America
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Revisiting 'The Last Supper'

DALÍ'S MISUNDERSTOOD MASTERPIECE

Michael Anthony Novak

FALL BOOKS II

Robert Ellsberg on
Bartolomé de las Casas

OF MANY THINGS

I must admit that I have never been a big fan of the work of art that graces the cover of this week's issue. "Why, then, is it there?" you might ask. Well, for starters, **America** is not a totalitarian state. We're not exactly a democracy either; still, it's both charitable and prudent to pay a decent respect to the opinions of one's colleagues, especially when they're as smart as mine. And, truth be told, quite a few members of team **America** like the piece. I don't see it, but I'm a bit old fashioned that way. My reaction to Dalí's modern depiction of the Last Supper is something like the punch line to the joke about how many Irish mothers it takes to screw in a light bulb. The answer: What's wrong with the old one?

Indeed. What's wrong with the "old" Last Supper, the one that Leonardo da Vinci gave us, that triumph of light, color and form that has inspired countless artists, Christian and otherwise, long before Dan Brown "cracked" its "code"? The more or less straightforward answer, of course, is that there is nothing wrong with the old one; it's a masterpiece. It's just that it is neither the first nor the last word on the subject. Artists in nearly every century since the second have taken a crack at depicting that fateful, world-changing night in Jerusalem, a seminal event in the life of Jesus and the church.

That is as it should be. For "in his gracious goodness," as the fathers at Vatican II put it, "God has seen to it that what he had revealed for the salvation of all nations would abide perpetually in its full integrity and be handed on to all generations." In other words, every generation of Christians must make its own the timeless truths of the Scriptures and tradition. In that sense, the new evangelization that we're hearing so much about is not really new at all; it is the work of the church in every age. As Archbishop Rino Fisichella points out in an article on **America**'s Web site (dated Oct. 15), the new evangelization invites Catholics, not to reinvent Christianity for a new century (a preposterous notion if there ever was one) but to "become missionaries so that the joy that has been communicated to them and that has transformed their lives may allow others, too, to encounter the same source of love and of salvation."

Jesus Christ is that source of love and salvation. At the heart of our faith, then, is not an idea or a philosophy or even a theology, but a person. Our faith is not in a proposition but in the One who is the way, the truth and the life. The proclamation of the Gospel in any age is existentially unintelligible in the absence of such a personal dimension. It is also dangerous; Robert Ellsberg reminds us of just that in this week's issue: The tragic story of some of the 16th century's "new evangelists" reveals that when Christians confuse the what of faith for the who of faith, then we also tend to forget who we are as people of faith and, unfortunately, who our neighbor is.

When God ceases to be personal and is instead merely a thought or idea, then God is no longer a subject, but an object. As Pope Benedict has written, "the arrogance that would make God an object…is incapable of finding him. To think like that is to make oneself God. And to do that is to abase not only God, but the world and oneself too."

The new evangelists—all of us—would do well to remember that. We would do well to remember that the most powerful form of evangelization is our account of the joy that is within us. We cannot fake that; and while it takes different forms at different times for different Christians, it ultimately comes from the same source, the same person. In a way, both da Vinci and Dalí got it right: Jesus is in the center of both pictures—exactly where he should be.

MATT MALONE, S.J.

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Contents

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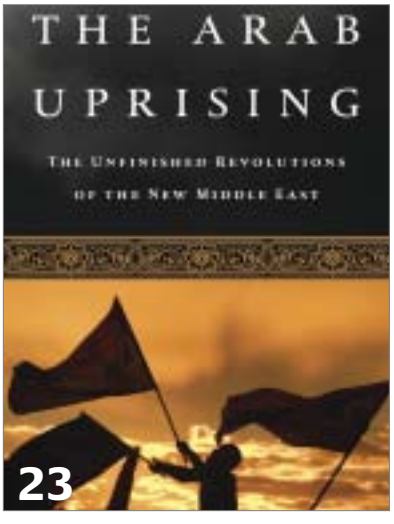

ARTICLES

COLUMNS & DEPARTMENTS

BOOKS & CULTURE

ON THE WEB

A report on Jacques Berthieu, right, a **new Jesuit saint**. Plus, Roger Haight, S.J., talks about his new book, ***Christian Spirituality for Seekers,*** with James Martin, S.J. All at americamagazine.org.

A Prayer for Malala

A PORTRAIT OF MALALA YOUSUFZAI AT A PRAYER SERVICE AT SACRED HEART CATHEDRAL IN LAHORE, PAKISTAN, OCT. 14. CNS PHOTO: MOHSIN RAZA, REUTERS

Do you remember what you were doing on Oct. 11, the United Nations' first International Day of the Girl Child? Malala Yousafzai, a 14-year-old Pakistani girl, was fighting for her life. She had been shot in the head and throat on Oct. 9 by a Taliban assassin intent on making the teenager an object lesson in fear. Ms. Yousafzai had dared to challenge the Taliban raging across Pakistan's Swat Valley. Her offense was her determination to get an education. Her poignant diary, written for BBC Urdu's Web site in winter 2008-9 about the daily struggles of a girl seeking a better life in a profoundly, even violently patriarchal society, had captivated the world and transformed her into a spokesperson for all girls barred from education and, regrettably, into a target in her homeland.

Gravely wounded, she has been transported to Britain for more sophisticated medical treatment and for her own safety. Taliban agents have vowed to complete their deadly mission. Ms. Yousafzai suffers today on behalf of all the girls in the developing world, millions who are shut out at birth from educational and career opportunities because of their gender; forced into child marriages, servitude or sexual slavery or murdered to preserve family "honor"; or prevented from being born in the first place as sex selection abortions depress the birth rate of girls in India, China and elsewhere.

This first observation of a day to acknowledge and celebrate the girl child focuses on the suffering engendered by child marriage. In the developing world, one in seven girls marries before age 15. The cultural institution of early and forced marriage essentially denies a girl her childhood. It disrupts her education, restricts her opportunities, increases her chances of becoming a victim of violence and abuse and jeopardizes her health.

The world wounds itself in its suppression of girls. Today there are 500 million adolescent girls in the developing world. If they could all express the fullness of their talent, their heart, their creativity and ambition—what would be the limit on their future accomplishments? How much could their vision and experience improve upon the plodding patriarchy in government and among international nongovernmental organizations dedicated to combating hunger, disease, poverty and social and economic inequity? But the spiritual loss of girls to the world is even more devastating when so many are denied the fullest expression of their humanity by "tradition," by fear and ignorance, by malicious and ultimately self-lacerating misogyny.

The church condemns the grave moral evil of violence against women and the sexual exploitation of women, whether in their own homes or through the vicious trade of human trafficking and sexual bondage, an industry that particularly abuses young girls. Beyond these obvious offenses to human dignity, however, various other degradations of girls have a significant material impact on the future in terms of a profound void opened up in global productivity and creativity that is literally incalculable. The church has repeatedly promoted the full and equal dignity of women, and by extension girls, in a world where many societies are hostile to that notion.

