Women Deacons?

Women already minister extensively in the church. Consecrated religious serve in various fields. Thousands of other women serve in diocesan offices; in parishes as administrators, pastoral associates, directors of religious education, in the whole spectrum of parish life; in hospitals; in prisons. In contrast to the women of ancient times, women today play a very important part in public life, holding high offices in government, business, the professions and education. Cultural reasons to exclude women from the diaconate, at least in the West, no longer apply.

Ordaining women as deacons who have the necessary personal, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral qualities would give their indispensable role in the life of the church a new degree of official recognition, both of their ministry and of their direct connection to their diocesan bishop for assignments and faculties. Besides providing such women with the grace of the sacrament, ordination would enable them to exercise diaconal service in the teaching, sanctifying and governing functions of the church; it would also make it possible for them to hold ecclesiastical offices now limited to those in sacred orders. And as the International Theological Commission document points out, what the Second Vatican Council was proposing was not a "restoration of a previous form" but "*the principle of the permanent exercise of the diaconate* [italics in the French original and in the English translation] and not one form which the diaconate had taken in the past." Who knows what new and grace-filled enrichment of that ministry might grow from the ordination of women as deacons?

ON THE WEB
A conversation
with Bishop Emil A. Wcela.
americamagazine.org/podcast

The ordination of women to the diaconate is separate from the question of the ordination of women to the priesthood, as this discussion has, I hope, shown. That issue was addressed by the 1995 declaration of Pope John Paul II. Regarding the ordination of women to the diaconate, it is up to episcopal conferences and bishops, to theologians and historians and to concerned Catholics to raise the issue for wider and more public consideration. A

Into the Future

Accepting a religious vocation in uncertain times

BY COLLEEN GIBSON

"I want to go to the novitiate," I stated boldly to my formation director. We both knew these words were coming, but stating my desire forthrightly brought with them a certain fortitude. The words floated with an air of certitude and conviction, unlike the words I had spoken when asking to become a "candidate" with the Sisters of St. Joseph, words I had wished I could put back in my mouth as soon as I spoke them. Now I knew I wanted to enter the novitiate, and I believed Jesus was calling me into a deeper relationship in this time.

The following evening I went out with a group of other young adults who volunteer with the sisters I live with. They teach English as a second language, guide new immigrants toward citizenship and offer help mastering basic computer skills. As we celebrated the year's accomplishments, I felt my phone vibrate briefly in my pocket. Probably just an e-mail, I thought, as I listened to the college student sitting across from me discuss the possibility of working on biomedical research in South Africa in the fall. Another friend, a few years older than my 26 years, talked about his acceptance into the Jesuit novitiate in the late summer. My phone buzzed again. I ignored it. As another volunteer and I discussed a 10-mile race we planned to run, I felt the vibrations of my phone once again. Who in the world was e-mailing this late at night? I slid the phone out of my pocket and silenced it, deciding I only needed to know what was going on in the worlds of the people I was with. Whatever kept my phone buzzing could wait until we were finished celebrating.

By the time I got home, it was near midnight. I checked my e-mail before I went to bed. As I stared at the computer screen, I realized what all that buzzing was about: the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had issued a doctrinal assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious.

I closed my computer and hoped it was a bad dream. By the time I awoke the following morning my inbox was filling up and the house was buzzing with the news. What followed has been a mix of emotions: hurt, shock, sorrow, compassion, denial, gratitude, doubt, resilience, resolution, peace.

What also followed was a confirmation. Only days earlier I had declared that the life of a woman religious is the life I believe I am being called to be a part of. It makes me feel more alive. It graces my existence. I am falling more deeply in love with Jesus each day. No matter what happens, that love calls me to action, to a life lived in service to the people of God.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/SVLUMA

COLLEEN GIBSON *has been formally accepted into the novitiate of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Philadelphia and began her novitiate in September.*

As one of the women I live with said to me the other night at dinner, "It certainly is not an easy time to be looking at religious life." Living a religious life never was, is or will be easy. It requires the work of self-discovery and spiritual deepening and the process of surrendering yourself to embrace God and neighbor alike.

Still, this time is unique. It may not be an easy time, but I have found it a truly blessed time. We face the reality of diminishing numbers, but zeal is flourishing within religious communities. Our society is recognizing the importance of intentional community living, where dedication to relationships comes first; and ministry is part of a balanced life, not the whole of it. Sisters young and old are talking about what an authentic living of the vows looks like, how to share our charism and mission with the world at large and what religious life is meant to be. Conversation and communal discernment are becoming essential to forward motion and are creating a space for all to be heard. This is a time like no other—a time of rebirth, a time of prayer and a time filled with energy around what the Spirit holds for religious life.

The future is uncharted. I can almost guarantee that whatever lies ahead will not look like religious life today. When I began my own exploration of religious life, after years of thinking and praying about it, my journey coincided with the beginnings of the Apostolic Visitation of Women Religious. Despite this scrutiny, the women I met bore witness to the challenges and joys of lives dedicated to Jesus. Through their passion, demeanor and care, I had no doubt that their lives were directed toward living the Gospel day in and day out. They may not have known what the future held, but with hope and love they were living toward the Kingdom.

Facing the unknown requires dreaming big and praying hard. The world is ever-evolving, and to exist in the midst of change we must hold on to the truth that grounds us. To live an intentional life in this world, one must humbly admit that the unknown exists, commit to living out love that unites and do the hard work of self-examination and awareness. It is not easy, but it is what real living requires.

As I have lived and worked with women religious, I have come to see that the future is not something to be feared but something to be embraced. Numbers will change. Ministry will evolve. Some ventures will succeed, some will fail; ultimately, we will learn. The thing that really matters is our relationship with God and what that relationship brings to life in us. The future is full of opportunity. In the midst of all of this, I for one can still say, "I want, I need, I am called to the next step in this life." A

THEATER | ANDREW GARAVEL

IRISH EXPORTS

Tom Murphy's plays of emigration

The movement of people from one country to another, which is one of the principal characteristics of globalization, has been an inescapable part of the Irish consciousness for more than a century and a half. "No custom has been more native to the country than getting out of it," wrote the critic Terry Eagleton of Ireland's sad history of emigration, in which her greatest export was her sons and daughters. An unexpected chapter of that story is now being written after the demise of the Celtic Tiger. Three plays with exile as the theme, written by the contemporary dramatist Tom Murphy, have recently been staged as **DruidMurphy** in London and New York City and will be performed at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., from Oct. 17 to 20.