In his "Letter to Women" in 1995, Pope John Paul II, after apologizing for the role Christians have played in undermining the dignity of women through the ages, highlighted the urgent need to achieve "real equality" for the world's women as a matter of justice "but also of necessity."

"Women will increasingly play a part in the solution of the serious problems of the future," he wrote, "leisure time, the quality of life, migration, social services, euthanasia, drugs, health care, the ecology, etc." What the church has called the "genius of women" will favor "processes of humanization which mark the 'civilization of love.'" But before that genius can be realized, the world's girl children must be protected and cherished.

The depravity of Ms. Yousafzai's attackers has generated outrage throughout Pakistan. It is possible that, as one government minister suggests, her shooting could prove a turning point as pressure mounts to finally contain the Taliban. It is tempting now to succumb to platitude and sagely note that such an outcome would mean Ms. Yousafzai's suffering would not have been in vain. But that is inaccurate—the suffering will surely continue for girls in Pakistan and around the world for many years after this first declaration of an international day for girls. And it is unfair to Ms. Yousafzai. She should never have been asked to pay so dear a price simply because she was born with a hunger for knowledge and a hope to do more with her life, as well as with the inescapable, wonderful and, in her case, daunting reality of her gender.

GUANTÁNAMO

Victims' Families Seek 'Justice' at 9/11 Trial

More than 11 years after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, claimed the lives of their family members, nine people traveled to Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, in mid-October to attend the pre-trial hearings of Khalid Shaikh Mohammed, the attacks' alleged mastermind, and four others accused of organizing and financing the attacks. The defendants, arraigned in May by U.S. military commissions, face execution if convicted.

By traveling to Guantánamo Bay, the family members had a unique opportunity to face personally the men accused of murdering their loved ones. Eleven years after that tragic day, the emotions were as raw as ever. "I wanted to walk past them when we came into the courtroom," said Kathleen Haberman of Farmington, Wis., who traveled to the Guantánamo Bay facility with her husband, Gordon. Their daughter Andrea, then 25, died in the attack on the World Trade Center. "I truly wanted to just look in their faces because, to me, these cannot be human beings.... No human being would do this."

Some family members spoke of the importance of faith in carrying them through the darkest moments since Sept. 11. "The Lord will help you through anything in life. You just have to ask," said Mrs. Haberman.

Merrilly Noeth lost her son Michael, then 30, a member of the U.S. Navy, at the Pentagon on Sept. 11. "I know he is with me. I believe very firmly, and I always have," she said.

Yet for those who attended the hearings, forgiveness is hard—even unthinkable. Forgiveness "for them?" asked Ms. Noeth. "I'm not that good."

Mr. Haberman admitted: "That's a tough one for me. When I sit in court with these guys, can I forgive them? I have a hard time. I mean, they don't want my forgiveness. I think justice is the word."

Dorine and Martin Toyen of Avon, Conn., lost their daughter Amy, then 24, in the World Trade Center. She was engaged to be married. "Her whole life was taken away from her," said Mrs. Toyen. "There is no way I could ever forgive them."

Mr. Toyen concurred. "I want justice, not forgiveness," he said. "I'm still very bitter. Rage." If the accused "are found guilty, then I would have no qualms with the death penalty."

During the week of hearings, Army Col. James L. Pohl, chief judge of the military commissions, heard more than a dozen motions related to the defendants' presence in court, what they are allowed to wear, how to treat classified information, calling and compelling witnesses, the applicability of the U.S. Constitution and whether the defendants should be able to recount on the record details of mistreatment while secretly detained by the Central Intelligence Agency.

Human rights organizations contest that the military commissions, a special court system created to try terrorism suspects, are unnecessary. Instead, they argue, the case should be moved to federal court, which has a proven record of trying and convicting terrorism suspects.

Peaceful Tomorrows, an organization of 9/11 families dedicated to peacemaking, agrees. The military commissions "currently fail to guarantee the fairness and respect for due process that federal trials would," the group said. "Justice will be served only if the highest legal standards are met."

Alexandra Scott of Stanford, Conn., who lost her father Randolph Scott, then 48, in the World Trade Center, shared her perception of the fairness of the current hearings. "There are different ways to gauge fair. Fair for whom? Fair for us?" she wondered. "This is 10 years in the making, but at the same time, it is also just the beginning. A matter of fairness is kind of hard to judge at this point."

LUKE HANSEN, S.J.

PHOTO: LUKE HANSEN

EGYPT

Christians Worry, But Note Signs of Freedom

Some of Egypt's Christians are concerned about Islamists in power, but there is greater freedom of speech than before the revolution, said the pope's ambassador to the Middle Eastern country. "I think there is a greater freedom now, though they accuse the present regime of also clamping down on people, on trying to control the press...so they say that the president is becoming a pharaoh," said the Vatican nuncio, Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald, describing the mood of Egypt's Christians.

"Christians are feeling uncomfortable, and certainly the Salafi group," an ultraconservative sect of Islam, "is showing...disrespect for Christians," he said during a visit to Washington in mid-October. "There are complaints, and I would say they are genuine complaints." The archbishop said that often what begins as a conflict over property or family affairs turns religious and "ends up with people having their houses burned or their shops destroyed or their place of worship also attacked.

"It's easy to arouse a group of Muslims against the Christians, and there can be also a reaction on the Christian side," he said, adding, "The thing is that people are rather hot-tempered and they don't reason very much before they react." When there is a problem, he said, Christians feel "that the security forces don't come in time, they always come late, and very often they hold reconciliation sessions, and the Christians are always the losers."

After President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt was ousted in February 2011, an Egyptian military council assumed broad powers. Sixteen months later, Mohammed Morsi of the Islamist Muslim Brotherhood was elected Egypt's new president. Morsi has finished his first 100 days in office, and critics say he has not kept most of his promises about what he would achieve in that time. Morsi has pledged that he would promote equal rights for Egypt's Christians and women. "Our Christian brothers, let's be clear, are national partners and have full rights like Muslims," Morsi said in May before his election. Egypt's Christians, mostly Copts, account for about 10 percent of the country's 82 million people.

Egyptians also are awaiting a court ruling on whether the assembly drafting the country's new constitution is legal. Members of Parliament chose members of the assembly, and some Egyptians argue that the assembly does not reflect all sectors of society. The court has said it will issue its ruling on Oct. 23.

Archbishop Fitzgerald said these were signs of emerging democracy: "Certainly people are ready to criticize the president and to say, 'Look, you promised many things, and you're not fulfilling your promises.'" He said he is trying to encourage Christians to participate in the new democracy, although some express fear for what the future holds for their children.

"My own message to them has been: Look, there is a new spirit of democracy, and you have to build on that," he said. "Though the Islamists are in power now, this doesn't mean to say that they will always be in power. This depends on you."

Celebrating Morsi's victory

SYNOD ON THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

Accent on the 'New'

Cardinal George Pell of Sydney, Australia, urges that the New Evangelization use the examples of newly canonized saints to reach the spiritually hungry. Cardinal Donald Wuerl of Washington says the New Evangelization can benefit from the church's social outreach to the sick and the poor, efforts that make the church "the very presence of Christ in the world today." Bishop Gerald Kicanas of Tucson suggests that it is the progressive messages of the church's social justice teaching that will enliven the New Evangelization. Hearing those observations about the nature of the New Evangelization, as a global synod dedicated to professing it convened in Rome in October, it may be fair to ask exactly how the "new" evangelization differs from the "old."