Each play in this extraordinary production by the Druid Theatre Company of Galway, Ireland, deals with exile in one of the aspects familiar to every emigrant, Irish or not. First there is the story of those who leave the old country and of those who stay behind. "Famine," set in 1846–47, shows the Great Hunger that sparked one of the largest mass migrations of the modern era, as the landowners try to entice the starving peasants to leave their homes for Canada, about which they know nothing (one character wonders whether it will be hot or cold there). Next, in "A Whistle in the Dark," we see the reality of the new country: in Coventry, England, in 1960 the Irish run wild, freed from the constraints of home and church, and fight Pakistanis for the next-to-lowest rung on the ladder. Finally we see the

PHOTO: HAMPSTEAD THEATRE/CATHERINE ASHMORE

Niall Buggy, left, as Dada in "A Whistle in the Dark."

return to the old country and how every exile carries the homeland in his or her imagination. In "Conversations on a Homecoming," a man revisits his hometown to find that his contemporaries no longer share the idealism that had once animated them. He, of course, has been able to preserve—and embroider—the memory in New York. "Why is everyone calling me a romantic?" he asks. The withering reply from one of his pals, "It's more polite."

It is hard to believe anyone has ever called Tom Murphy a romantic. That is likely one reason why he is far less familiar to theatergoers than his contemporary Brian Friel or younger playwrights like Martin McDonagh and Conor McPherson. The lyricism that audiences (rightly or wrongly) expect in Irish drama even in the midst of violence is hard to discern in Murphy, who writes raw, naturalistic dialogue spoken by characters who rarely if ever break free of their constraints. Yet there is poetry in these plays—or better yet, music.

Despite Ireland's reputation as a nation of raconteurs ("We Irishmen have done nothing," said Oscar Wilde, "but we are the greatest talkers since the time of the Greeks"), Murphy portrays people who find it hard to speak about their own lives, so he strives to give them a rhythm of speech that "can make the inarticulate sing with feeling." A character will repeat a phrase over and over like a musical motif, often in place of what he cannot, or dares not, express. The abusive father in "Whistle," for example, cannot admit how he has brutalized his sons: "Boys…Ye're not blaming me…Made men of ye…I tried, I did my best…I tried, I did my best…Tried…Did my best…I tried…."

In these plays, which were written years apart and not intended to be a trilogy, there is also a more universal theme than emigration. Murphy asks us to consider what happens when

people become mired in ideas or sets of values that no longer answer the realities of their lives.

In "Famine," John Connor, the village elder, cannot leave or take any other decisive step because, though now landless, the Connors were long ago chieftains here. In "Whistle," Dada Carney brings a pre-modern blood feud from the west of Ireland to industrial England. When the eldest son asks what they will gain by beating up the rival clan in a pub brawl, he shows he belongs to the commercial world of gain and loss, that he is not a man of honor. And in "Conversations," set in the late 1970s, Michael, just returned from America, harks back to the Camelot era and wants to carry on the vision of their own local J.F.K., a once-charismatic figure whom everybody in town now knows to be a drunken fraud. In each case, the disparity between what people believe and the circumstances in which they find themselves leads to violence, actual (in "Famine" and "Whistle") or verbal ("Conversations"). But there is also hope in the struggle of at least some of the characters to find a hard-won reconciliation.

Murphy has had a longstanding relationship with Druid and its director, Garry Hynes, and, as with her 2006 production of "The Playboy of the Western World" by J. M. Synge, she more than does justice to the playwright. As with every Druid production I have seen, the performances are uniformly excellent, though I cannot help but single out two actors: Niall Buggy, whose Dada Carney is not a swaggering tough guy but a prissy little martinet; and Aaron Monaghan, astonishing in each of the works as a blowhard entrepreneur, a vicious thug and a crippled scapegoat. (I saw the plays at London's Hampstead Theatre in June, but the production and cast at the Kennedy Center will be exactly the same.) To see these plays—especially all in one day—is to be shaken up, and not by their violence alone. (In "Whistle," there is a debate about the relative merits of fists, chains and broken bottles in a fight—and we then get to see the results.)

ON THE WEB
John Anderson reviews "The Master."
americamagazine.org/culture

These works are unsettling, but at the same time they give us "the celebration of being alive" that Murphy sees as the reason we go to the theater. Asked recently about the nature of his work, he said: "If you manage to get human nature at work, human nature is constant. Human nature will always, always be greedy; human nature will fall in love, will hate, will aspire, will emigrate." Murphy manages to capture all these things at work in their brokenness and in their beauty.

ANDREW GARAVEL, S.J., *is an assistant professor of English at Santa Clara University in California.*

BOOKS | PATRICK WHELAN

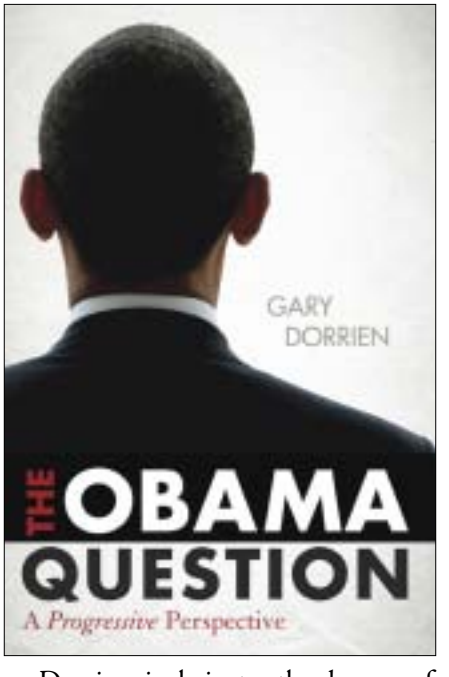
LEARNING AS HE GOES

THE OBAMA QUESTION
A Progressive Perspective

By Gary Dorrien
Rowman and Littlefield. 245p $35

Are corporations people? This pivotal question, advanced by the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in the Citizens United case in 2010 that expanded the rights of corporations to influence elections, has animated a very spirited debate as the presidential election heats up. Can groups (including corporations) be expected to act as good citizens? Or are they inevitably less moral in their motives and actions, as President Obama's favorite theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, argued 80 years ago?