Bishop Kicanas's synodal experience offers some insight into the question. In a series of blog posts from Rome, Bishop Kicanas offered something really new, a uniquely transparent experience of church leaders grappling with the challenge of the New Evangelization and trying to come to terms with its meaning themselves. His frequent digital dispatches were themselves another marker of the new. Bishop Kicanas used one of the latest communication forms of the Internet age to facilitate his outreach in digital epistles to the members of his home diocese but also the entire Christian world.

"New evangelization is a phrase first used by Paul VI in 'Evangelii Nuntiandi,'" Bishop Kicanas wrote in an e-mail message from Rome, "and taken up by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. New evangelization begins with ourselves as practicing Catholics, inviting us to deepen our relationship with Jesus Christ. It extends to those who have left the church, whom we miss, inviting them to come back home. It reaches out to those who have not met the Lord inviting them to encounter Jesus Christ. This synod touches everyone, calling all to awaken the faith, to discover what the church teaches and to inspire others to know Jesus Christ."

The bishops at the three-week-long synod, which ended on Oct. 28, also discussed the challenges facing the New Evangelization. Cardinal Wuerl's opening address on Oct. 8 included a critique of modern culture, warning that a "tsunami of secularism" threatened to wash away the West's foundational Christian tradition.

The proceedings were also not without controversy. Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, generated some consternation with a surprise presentation: an eight-minute video gleaned from YouTube that compared birthrates between native-born Europeans, about 1.8 per woman, to the birthrates of Muslim immigrants to Europe, about 8.1. Among the many dire possibilities held up in the video was the specter of France as an Islamic republic within four decades.

Bishop Kicanas shared a couple of more edifying moments from the Synod. The session on Oct. 19, he said, "ended with the loudest and most prolonged applause from the synod floor yet." A young catechist from Italy, Tommasso Spinelli, had addressed the bishops. "He urged priests to be proud of their priesthood, to know they matter," Bishop Kicanas said. The young layman told those assembled that priests should be attentive to their celebration of the liturgy and not to be hesitant to challenge young people who want to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ. Priests must be the guides.

"The passion and sincerity of his words touched the hearts of the synod fathers," Bishop Kicanas said. "It gave a hint of how the young can be the source of the New Evangelization. They can inspire and encourage their peers and even their elders, as Tommasso did with the bishops, on the importance and deepening of faith."

Bishop Kicanas said he also found the synod's opening reflection from Pope Benedict XVI deeply moving. "This elderly man spoke passionately and with vigor, without any notes, on confession and charity as roots of the New Evangelization," he said. "The wise teacher obviously was grasped by the message he was presenting. His strong gestures and clear thoughts were captivating.... He called Catholics to confess out loud and make public what is in their hearts. We need courage to utter the word. He called us to sing out our faith."

The pope, said Bishop Kicanas, "reminded us that faith does not remain in church, but we take our faith out into the street in works of charity. Works of charity and justice are at the heart of the new evangelization."

KEVIN CLARKE

Syria Delegation

A papal delegation of bishops, including Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York, will travel to the capital of war-torn Syria in late October. Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Vatican secretary of state, made this announcement on Oct. 16 at the Synod of Bishops in Rome. He said the delegation would be a display of solidarity and would encourage peace negotiations "in the certainty that the only possible solution to the crisis is a political solution and bearing in mind the immense suffering of the population." The cardinal said that Pope Benedict XVI had instructed the Vatican delegation to express, on behalf of the pope and the synod: "our fraternal solidarity with the entire population," "our spiritual closeness to our Christian brothers and sisters" and "our encouragement to all those involved in seeking an agreement that respects the rights and duties of all, with particular attention to the demands of humanitarian law."

Scapegoating the Aged

Western nations must resist the pressure to "scapegoat, abandon, even kill, the elderly as a cost-cutting measure," an Australian bishop said in a major bioethics lecture. Bishop Anthony Fisher of Parramatta, a member of the Pontifical Academy for Life, said health economists and utilitarian philosophers were placing the elderly at risk by treating them as a "swarm of voracious but unworthy consumers of a resource which doctors must guard from them." Delivering the 2012 Anscombe Memorial Lecture on Oct. 15 at St John's College, Oxford University, he accused health economists who focused disproportionately on costs of "showing us how to get most efficiently to the wrong place." He said that as the number of people over age 65 rises, the strain on governments will increase proportionately. "Of course we need principles of fairness here and virtues like medical temperance," the bishop said. "But to wish we were dead before we are old or that the old were dead so they'd stop burdening us is no anthem for a good society."

Vulnerable to Violence In Guatemala

In Guatemala young women are vulnerable to many forms of violence, according to the human rights office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala City. Girls are most often the victims of childhood abuse, and adolescent girls are victims of sexual abuse that is often unreported. The office said that young women in Guatemala's "chauvinist" society are objects of discrimination and in some cases forced to marry and deprived of an education. Girls as young as 10 have become pregnant. Often their abusers are other family members, so the assaults go unreported to authorities. All these abuses of girls contribute to Guatemala's persisting poverty, the office reports. While laws are on the books in Guatemala to protect girls, they are not fully implemented, and the state does not employ sufficient resources for this purpose, according to the archdiocese. (See Editorial, p. 5.)

From CNS and other sources.

NEWS BRIEFS

Jacques Berthieu

The U.S. bishops will discuss getting up to speed with church teaching—literally—when they consider a statement on **doctrine in the digital age** at their meeting in Baltimore from Nov. 12 to 15. ✦ Between trips to Africa and South America, Cardinal **Theodore E. McCarrick,** the retired archbishop of Washington, stopped home long enough to be honored on Oct. 10 for his "extraordinary commitment to peace" by the Rumi Forum, advocates of interfaith dialogue and peacemaking. ✦ On Oct. 18 Pope Benedict XVI appointed Archbishop **Joseph W. Tobin,** secretary of the Vatican Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life, to be archbishop of Indianapolis. ✦ Cardinal **Reinhard Marx** of Munich-Freising, president of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community, criticized German plans for a minimum wage on Oct. 10 and warned that a tax on wealth would resemble "class struggle." ✦ **Jacques Berthieu**, a French Jesuit (1838–96) and missionary in Madagascar, was canonized in Rome on Oct. 21 together with six other blesseds, including **Kateri Tekakwitha** and **Marianne Cope**. ✦ The United Nations reports more than 30 armed groups are operating in the eastern provinces of the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, particularly in North Kivu, where fighting over resources has driven thousands from their homes.

KYLE T. KRAMER

Bullseye!

For years I dreamed casually about taking up archery, and this summer I finally splurged on a very nice compound bow for target shooting and deer hunting. I am hardly on the cutting edge of popular culture, so I learned only in hindsight that bows and arrows have taken a larger place in the cultural zeitgeist. According to the Archery Trade Association and sporting-goods retailers, among others, recent years have seen a rapid increase in archery's popularity, especially among youth.