Professor Gary Dorrien, the Niebuhr Professor of Social Ethics at Union Theological Seminary in New York, wades deeply into this issue in his new book, *The Obama Question: A Progressive Perspective*, which portrays President Obama as both an optimist and a pragmatic problem solver. Dorrien sees in Obama a moral actor who is learning as he goes, but who has artfully managed the erratic passions of the nation even as his administration rode a bronco that bucked from one crisis to another—while egged on by the rodeo clowns from the other side of the aisle who actively rooted for the demise of the rider.



Dorrien is heir to the legacy of Niebuhr, who himself taught at Union for 30 years. Writing about *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932), the book that brought Niebuhr his early public acclaim, Dorrien says it estab-

lished the tropes that Niebuhr invoked for the rest of his career. With an icy and aggressive tone, Niebuhr admonished that politics is always about struggling for power. Human groups never willingly subordinate their interests to the interests of others. Morality belongs to the sphere of individual action, Niebuhr argued. On occasion, individuals rise above self-interest, motivated by compassion or love, but groups never overcome the power of self-interest and collective egotism that sustains their existence. For this reason the appeals to reason by secular liberals like John Dewey, and the appeals to reason and Christian love by social gospel liberals, were (to Niebuhr) "maddeningly stupid."

With the same thoroughness that Dorrien earlier brought to the study of American Christianity (he is the author of a three-volume history of progressive theology in the United States), he brings an Episcopal priest's perspective and appreciation for social justice to his analysis of the president's first term in *The Obama Question*. Dorrien is as tough on Obama as he was in his earlier writing on Niebuhr and Paul Tillich. The two subjects come together in Dorrien's perception of Niebuhrian realism as a unifying theme in the Obama presidency.

Dorrien starts by recounting Obama's early life and education. He assembles a collection of disparate clues about Obama's thinking on race and politics in America, and shows how his growing admiration for the civil rights movement instilled in him a communitarian spirit. He recounts the story of Obama's early work as a community organizer, one I myself had a chance to explore when I interviewed all the Catholic priests who worked with the future president in a group of Catholic parishes on the South Side of Chicago. Dorrien recalls the impact of several tragedies, including the death of Barack Obama's father in 1982, the death of the president's brother David in a motorcycle crash in 1987 and ultimately the death of his mother, Ann Dunham, from uterine cancer in 1995 at age 52.

Dorrien then plunges into a detailed liberal critique of the Obama presidency, of the economic crisis and the stimulus package in 2009, of the expanding health care crisis and the drama over passage of the Affordable Care Act in 2010 and of the efforts to hold banks accountable for millions of home foreclosures and job losses. Christian liberals in general are comfortable with all these efforts, though there is also a sense that much more could have been done.

Dorrien does a creditable job deconstructing Obama's foreign policy. Even Christian ethicists who celebrated the end of torture and the generally conciliatory tone of the Obama State Department have had fits of dyspepsia over the continued growth of military budgets, the extrajudicial killing of an American citizen and the increase in civilian deaths associated with the use of drone aircraft.

The author sees Obama searching for balance in response to each crisis: overthrowing Qaddafi in Libya, the commando raid on bin Laden's compound in Pakistan and Obama's measured words when he received the Nobel Peace Prize on the eve of the escalation of the war in Afghanistan.

Dorrien turns to Niebuhr to explain the president's rationalization for these violent actions. He writes, "Niebuhr, refashioning Augustine's [just war theory] argument, contended that the love ethic of Christ defines the highest good in the realm of personal life, but justice is the highest good in the social realm.... Faced with the fact that attacks upon innocent people occur, the biblical command not to kill must give way to the command of love, interpreted as the duty to protect the innocent, just as Augustine taught."

The book begins with a story about Dorrien running into Niebuhr's daughter Elisabeth on the day Barack Obama was elected president. Flush with excitement, she exclaimed to him, "Gary, this is better than we deserve!" But in the end, the book is about the sobering reality of the intense four-year partisan struggle that ensued. Dorrien does a thorough job of chronicling the pugnacious denunciations by Obama's critics, and then of making the more apocalyptic ones look terrifi-

cally foolish.

The biggest shortcoming of the book may be that Dorrien tries to take on Obama's critics all by himself, mostly without citing Obama's many other defenders. The author is also strangely silent about the drama of Obama's relationship with the Supreme Court, with no discussion of the Citizens United decision or anticipation of the court's historic deliberations on Obama's health care reform legislation—which they upheld in June. But *The Obama Question* puts into words the frustration many liberals feel with the obstructionism of the Republicans since Obama took office. Dorrien offers some hope that the president's most creative and courageous efforts facing down, to use John F. Kennedy's words, "tyranny, poverty, disease—and war itself"may yet meet or exceed the early expectations of so many who believed in him.

PATRICK WHELAN, M.D., *a member of the pediatrics faculty at Harvard Medical School, is a former president of Catholic Democrats.*

HANK STUEVER

OVEREXTENDED NATION

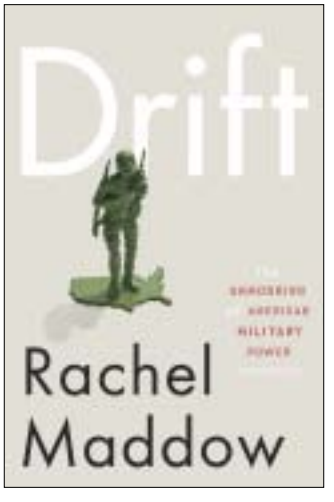
DRIFT
The Unmooring of American Military Power

By Rachel Maddow
Crown. 275p $25

In America's busy-buzzy, easily distracted media culture, who among us can be reliably counted on to do the homework assignments? Sooner or later, many of us opt for the drive-thru version of whatever Topic A happens to be at this very instant, finding it faster to riff, tweet and link our way to a wobbly position.