Katniss Everdeen, the 16-year-old heroine of the dystopic novel (and film), *The Hunger Games*, gave a recent spur to the growth of the sport when her archery skill helped her outwit the despotic power of a cruel empire. The expert archer Princess Mérida, in the recent animated film "Brave," provides a similar model of empowerment for young girls. Archery also attracted millions of viewers during the 2012 Olympic Games.

What is the draw? Regardless of whether it ends up as fad or fixture, what about this seemingly anachronistic sport has allowed it to gain traction in our cultural narratives? Might its appeal even provide some unlikely measure of hope for today's youth and our common future?

A bow involves the body intimately. My compound bow may have carbon fiber components and high-tech engineering, but ultimately I still have to draw it to the right position, aim properly and smoothly release an arrow. All of these skills demand an exquisite awareness of one's body and must ultimately be learned by the body, shot after shot after shot, as muscle memory. When my young daughters shoot a bow, they learn to be aware of and (I hope) to value their bodies. In an age when most forms of modern technology alienate the body or make it largely irrelevant, perhaps archery represents an invitation back to the body. And for the Christian, to discover the blessed body is to discover the heart of the Incarnation, in which bodilyness plays an essential part of the divine plan.

Archery engages not only the body, but also the mind; shooting well requires tremendous mental discipline, focus and self-control. When I aim an arrow, even the slightest distraction or preoccupation makes my shot go wild. As a person whose mind often wanders during my daily prayer time, I have noticed that regular archery practice has helped develop my capacity for spiritual concentration, too. In fact, Eugen Herrigel's classic *Zen in the Art of Archery*, which describes the years of lessons he received from a Japanese master archer, claims that archery can and should be a spiritual discipline. I wonder if in archery some intuit a counterbalance to the diffusion and distraction created by on-demand entertainment and a multi-tasking workplace culture—especially young "digital natives," whose brains have been hard-wired on iEverything.

Archery engages not only the body, but also the mind.

Though it may require a great amount of bodily and mental control, archery ultimately demands what the Zen tradition calls "beginner's mind" and what we Christians might call the virtue of humility. Too much confidence ruins the shot, as does grasping the bow too tightly. As Herrigel learned, the master archer does not even claim to release an arrow; it "releases itself" when the shot is ripe. I think we are finally beginning to see how the delusion that we are masters of our surroundings has not served the human race well. Archery might help teach some to hold their bows and their egos more loosely.

Sometimes our 5-year-old son will do target practice alongside me, shooting suction-cup arrows with his toy bow. I love watching his wiggly body go still with concentration, and I thrill with him at his occasional bullseyes. An important New Testament Greek word for sin, *hamartia*, is actually an archery term that means "to miss the mark." So might trying to hit the mark represent an innate human longing for truth and virtue in a fallen and complex world—a world made even more confusing by marketing hype and expedient political spin?

I harbor no illusions that archery will save the world, or that any one thing will. But our future may depend less on grand purposes and plans than on people whose personal qualities are honed, by practice and grace, to kingdom caliber. Perhaps in archery a few may find a way to embrace their bodies, concentrate their minds, humble their hearts and nurture a deep desire for truth. The world would be better for it, and that would be the best bullseye shot of all.

KYLE T. KRAMER *is the author of* A Time to Plant; Life Lessons in Work, Prayer, and Dirt *(Sorin Books, 2010).*

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Bartolomé de las Casas, as depicted in the book *History of the Church* (ca. 1880)

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/BOCMAN1973

What the 'protector of the Indians' found in America

Las Casas' Discovery

ROBERT ELLSBERG

Christ did not come into the world to die for gold.
—Bartolomé de las Casas

Who is my neighbor? That question emerges as one of the critical questions of the Gospels. After all, as Jesus confirms to an inquiring scribe, our eternal life rests on loving God and our neighbor as ourselves. And so the scribe's question, "Who is my neighbor?" could not be more pertinent. Jesus answers by way of the parable of the Good Samaritan. In so doing, he cuts through any easy notion that our "neighbor" is simply the person who lives next door or who lives in the same "neighborhood," who looks like us or shares our values.

The story of Bartolomé de las Casas (1484-1566), a Dominican friar and one of the first Europeans to set foot in this hemisphere, offers another answer to the question. His story raises the further question: Who are those in our world who "don't count," whose humanity does not measure up, whose aspirations and needs are not our concern? How would we respond, how would we organize our lives if we believed our salvation rested on the answer to that question?

The arrival of three small Spanish ships on the blue shores of the Bahamas in 1492 marked the beginning of an unprecedented collision of cultures. For the Spanish explorers and their royal patrons, the "discovery" of "the new world" was like the opening

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of a treasure chest. But for the indigenous peoples, whom Columbus called Indians, it marked the onset of oblivion. For most of the invaders, this was not a serious consideration. In their view, the Indians were a primitive, lesser breed; as Aristotle taught, some people were born to be slaves and others to be masters. While the church endorsed the conquest as an opportunity to extend the Gospel, there were few theologians of the time prepared to see the Indians as fully human and equal in the eyes of God. One who did was the Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas, who was so affected by what he had seen during the early decades of the conquest that he devoted his long life to raising an outcry and bearing witness before an indifferent world.

Gilded Cruelty

To an extraordinary degree the life of las Casas was bound to the fate of the Indians. As a boy of 8, he witnessed the return of Columbus to Seville after his first voyage to the New World. With fascination the young boy watched as the Admiral of the Ocean paraded through the streets, accompanied by seven Taino Indians (the surviving remnant of a larger number who began the voyage). As he recalled, they carried "very beautiful, red-tinged green parrots," as well as jewels and gold "and many other things never before seen or heard of in Spain."

Such scenes of cruelty haunted las Casas for the rest of his life. They also began his conversion.

His father quickly signed up for Columbus's second voyage, and in 1502 Bartolomé made his first trip to Hispaniola (currently Haiti and the Dominican Republic). After later studies in Rome for the priesthood he returned to the New World, where he served as chaplain in the Spanish conquest of Cuba. Though a priest, he also benefited from the conquest as the owner of an *encomienda*, a plantation with Indian indentured laborers.

In these years, he witnessed scenes of diabolical cruelty, which he later chronicled with exacting detail. He described how the armored Spaniards would pacify a village by initiating massacres; how they would enslave their captives and punish any who rebelled by cutting off their hands; how they would consign them to die before their time through overwork in the mines and plantations. His reports, based, as he frequently noted, on "what I have seen," included accounts of soldiers suddenly drawing their swords "to rip open the bellies" of men, women, children and old folk, "all of whom were seated, off guard and frightened," so that "within two credos, not a man of all of them there remained alive."

Such scenes, replayed constantly in his memory, haunted las Casas for the rest of his life. They also began a process of conversion, as the Spanish priest gradually defected from the cause of his own countrymen and identified with those who were treated as nonpersons, of no account, of "less worth than the dung in the street."