Whatever degree of succor her loyal viewers find each night when they tune in to MSNBC's "The Rachel Maddow Show," perhaps the real draw, the true comfort, is that Maddow always comes across as the best prepared student in the class by far, without the rest of the class hating her for it. Why else would Roger Ailes, the chairman and chief executive officer of Fox News, leave an admiring blurb on the back cover of Maddow's book *Drift: The Unmooring of American Military Power*? This is a persuasively smart, fluidly written account of the deplorable state of what used to be called the military-industrial complex. Ailes knows what any objective viewer can plainly see: In a nation of dumbdumbs, Maddow's contribution to the dialogue is formidable, and, as far as television goes, sweet relief.

Accounts of backstage life at her show depict an office in which there must never be enough toner ink for the printer. Maddow, with help from her staff, is constantly amassing clips of contemporary and historical journalism, raw data, transcripts, conflicting reports—all of which she then arranges in stacks on the floor. Several verbs might apply to what this 39-year-old Rhodes scholar does next: Absorbs? Ingests? Synthesizes? I think it is simpler than that. She reads it, in the calmest sense of the word.



And yet, for all her alacrity, "I'm the slowest writer on earth. I make sloth look blurry with speed," Maddow avers in *Drift's* acknowledgments. She may be a slow writer, but the payoff here is an impressive, reasoned work of interpretive journalism. In print, the language and structure of *Drift* are unmistakably hers, casually sauced with words like "weird," "hokey" and "malarkey." Her measured outrage is braided with wry sarcasm, making her a master of that modern tone in which one is ironically aghast: *Really? Seriously?* (Or as kids-on-the-go text it: Srsly?)

Drift is best read as an enjoyable and thinky tract in the key of *Srsly?* Unlike many of the quickie books written by the men (and a few women) who dominate cable news shows and clog up the bestseller lists, *Drift* is refreshingly *not* about Rachel Maddow, though the first sentence might seem to suggest otherwise: "In the little town where I live in Hampshire County, Massachusetts...."

That little town, where Maddow keeps a primary residence with her partner, Susan Mikula, and "an enormous dog," is relevant for its outsized share of the nation's post-September 11 spending spree in an intense and costly effort to shield itself from real and imagined dangers. In the Homeland Security era, a volunteer firehouse for this burg became a "Public Safety Complex" with an eagle-airbrushed fire engine too large for the garage that housed the old truck.

In metaphor and fact, this is the America that Maddow frets fully about for the next 260 or so pages—an overextended nation so obsessed and economically dependent on an increasingly privatized defense machine (and our paranoid role as global police operation) that it has become locked in costly and impulsive acts of quasi-declared war. And yet, as Maddow makes clear, this system

works only because so many of us can remain personally detached from the consequences.

Drift initially reads as a breezy history of defense spending, as Maddow glides effortlessly from Thomas Jefferson's role as America's original worrywart, to the marketing origins of the G.I. Joe doll, to the distorted willfulness of Ronald Reagan's invasion of Grenada. She also delivers what may be the most succinct and even delightful recap of the Iran-Contra affair ever written—not bad for someone who was all of 14 the summer Oliver North was brought before the joint committee. (This is no small feat for us writers who are squarely, proudly in Generation X and are constantly reminded by our boomer superiors of how much current history we missed by just *this* much and with it our chance to comprehend the late 20th century.)

Eventually, *Drift* becomes a book about infrastructure, a subject about which Maddow is unrepentantly and excitably nerdy. She is passionate about how armies are fed, military bases are run, soldiers and their families are treated. Throughout *Drift* Maddow's concern for our all-volunteer forces is eloquently and subtly evident, and more meaningful than the usual lip service paid to "heroes."

A later chapter, about the build-up of the U.S. nuclear arsenal and its current rusted-out condition, is at once maddening, tragic and (drawing on another of Maddow's true talents) hilarious, as she employs a refrain of "Whoopsie!" to her chronicle of how often the United States loses, drops, sinks or otherwise forgets to disable its fritzy array of mothballed bombs.

Maddow becomes prescriptive in a no-nonsense three-page finish: The United States should pay for wars with contemporaneous taxes and bonds; we should get the Central Intelligence Agency out of the offensive-strike business; we need to roll back efforts to privatize the military ("Our troops need to peel their own potatoes again"); and so on. Readers will find themselves in a moment of strange reverie: If we like Rachel Maddow so much on television and now on the page, would she ever consider running for....?

Nah. The smartest kid in class is usually too smart to fall into that trap.

HANK STUEVER *is the* Washington Post's *television critic and the author of* Tinsel: A Search for America's Christmas Present.

RAYMOND A. SCHROTH

AFTER DALLAS

THE PASSAGE OF POWER
The Years of Lyndon Johnson

By Robert A. Caro
Alfred A. Knopf. 736p $35

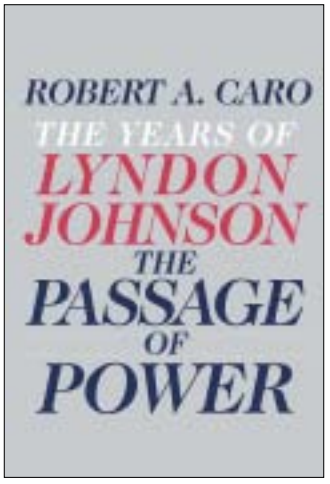
Robert Caro, now 76, had his epiphany on power when he was sent as a young reporter for Long Island Newsday to cover a plan by Robert Moses to build a bridge from Rye, N.Y., across Long Island Sound to Oyster Bay. It was, he recalls, the "world's worst idea," and he wrote a series exposing the folly of the scheme. He convinced everyone, it seems, including New York's Gov. Nelson Rockefeller; but the State Legislature approved the plan 138 to 4. In 1964 Caro concluded that bridges and highways are built not because of scientific studies but because Robert Moses has power and puts them where he wants. So Caro wrote *The Power Broker* (1974), the 1,200-page saga of how one city planner's ego, implanted in the Triboro Bridge and Tunnel Authority, transformed the face of New York and Long Island, fed by the urban-auto myth that every upwardly-mobile citizen would have two homes—one in Manhattan for work and the other on Long Island to nourish the spirit.

The impact of the book set the stage for a five-volume biography of Lyndon B. Johnson, of which this is the fourth. Of Caro's five books, three have the word *power* in the title. This one is no mere biography of an individual but a profound analysis of Lord Acton's 1887 maxim: power corrupts. Critics have labeled Caro's opus Shakespearean; it fits the classic theme of tragedy where the ego-blindness of a potentially good leader, deaf to the voices of prophets, brings a whole world to ruin.

The Passage of Power covers only six years, starting in 1958 when Senator Lyndon Johnson is ambivalent about pursuing the Democratic nomination for president but shys away because he fears the humiliation of losing. This hesitant soul is the same 13-year-old boy who, when a group of children sat at recess under a hackberry tree, looked at the sky and, driven by his father's financial failure, proclaimed: "Someday I'm going to be president of the United States." The narrative moves inexorably to Dallas, then to the determination of a dramatically transformed Johnson to establish his credibility by fulfilling both John F. Kennedy's legislative program and his own compassionate vision for social and racial justice.

The sick heart of the narrative, however, is the crippling hatred between Johnson and Robert F. Kennedy. And as the story develops, Caro turns back the clock to fill in the biographies of the stars, including a harrowing recreation of J.F.K.'s PT 109 heroism, when his boat was sunk in battle and he saved his crew in World War II, and Johnson's earlier Texas shenanigans, which undermine his integrity.

Robert Kennedy's loathing for Johnson is traced to some insulting comment made about the Kennedy patriarch, Joseph P. Kennedy, whom President Franklin D. Roosevelt removed as ambassador to the United Kingdom right before the 1940 election. Johnson despised the Kennedy sons because, by his measure, they were not "manly" enough, and he said of Bobby, "I'll slit his throat if it's the last thing I do." Meanwhile, as the 1960 election looms, Johnson now lusts after the presidency and vastly underestimates his rival—as he saw him, a spoiled, sickly lightweight John Kennedy.



With typical cool, J.F.K. calculates that he cannot win the presidency without Texas and inroads into the South; and he offers Johnson the vice presidency. Terrified by the prospect, during the convention Robert Kennedy runs up and down the stairs between his brother's room and Johnson's trying to force Johnson out. But Johnson has calculated that the chances of any president dying in office by either illness or assassination were pretty good. So he clings to the vice presidency and endures two years of another kind of humiliation—no power, a too-small office, no clout in the senate, no invitations to the most exclusive parties—aware that the glamorous Kennedy entourage is laughing at him behind his back. He even lowers himself to pleadingly ask Robert Kennedy, "Why don't you like me?" only to be brushed aside.

Until Dallas. Caro's prose resurrects the sad reverberating sounds of drum rolls, the clatter of hoofs and rhythmic tread of marching soldiers as the hush deepens block by block.

Caro is not a political cartoonist but a great biographer, a sensitive student of human nature. So the rude, bullying, spiteful Robert Kennedy displays a moral streak during the Cuban Missile Crisis meetings. While most men around the Cabinet Room table want to bomb Cuba, Kennedy, wary of civilian casualties, says, "a sneak attack is not in our traditions." And he could melt with compassion for sick children and old people in hospital wards.

Lyndon Johnson, a volcanic, abusive vice president facing both a congressional investigation and a Life magazine exposé about Texas political business deals, is transformed by his new role. To win Congressional support for civil rights, tax reform and "the unconditional war on povery" he skillfully creates a two-fisted, mounted frontiersman image by inviting the press to long visits, punctuated by a Van Cliburn concert, at his ranch in Texas. He calls up the image of Jacqueline Kennedy nestling the bloody skull of his predecessor in her lap. As Eric Sevareid said, "He had to stamp his own leadership on his predecessor's administration, and he did this in a matter of days.... He had to impress his own personality on the country at large, on a people just getting used to Mr. Kennedy's far different nature, and this Mr. Johnson began to do the moment propriety permitted."

Meanwhile Robert Kennedy, in deep depression, has been secretly visiting his brother's grave at night. To the president he is still a "snot-nosed little runt." Johnson, in a remark he knew would get to Kennedy, later suggested to Pierre Salinger that the assassination might be "divine retribution" for John Kennedy's "participation" in assassination plots against other heads of state in Cuba and Vietnam. In the next—and final—volume, as Vietnam rises both Kennedy and Johnson will meet their fates. We are blessed to have Robert Caro to tell their stories.

RAYMOND A. SCHROTH, S.J., *is literary editor of* ***America****.*

KAREN SUE SMITH

WE THE PERSON

OUR DIVIDED POLITICAL HEART

The Battle for the American Idea in an Age of Discontent

By E. J. Dionne Jr.
Bloomsbury. 325p $27

As a columnist for the Washington Post, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and the author of several books, including *Why Americans Hate Politics*, E. J. Dionne Jr. keeps his finger on the nation's pulse. Across the political spectrum, he writes, many Americans fear that our nation, not just the economy, is in decline; that political polarization is keeping us from governing ourselves effectively; and that growing inequality may persist over the long term because the old social contract based on shared prosperity is broken. Yet in his new book, *Our Divided Political Heart: The Battle for the American Idea in an Age of Discontent,* Dionne argues that what we are experiencing is not national decline, not yet, but rather a historic loss of balance that urgently needs to be restored.

If one sees democracy as an ongoing

balancing act, it should not be surprising that the public sometimes leans too far in one direction or the other. Democracy is fragile and requires regular maintenance, but equilibrium can be recovered with effort. And U.S. history can alleviate fears for the future and offer clues about what needs to be done.

The word *balance* is crucial to Dionne's thesis that America's identity includes the core values of both individualism and community, which pull in different directions yet must be held together if we are to maintain balance and move ahead as a nation. An overemphasis on either comes at the expense not only of the other but of the whole democratic experiment.

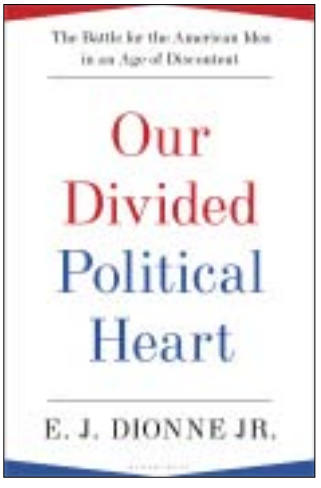
"American history is defined by an irrepressible and ongoing tension between two core values: our love of individualism and our reverence for community," writes Dionne. He then adds respect for equality as a third core component, one doubly important because equality is often linked to the positive role of government in promoting and extending liberty.