In 1514, las Casas, 30, gave up his lands and the Indians in his possession and declared that he would refuse absolution to any Christian who would not do the same. Eventually, he joined the Dominican order and went on to become a passionate and prophetic defender of the indigenous peoples. For more than 50 years he traveled back and forth between the New World and the court of Spain, attempting through his books, letters and preaching to expose the cruelties of the conquest, whose very legitimacy, and not merely excesses, he disavowed.

On one occasion, a bishop became bored with the Dominican's account of the death of 7,000 children and interrupted him to ask, "What is that to me and to the king?" With fierce indignation, las Casas replied, "What is it to your lordship and to the king that those souls die? Oh, great and eternal God! Who is there to whom that *is* something?" To las Casas the Indians were fellow human beings, subject to the same sadness, entitled to the same respect. With this insight it followed that every ounce of gold extracted by their labor was theft; every indignity imposed on them was a crime; every death—whatever the circumstances—was an act of murder.

Although the main attraction for the Spanish in the New World was gold, the conquest was ostensibly justified by evangelical motivations. The pope had authorized the subjugation of the Indian populations for the purpose of implanting the Gospel and securing their salvation. Las Casas claimed that the deeds of the conquistadors revealed their true religion: "In order to gild a very cruel and harsh tyranny that destroys so many villages and people, solely for the sake of satisfying the greed of men and giving them gold, the latter, who themselves do not know the faith, use the pretext of teaching it to others and thereby deliver up the innocent in order to extract from their blood *the wealth which these men regard as their god*."

Scenes of the Crucified Christ

With shame, he recounted the story of an Indian prince in Cuba who was burned alive. As he was tied to a stake a Franciscan friar spoke to him of God and asked him whether he would like to go to heaven and there enjoy glory and eternal rest. When the prince asked whether Christians also went to heaven and was assured that this was so, he

replied without further thought that he did not wish to go there, "but rather to hell so as not to be where Spaniards were." las Casas notes with bitter irony, "This is the renown and honor that God and our faith have acquired by means of the Christians who have gone to the Indies."

But las Casas' theological insights went far beyond a simple affirmation of the Indians' human dignity. In their sufferings, he argued, the Indians truly represented the crucified Christ. So he wrote, "I leave in the Indies Jesus Christ, our God, scourged and afflicted and beaten and crucified not once, but thousands of times."

For las Casas there could be no salvation in Jesus Christ apart from social justice. Thus, the question was not whether the Indians were to be "saved"; the more serious question was the salvation of the Spanish who were persecuting Christ in his poor. Jesus had said that our eternal fate rests on our treatment of those in need: "I was hungry and you fed me, naked and you clothed me.… Insofar as you have done these things to the least of my brothers and sisters, you have done them to me" (Mt 25:31-40). If the failure to do these things was enough to consign one to hell, what about the situation of the New World, where Christ, in the guise of the Indians, could justly say, "I was clothed, and you stripped me naked, I was well fed, and you starved me.…"?

Las Casas did not oppose the goal of evangelization. But this could never be achieved by force. "The one and only method of teaching men the true religion was established by Divine Providence for the whole world and for all times, that is, by persuading the understanding through reason and by gently attracting or exhorting the will." Needless to say, such views on religious freedom, the rights of conscience and the relation between salvation and social justice were far advanced for his time; indeed, they were scarcely matched in the Catholic Church until the Second Vatican Council. Even then, they were bitterly debated.

Nevertheless, las Casas did win a hearing in Spain, where he was named Protector of the Indians. With the passion of an Old Testament prophet, he proclaimed: "The screams of so much spilled human blood have now reached heaven. The earth can no longer bear such steeping in human blood. The angels of peace and even God, I think, must be weeping. Hell alone rejoices." But his efforts made little difference.

In 1543, with court officials in Spain eager to be rid of him, las Casas was named a bishop. While he spurned the offer of the rich see of Cuzco in Peru, he accepted the impoverished region of Chiapas in southern Mexico. There he immediately alienated his flock by once again refusing absolution to any Spaniard who would not free his Indian slaves. He was denounced to the Spanish court as a "lunatic" and received numerous death threats. Eventually he resigned his bishopric and returned to Spain, where he felt

he could more effectively prosecute his cause. He took part in an epic debate with one of the leading theologians of the day, defending the humanity of the Indians, their right to religious liberty, and challenging the legality of the conquest. He also fought to abolish the encomienda system and wrote voluminous histories of the conquest and "the Destruction of the Indies." By this time, he charged, the once-vast indigenous population of Hispaniola had been reduced to 200 souls. Las Casas died in his monastic cell on July 18, 1566, at 82, confessing to his brethren his sorrow and shame that he was unable to do more.

Las Casas' Legacy

Five hundred years after the "discovery" of America, what are we to make of this life, this witness? Clearly for his writings on human equality and his defense of religious freedom, las Casas deserves to be remembered as a political philosopher of high significance in the history of ideas. But in decisively challenging the identification of Christ with the cause of Christendom, he proposed a recalibration of the Gospel that continues to provoke a response. In 1968 the bishops of Latin America, meeting in Medellín, Colombia, examined the social structures of their continent—in many ways, the ongoing legacy of the early conquest—and named this reality as a situation of sin and institutionalized violence. To preach the Gospel in this context necessarily involved entering the world of the poor and engaging in the struggle for justice.

In undertaking such a shift in perspective and allegiance, the bishops were renouncing their age-old identification with the rich and powerful, and their new stance provoked a furious reaction. As Dom Hélder Câmara, a courageous Brazilian bishop cut from similar cloth as las Casas, observed, "When I feed the poor they call me a saint. When I ask why there are so many poor and hungry, they call me a Communist." In subsequent years many priests, sisters and lay Catholics raised this same question, with fateful consequences. In the words of Oscar Romero, the prophetic archbishop of San Salvador: "One who is committed to the poor must risk the same fate as the poor. And in El Salvador we know what the fate of the poor signifies: to disappear, to be tortured, to be captive, and to be found dead."

In the decades of the 1970s and '80s, the truth of those words would be played out in the lives of tens of thousands of Christian martyrs in Latin America. They included Archbishop Romero himself, a bishop like las Casas, whose conversion had been prompted by his encounter with the "scourged Christ" of the poor. He was assassinated in 1980 while saying Mass in El Salvador, and he became a symbol of a new church born of the faith and struggle of the poor. His death was a potent sign of the lingering contradictions implied in the original "evangelization" of the Americas—

that 500 years after the arrival of Columbus, in a land named for the Savior, a bishop could be assassinated by murderers who called themselves Christians, indeed faithful defenders of Christian values.

Las Casas lived in a time of epochal change, in which new, unprecedented realities posed new questions. Were the Indians truly human? Over time, that question has been definitively answered—at least in theory. But in practice? Slavery in the United States was abolished only 150 years ago, legalized segregation in our own lifetime. But to what extent do we truly consider the lives of those designated the "other" as equal to our own? In a global economy that largely functions to siphon wealth and resources from the world's poorest to its wealthiest inhabitants, who can say whether it is God or gold that we truly worship? As we steadily ravage the irreplaceable natural resources of the planet and recklessly undermine the fabric of sustainable life on earth—all for the sake of short-term profit—who can say that we have advanced beyond the rapacious conquistadors, whom las Casas depicted as "wolves, tigers, and hungry lions" feasting on the blood of their victims?

Long after the death of las Casas, his writings became the basis of the "Black Legend," a potent weapon in the service of Protestant anti-Catholicism and anti-Spanish propaganda. In light of the bloodstained history of the past century, it is harder to ascribe his testimony to some peculiar Iberian aberration from the land of the Inquisition. In fact, his writings pose the deepest challenge to the role of the church in our time. In the face of today's injustice and violence, in the face of all the threats to human survival, do Christians stand on the side of the victims or with those who profit from their suffering? The Jesuit philosopher and theologian Ignacio Ellacuría of El Salvador, who along with Romero would later join the company of martyrs, spoke of the "crucified peoples of history." Like las Casas with his talk of the "scourged Christ of the Indies," Ellacuría compared the poor with Yahweh's Suffering Servant. In their disfigured features he discovered the ongoing presence and passion of Christ—suffering because of the sins of the world. In this light, he said, the task of the Christian was not simply to worship the cross or to contemplate the mystery of suffering, but "to take the crucified down from the cross"—to join them in compassion and effective solidarity.

ON THE WEB
Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., on St. Jacques Berthieu.
americamagazine.org/saints

Five centuries before the phrase was coined, las Casas' "preferential option for the poor" continues to trouble the conscience of all who turn their gaze from the sufferings of the "other," whether in our midst or across the sea, while daring to ask, "What is that to me?" A

Out of Africa

How a new generation of theologians is reshaping the church

BY AGBONKHIANMEGHE E. OROBATOR

Africa's theological landscape is changing significantly and rapidly. The pace and scope of this transformation came into focus at the first regional conference of the global network of Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church held in Nairobi, Kenya, in August 2012. For three days, 35 African theologians engaged in intense conversation about pressing issues confronting church and society in Africa from the perspective of theological ethics. By many accounts this inaugural gathering did not resemble the usual theological talk-shop where scholars present abstract theses or ecclesiastical leaders declaim lofty doctrinal propositions. Judging by its composition, methodology and focus, the conference offered a glimpse of the shape of theology in Africa today and the promise it holds for the world church.

Three factors illustrate this phenomenon of change in theological discourse and scholarship. The first factor relates to demographics. Picture this: Nearly half the participants at the C.T.E.W.C. conference in Nairobi were women, both lay and religious. This is something new and different. A gathering of theologians where women are not in the minority is unprecedented in Africa. It would have been customary to have, at most, only token representation. Among the women theologians in attendance at the Nairobi conference, seven are in a C.T.E.W.C.-sponsored program for the advanced training of African women in theological ethics. This program will enable all of them to earn doctoral degrees in theological ethics from African universities within the next three years. A new generation of African women theologians is in the making across an ecclesial and theological landscape where hitherto they were unrepresented, their voices ignored and their contributions unacknowledged.

As the veil of invisibility lifts, African women are taking a critical stand on existential issues in church and society. They make their own arguments as scholars with passion, confidence and authority rather than being spoken about as passive objects in theological conferences and workshops conducted and dominated by male theologians. It should hardly surprise us that this new generation of theologically literate African women expresses its understanding of faith and the concomitant ramifications for civil and religious society in a new and radical way. They open up new paths toward an action-orientated theological enterprise.

The advanced theological education of African women responds to one of the recommendations of the Second Synod of Bishops for Africa, held in 2009, for the formation and greater integration of women into church structures and decision-making processes. Judging by the tone and scope of the discourse at the Nairobi gathering, integration would not necessarily translate into unquestioning and submissive acceptance of subservient roles, to which many African women are confined in church and society. As a result of the theological formation of African women, we can expect to see an intensifying theological advocacy for the just treatment of women in Africa; honest recognition and appreciation of their dignity and contribution to society; and constructive harnessing of their talents and resources for leadership, ministry and participation in both the African and the world church.

A New Way of Doing Theology

A second sign of change on Africa's theological landscape is a palpable sense of energy and creativity. Among the participants at the Nairobi conference, the majority received their doctorates in theology less than five years ago. This means that a new generation of African theologians has emerged, primed to receive the mantle from the more seasoned generation of theologians who negotiated the transition from a colonial church to a truly African church, but ready to steer this church in a new and exciting direction.

The format of the conference took the shape of conversation—women and men, lay and religious, young and old exploring and raising probing questions, clearing new paths and articulating viable options. A critical component of this approach is readiness to listen and learn from one another. The setting of the conference recalled the African palaver model of dialogue and consensus in addressing pertinent theological and ethical issues. This conversation was led by new African scholars in dialogue with established scholars and ecclesial leaders. Archbishop John Onaiyekan of Abuja, Nigeria; Archbishop John Baptist Odama of Gulu, Uganda; and Bishop Eduardo Hiiboro Kussala of Tombura-Yambio, South Sudan, all attended the conference. Unusually, they

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Participants in the Catholic Theological Ethics Conference, August 2012. The author is standing next to the banner, far right.

participated not as keynote speakers but as conversation partners. In this role, the ecclesial leaders contributed to and enriched the conversation by offering candid views and relating moving personal testimonies of their experience of reconciliation, justice and peace in Africa. Here, again, something new is emerging across the continent: it is not customary for theologians to dialogue with ecclesial leaders on level ground.

A third striking feature of the conference was the variety of issues addressed by participants. On the agenda were the themes of the Second African Synod: reconciliation, justice and peace. Any observer of Africa and its predicament would understand why these themes are crucial for the church in Africa, a continent reeling from the trauma of ethnic division, economic mismanagement, human rights abuses, political bigotry and civil and sectarian violence. These crises affect the lives of all Africans. The ability and willingness of African theologians to tackle these vexing ethical challenges is a measure of the credibility and relevance of Catholic theology in Africa. The concerns of the conference participants reflect the concerns of contemporary theologians in the wider *ecclesia* in Africa. They go beyond the borders of church doctrine and discipline and relate to public and existential concerns. The catalog of concerns ranges from sociopolitical unrest in Northern Uganda and Ivory Coast to economic injustice endemic in the mining industries in Congo and Nigeria; from sexual, gender-based violence in South Africa and South Sudan to ethnic, religious and sectarian violence in Kenya and Egypt. Current conversations in theological ethics in Africa do not shy away from these complex ethical issues. Yet it would be mistaken to think that the focus is simply *ad extra*.

ON THE WEB

Excerpts from papers delivered at the Nairobi theological conference.
americamagazine.org

Justice in the Church

Also at issue are internal ecclesial concerns, such as the role and participation of African women in the church. Official rhetoric of participation, equality and gender justice in church is not lacking; oftentimes, it is stirring. But too often it remains at the level of rhetoric. African women theologians are leading the way not only in formulating a critical appraisal of the ecclesiastical status quo, but also in articulating alternatives to an inherited theological discourse that favors patriarchy and clericalism. There is growing recognition that the quest for reconciliation, justice and peace is as pressing for the church as it is for the wider society. And this quest cannot bypass or overlook homegrown solutions. This presents African theologians with a formidable, multifaceted task: first, to explore and identify these potential solutions; second, to articulate and analyze them systematically in conversation with the Christian tradition and Catholic social teaching; and, third, to propose workable models and applications at the service of the church's mission in a postmodern, globalizing world.