Catholic readers will find America's core values, positive role for government and emphasis on human rights and equality highly compatible with church teaching.

Citing one historical example after another, Dionne challenges the Tea Party's distorted view of U.S. history, which touts small government as a core value of the founders and limits government's responsibility to relieve and prevent inequalities. The Tea Party, he argues, promotes extreme individualism (characteristic of the Gilded Age) at the expense of community and government. And that is pushing us off-balance today. While Dionne thanks the Tea Party for turning to history, he shows their version of history fudges the facts. Historians favored by the Tea Party, for example, have glossed over the fact that slavery, based on a notion that blacks are inferior to whites, was a major cause of the Civil War. A few of their apologists wrote for the extremist John Birch Society of the 1940s and '50s.

Dionne puts the record straight. For a hundred years, throughout the 20th century, a national desire to hold the core values (individualism, community, equality) together shaped what Dionne calls the long consensus. That consensus, he maintains, is what made the United States into a world leader. These core values are also rooted in our founders' beliefs and in the Constitution.

The author's main arguments are compelling. Here is a sample: The Constitution itself is no revelation handed down to God's anointed. It is a compromise document, the work of individuals who argued over principles, values and politics, but who together established a strong federal government, powerful enough to unify, lead and defend a group of former confederated states. Individualism and community are present in the substance of the Constitution; both were present in the writing of it; both should be present in the interpreting of it and the amending of it.



Moreover, the principle of equality embedded in the Constitution, though far from perfectly realized when it was signed, contained the seeds of expanded liberty realized later in the movements to end slavery, to protect labor, to give women the vote and so on. The founders did not consider themselves infallible (nor should we), evident in the fact that they humbly wrote into the Constitution a process for amending it.

"We believe in limited government, but also in active and innovative government," writes Dionne. "Our Founders did not devote so much time and intellectual energy to creating a strong federal government only for it to do nothing."

Imbalance can be fatal. The Union was imperiled and nearly lost in the most serious case of Americans out of equilibrium: the Civil War. At that time Abraham Lincoln reminded Congress that the Union preceded the states and created them. He noted that while the union is mentioned in the Constitution (beginning with the Preamble, "a more perfect union"), the sovereignty of states is not.

In later chapters, Dionne recounts how other imbalances were corrected, as with the rise of the populists, the progressives and the repeal of Prohibition. Still, the book offers no quick fix or any recipe at all. Dionne suggests that it falls primarily to the millennial generation to restore the value of community in the face of today's extreme individualism. He bases his optimism on the results of a Pew study of millennials. But in my view, a poll does not carry the weight of history, though I hope he is right and that the country can wait that long for a remedy.

Not only does the author deftly use history and political theory to shed light on the current political polarization of America, he does so in an exemplary way, with civility and equanimity. It would be hard to find a more well-reasoned or hope-filled book about the current fractured state of the country. If reason, hope or civility appeals to you, read this book. If not, read it solely for the historical discussion.

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

LETTERS

What Catholics Do Best

Re "Faith by Heart," by David Impastato (9/10): While I am in full support of more catechesis and evangelization, there is no evidence that rote memorization will lead to greater retention of young Catholics. In fact, the Catholic Church actually has a greater retention rate than almost any other faith tradition, according to the Pew Research Center.

If we want to do better, and we should, we should expand participation in those activities that already work: retreats, youth ministries, sacramental education aimed at the entire family and so forth. We need robust and energizing faith formation; strong modeling from adults and church leaders; and active participation in liturgy, works of charity and social justice involvement that leads to Catholics truly living their faith, not just reciting it.

DOUGLAS CREMER
Pasadena, Calif.

Knowing the Faith

Congratulations to **America** for having the courage to publish a lead article about the U.S. church's "dirty little secret"—youngsters who know nothing about their faith. The proposed solution makes simple, practical sense.

The article argues against a "rote" catechesis. Learning a Beatitude, like "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God," instills actionable, inspirational knowledge that builds and articulates Christian identity. It provides "a habitation and a name" for Christian praxis. The experiential component of faith formation is essential, but it must occur in a both/and context. Knowing the faith and living the faith are inseparable and mutually affirming.

May this common-sense approach, suggested by our bishops and church documents, find its way into our classrooms, desperate for a solution to this historic crisis.

JANE JUSTIN
Scranton, Pa.

Wisdom for Young Catholics

Re "Help Their Unbelief," by Matt Emerson (9/10): I have long wrestled with some of the students' same questions, doubts or downright opposition. But I would never think of myself as a faithless, unbelieving or disloyal Catholic. At my ripe old stage in life, I have decided that my faith does not depend all that much on certain doctrinal allegiances, and it no longer troubles me to say so. Having set some old "saws" aside, I can more easily get to what counts.

In adult education classes in my parish, I always insist that inquirers read a solid book or two on the history of Christianity before engaging with theology. There's nothing like a dose of reality therapy before soaring to the heights (depths?) of theology and philosophy. History teaches a lot that theology sometimes asks us to ignore.

No, I am not a postmodern nihilist, skeptic or relativist. Nor do I jump or necessarily pay attention whenever a new Vatican document or bishop's letter comes forth. I hope that our effort to encourage young Catholics to "stay the course" helps them to see the middle point between these two extremes.

PHILIP GARMEY
Lynchburg, Va.

Self-Made Fiction

Re "Catholic Identity at Issue as Ryan Joins Romney" (Signs of the Times, 9/10): Paul Ryan's budget plan makes a very dangerous assumption—that all welfare recipients are able to work. It is also simply not true that anyone who works hard can be successful.

Some people forget, or choose to ignore, that we have brothers and sisters who are born with varying mental and physical capacities. What do "self-made" people do to ensure they are born with their physical abilities and above-average intelligence? What did they do to avoid being an infant with fetal alcohol syndrome? Nothing.