Those familiar with the African theological landscape would naturally link this methodology to inculturation. The three-stage process outlined above follows that familiar pattern. What is different is that the issues at stake are not just matters of sacramental and liturgical practice that have prompted some theologians to narrowly and erroneously depict the church in Africa merely as "the dancing church." This stereotypical portrayal of what church is and does in Africa flies in the face of what African Catholic theologians are talking about. The discourse has shifted. A quick sample of topics discussed at the Nairobi conference is enough to remove any lingering doubt.

PHOTO BY YIU SING LUCAS CHAN, S.J. COURTESY OF JAMES F. KEENAN, S.J.

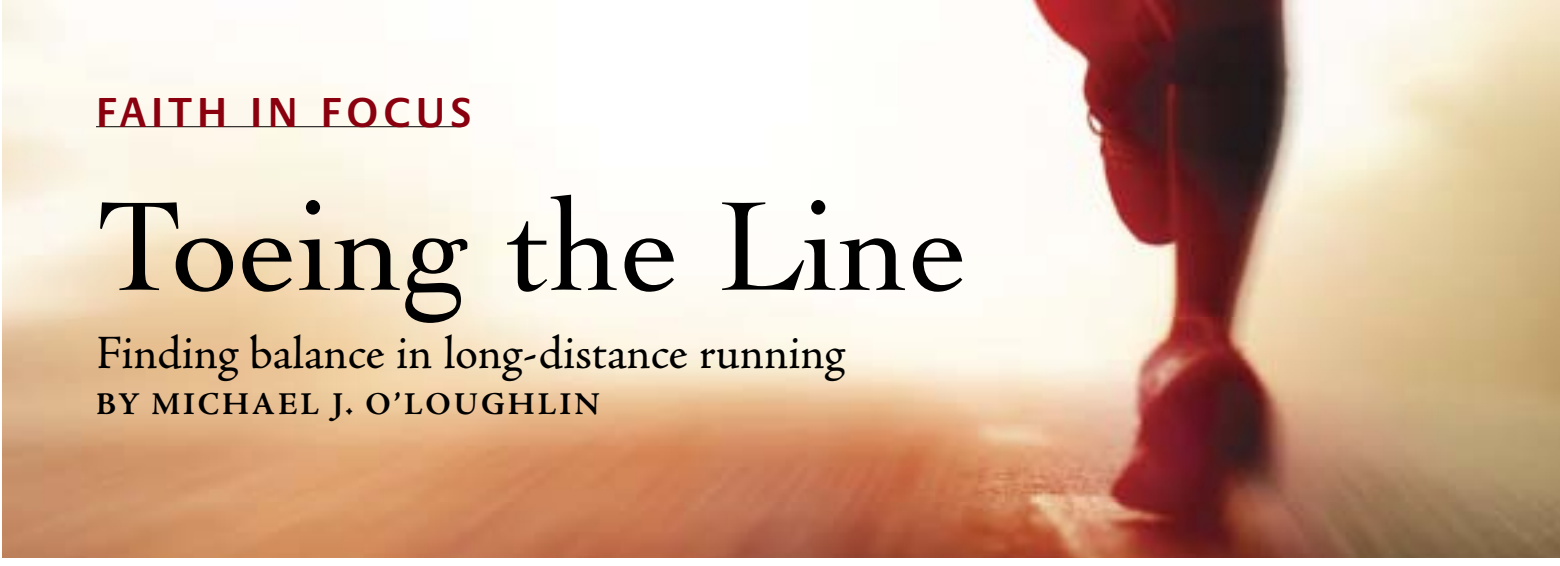
Alison Munro, the South African nun who leads the H.I.V./AIDS Office of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference, demonstrated how the daunting task of dealing with the AIDS pandemic in South Africa is integral to the church's mission of justice and peace. The Nigerian-American scholar Anne Arabome made a powerful argument in favor of justice as a practice that thrives only when women and men are accorded equal dignity in church and society. One of the seven C.T.E.W.C. scholarship recipients, Anne Oyier, drew on personal experience of sectarian violence to argue persuasively the case of holistic peace education as the path toward effective reconciliation and lasting peace in Africa. Elisée Rutagambwa, S.J., offered a model for overcoming the tension between the quest for justice and the necessity of reconciliation in concrete instances of violence, like those in Northern Uganda and Rwanda. And David Kaulemu, a Zimbabwean lay theologian, proffered a methodology for promoting social justice founded on mutuality and collaboration between the church and civil society in Africa.

There can be no question about the strong and dynamic currents that are now shaping the flow of theological discourse in Africa. A unique characteristic of this discourse is the widening circle of conversation partners. African theologians no longer content themselves with talking to like-minded theologians; they are talking to bishops, civil society groups and government representatives. This approach represents a new way of doing theology, in which collaboration and conversation are preferred over confrontation. The result is a process of mutual listening and learning, a vital ingredient for constructing what the veteran African theologian Elochukwu Uzukwu once designated as "the listening church."

The Nairobi conference offers a new understanding of the nature and purpose of theology in Africa and in the world church. First, theology resembles a team event where the rules of engagement favor conversation over confrontation, even in the midst of tumultuous and neuralgic debates in church and society.

Second, theology is work in progress informed by on-the-ground realities. It is not about discussing arcane points of doctrine or resisting critical analysis. Theology embodies and delineates a shared space large enough to accommodate multiple quests to (re)interpret Christian tradition and Scripture through sincere and respectful dialogue in the unfolding context of church, society and the academy. In this space openness to personal conversion would seem a precondition for effective dialogue and action.

Finally, there is a generational turnover that recognizes the wisdom and legacy of established theologians but celebrates the promise and vitality of young theologians intent on furthering the mission of the world church. On the evidence of the dynamics and demographics of this generational turnover in African theology, we would be right to proclaim with Pliny the Elder: "There is always something new out of Africa!" A



Toeing the Line

Finding balance in long-distance running

BY MICHAEL J. O'LOUGHLIN

Just before the race, I sat on a stone wall and gazed at the Vermont mountains reflected in a shimmering lake. It was early, but the park was already filled with people, thousands engaged in their personal rituals, calming their nerves or pumping themselves up. I was silent for a few moments, ignoring the commotion. After some encouraging words from my best friend and de facto trainer, I headed to the corrals. The starting gun fired and I was off. Only 26.2 miles to go.

For many, running is a spiritual practice, time to attune oneself to the workings of the mind, one's surroundings and the physical demands imposed on one's body. I had started running to get in shape and, with some cajoling from a close friend, began a quest to complete a full marathon. It was during the training that I realized I had come to depend on running as time to clear my head, to meditate a bit and even to pray. I began to see running as not simply physical exercise, but as a way to connect my spirit to God's.