Instead of arrogance in success, we need humility and grace to recognize

those who really do need our care. It would be impossible to read the New Testament and not understand this message Jesus taught over and over again.

DENISE ANDERSON
Rochester Hills, Mich.

Changing Context

At one time, I believed something could be done to stem the legal fallout of Roe v. Wade, and I would have supported a candidate like Paul Ryan. But now? To paraphrase a new song by Taylor Swift, "We will never get back together" as a country on the issue of abortion. Americans are completely divided on abortion, and I know of no one on the pro-life side who has offered any kind of satisfactory alternative to criminalizing abortions—something our culture will never put up with.

Neither party offers an agenda that is totally acceptable to Catholic teaching. For Catholics who are not rooted in one or another (faulty) ideology, thiselection is a choice about which candidate offers a platform that is the lesser of two evils.

ART KILLOREN
Winter Haven, Fla.

Gospel Dialogue

Re "Of Many Things," by Drew Christiansen, S.J. (9/10): Call it dialogue, conversation, questioning or even opining, this method of being church is at the heart of it all. Think of the consistent impression one receives by simply reading the Gospels. Jesus spoke, questioned and listened. His disciples, the crowds and even his "enemies" did the same. In the midst of this particular divine encounter, the church was founded, formed and managed to grow. It is apparent that the beat must go on.

JOHN HUNT
Pompano Beach, Fla.

Protecting My Vote

I was very disturbed by "Suppressing the Vote?" by Maryann Cusimano Love (8/27). A valid state-issued identification is not a poll tax. I am frequently asked for my driver's license in everyday life. How does a person navigate through life without a valid state-issued identification?

As a law-abiding citizen, I have the right to expect that my validly cast vote will not be disenfranchised by others who are not eligible to vote.

I am appalled that **America** would print an article filled with such blatant distortions. This type of sleazy, biased "journalism" makes me question why I waste my money to subscribe.

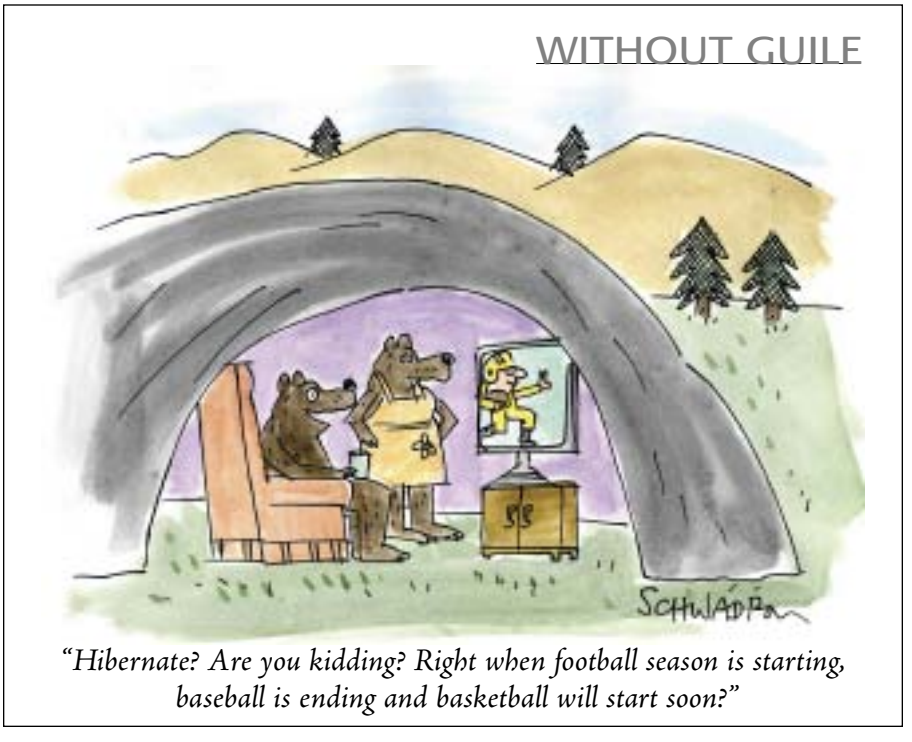
TERRI SHAWHAN
Broadview Heights, Ohio

Today's Moral Issues

Bishop Richard E. Pates ("In This Together," 8/13) writes with the naïveté of one who has not experienced firsthand the gritty reality of day-to-day life. His simplistic essay overlooks the tragic moral implications of a nation increasingly within the control of multinational corporations focused exclusively on earnings per share rather than quality product or humanitarian goals. The result is that Catholics who are in lockstep with the hierarchy view same-sex marriage and reproductive rights as the major moral issues facing humankind. They are not.

When I was younger, the church warned against consumerism and greed. These are among the most critical moral issues facing Christians today. Corporate greed, exploitation of workers, vilification of the poor, privatization of governments in the pursuit of profit, income inequality and the corruption of our democracy by money are just a few issues that should arouse concern for people who love Jesus and want to serve him.

JIM PALERMO
Southampton, Mass.



"Hibernate? Are you kidding? Right when football season is starting, baseball is ending and basketball will start soon?"

CARTOON BY HARLEY SCHWADRON

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It's Complicated

TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), OCT. 7, 2012

Readings: Gn 2:18–28; Ps 128:1–6; Heb 2:9–11; Mk 10:2–16

"What God has joined together, let no one separate" (Mk 10:9)

Catholics understand revelation as arising from a single source and manifesting itself through both Scripture and tradition. That is, the Bible and the dynamic, Spirit-filled life of the church become a mutually informing expression of God's guidance. As Scripture molds how tradition views the world, tradition, ever evolving to changing conditions, brings different questions and perspectives to Scripture.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus is tested by the Pharisees about Moses' allowance for divorce. Jesus appears to articulate an absolute rule: no divorce, or at least no divorce and remarriage. Early on the church struggled with such an absolute pronouncement. We see the struggle even within the New Testament itself. Matthew's version of the same story (19:9) adds an exception Jesus appears not to have made originally, for sexual immorality (*porneia*). Paul refers to Jesus' original teaching (1 Cor 7:10) and apparently feels free to nuance it to fit the conditions of the church. In this case Paul allowed divorce and remarriage between believer and unbeliever if the unbeliever wished it. The value he draws upon is God's will that we live in peace (7:15).

Today, the Catholic Church takes the indissolubility of marriage as a divine law, but then allows annulments for various reasons, including the very vague "lack of due discretion." These ongoing considerations reflect efforts to take the teachings of Jesus seriously in a complex world.

It might be helpful to consider how Jesus responded to the Pharisees. He took them out of their legal mentality and into the divine vision of the very nature of the human condition and the profound relationship God intends husbands and wives to have. He drew them back to Genesis, our first reading, and to Adam, God's lonely gardener. Being alone is not right, so God creates all the animals; but they are no partners for the man. God then takes a rib from Adam and forms Eve.

If we reflect on the symbolism, Adam not only finds "bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh"; he is also missing a rib. Eve has it. To be complete he needs to reconnect with that rib. "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body." This is the purpose of marriage: the giving of oneself over to this new creation.

So divorce is clearly contrary to what we were made for in terms of marriage. This is the teaching of the Lord. No one knows this truth more deeply than earnest believers who committed their lives to a union that is now fractured by divorce. Their pain, loneliness, sense of failure and often even shame speak loudly and clearly that this brokenness is not the flourishing God intended. Does that make them violators of the divine law? Adulterers in a remarriage? Not necessarily. Like Matthew, Paul and the modern church, one is wise to take both Jesus' words and the dynamic tradition to heart, and use both to wrestle with this complex moral problem. One thing should be obvious: when we do such wrestling, we should always be sensitive to everyone's pain and the priority of conscience. The second reading, from the Letter to the Hebrews, describes Jesus' solidarity with us as a consequence of his own suffering. Our solidarity involves entering into each other's brokenness as well.

ART: TAD DUNNE

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Consider any brokenness in your own life.
- Invite the compassionate Lord into that wound.
- Pray daily for those around you who are suffering.

Pope Benedict XVI spoke early in his pontificate to pastors about Catholics who divorced and remarried without an annulment. "None of us has a ready-made solution," he said; "each person's suffering is different." He even saw their presence at the Eucharist as "involvement in the mystery of the Cross and resurrection of Christ. Given that it is the sacrament of the passion of Christ, the suffering Christ embraces these persons in a special way.... They can feel embraced by the crucified Lord who falls to the earth and dies and suffers for them and with them"—and with us all.

PETER FELDMEIER

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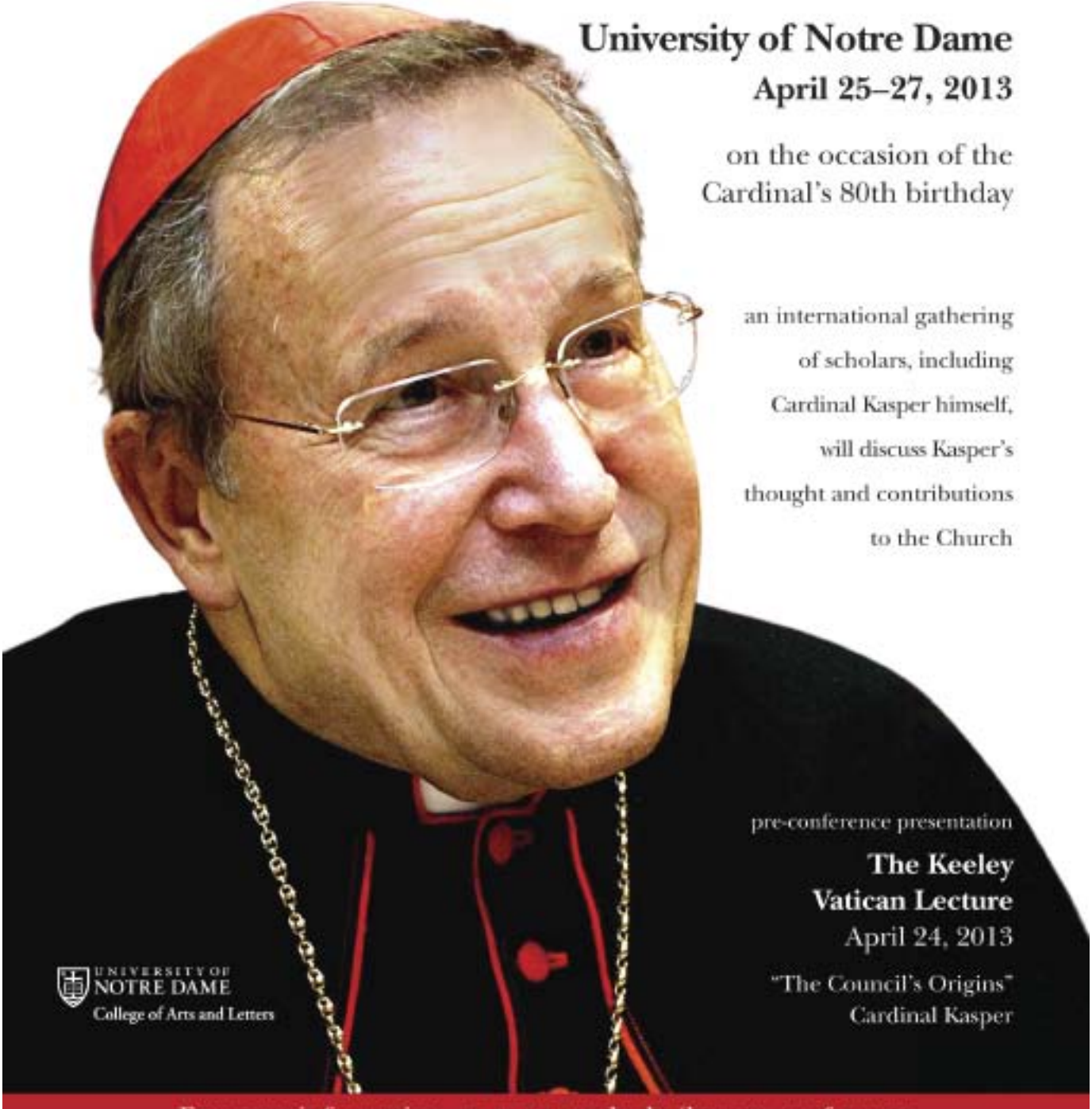

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