I am not alone in my newfound appreciation for spiritually infused running. With cropped brown hair and a full beard, Brother Elias Eichorn, 25, is a monk at St. Joseph Abbey in St. Benedict, La., who supplements a demanding prayer schedule with long trail runs through the monastery's 1,200 wooded acres. Brother Elias told me that his runs give him time to process his day and to connect with God. "Running's very much a spiritual thing for me. It's very much part of my relationship with God because it's very much about being spiritually and physically healthy," he said.

Like me, Brother Elias started running to lose weight—at 5 ft. 9 in. He once checked in at over 300 lbs.—but he quickly became aware of the complementary emotional and spiritual benefits of long-distance running. Now, just a few years after his first run with a fellow seminarian, he has completed six full marathons, most recently finishing Boston, perhaps the world's most prestigious race. Brother Elias crossed the finish line in just over four hours and 15 minutes on a day when the temperature flirted with 90 degrees.

The rule of St. Benedict that orders a monk's daily life compels monks to pray six times daily—vigils, lauds, Eucharist, daytime prayer, vespers and compline—and to keep a rigorous work schedule. *Ora et labora*—pray and work—is their motto. If he does not have work to do in the monastery's woodshop, Brother Elias finds time to run between lunch and vespers. On Sunday afternoons, when the monks are free from many of their work and prayer obligations, he runs longer distances.

Forgoing formal prayer while running, Brother Elias lets his mind wander. "Sometimes it's a processing time, when I think about what is going on during the day, or work through what is going on in school," he said. But a certain kind of prayer, lectio divina, offers a method that he said is well suited for meditation on the run. It involves reading Scripture and focusing on a few words or phrases.

"Even though exercise is thought of as tiring, when you do it you feel more energized, physically and spiritually," he said. "It gives me time to relax; it's me-and-God time. Whether it's explicitly saying a prayer or just letting my mind go, it's something for me that relaxes and deepens my spirituality as I do it."

Running Through my Mind

Much of what Brother Elias told me about the practice of lectio divina was reiterated in what was, for me, an unexpected quarter. About a week before the Vermont marathon, I had picked up a copy of *Running With the Mind of Meditation*, by Sakyong Mipham, a teacher of Buddhist meditation and a seasoned marathoner, hoping to find some inspiration to get me through the race. As the running maxim goes, a marathon is really a six-mile race: experienced long-distance runners manage the first 20 miles somewhat easily. After that, the liver loses its glycogen stores, a buildup of

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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/WARREN GOLDSWAIN

lactic acid causes muscles to stiffen and the mind suffers. The remaining 6.2 miles feel like hell. The things I had muttered under my breath during the last stage of my first marathon in Providence, R.I., would have made a sailor blush. I was hoping for a more enlightened finish in the Green Mountains.

The Sakyong writes that running and meditation improve both physical and spiritual health and can alleviate pain. It's how we react to the pain, he told me by e-mail, that we understand how we approach the world. "Pain is a natural part of life," he wrote. "We will all have to deal with it at some point, so it is important to look at how we react to it and how we can approach it with a level of cheerfulness."

I'm not sure I was cheerful as I lurched on in pain during those late miles in Vermont. My quads were on fire, my knees crunched with every step, and my face was covered in sweat as the sun beat down. Still, I was not angry and miserable as I had been the year before. Maybe the meditation was working. "Many people believe that meditation is about separating yourself from reality, going to some far off place where it is quiet and peaceful, away from the stress of everyday life," the Sakyong wrote to me. "[But] meditation is more about connecting with who you are in this very moment."

Powered by Prayer

When I needed inspiration to keep going, to overcome the pain, the story of Stephanie Baliga reminded me of the mental and physical toughness some runners exude. Stephanie was a wunderkind runner from the age of 9. In college she ran cross country at the University of Illinois. Like many elite athletes, her desire to win and to further her own ambition was her primary motivation. After walking on to the team at Illinois, she finished 21st in the Big Ten, was ranked sixth in the nation and helped Illinois win its first N.C.A.A. regional title. Then one day, during a routine track practice her sophomore year, she broke her foot. "I never really got back to where I was before [the injury]," she said. In fact, it seemed she might never run again. "I had increased my training a lot, and then my foot pretty much broke in half," she said. "I was running a regular training run, and all of a sudden I went from running to having a broken foot in about five minutes. I was like, 'You're done.'"

While taking time away from competitive running, she began a serious discernment process about what she wanted from life, a journey that ultimately took her to a rough section of Chicago to join a small community of Catholic sisters, the Franciscans of the Eucharist. "The injury made me reevaluate my life, and made me realize that running could not be my entire life," she said, adding that before that time she had little interest in her faith. "Through a series of events, I came to a deeper faith in the Catholic Church. And that, the recovery, was when I really started making running a spiritual activity," she said.

Today, Sister Stephanie, 24, says that physical activity helps her focus her mind on praying and frees her from distractions that come easily. She said that from a Catholic perspective, meditation involves thinking or praying about something specific in an attempt to achieve contemplation. This is the moment when an individual feels God's very presence. Though rare for her, she said the few times she has experienced this feeling happen to coincide with something resembling a runner's high.

In addition to offering her a time to pray and exercise, Sister Stephanie also uses running as a way to serve the poor. Her church is finishing up a massive renovation project thanks to a $21,000 contribution offered by a team, led by Sister Stephanie, that ran the Chicago marathon in 2011. She finished the race in 3:43:53. Sister Stephanie hopes to bring in over $40,000 during the 2012 race.

In the final minutes of my marathon in Vermont, my reliance on spiritual insight helped me get across the finish line. I ran down a bike path with a beautiful view of the lake below but no shade anywhere in sight. I was tired, hungry and incredibly thirsty. I yelled "Oh God!" somewhere along mile 24. It wasn't prayer, but a cry of agony. My friends and family were waiting for me at the finish line, and I realized I could still finish in under four hours—my goal—if I just kept my pace. I muttered what may qualify as a quick prayer: "God get me through this." Thinking back to the Sakyong's book, I tried to envision myself as a garuda, a mythical flying dragon whose image helps the Sakyong finish his races.

I decided to go for it, picking up speed as the crowds increased along mile 25. With the finish line in sight, the announcer declared that runners had three minutes left to break the four-hour mark. I picked up steam and tried to think of nothing but the finish line just ahead. I clocked in at 3:58. In my mind, I looked great with my arms high in the air, waving to my friends. When I saw the photo a few days later, I realized I had actually looked like death, a sort of determined zombie intent on capturing his next meal.

These days remixed pop nonsense still blasts through my headphones as I cruise through Rock Creek Park in Washington, D.C. But only sometimes. Other days, the trees and sunset, the people around me, God, or perhaps nothing at all, are my companions. During my runs, I reconnect with myself, let go of the day's worries, try to be present in the moment and to dream about the future. In these moments I find grace, and I embrace the long silences and the solitude as opportunities for reflection and spiritual growth. And when the finish line seems too far away, I dig for the strength to continue. A

FALL BOOKS II | STEPHEN ZUNES

WHEN WINTER THREATENS

THE ARAB UPRISING
The Unfinished Revolutions of The New Middle East

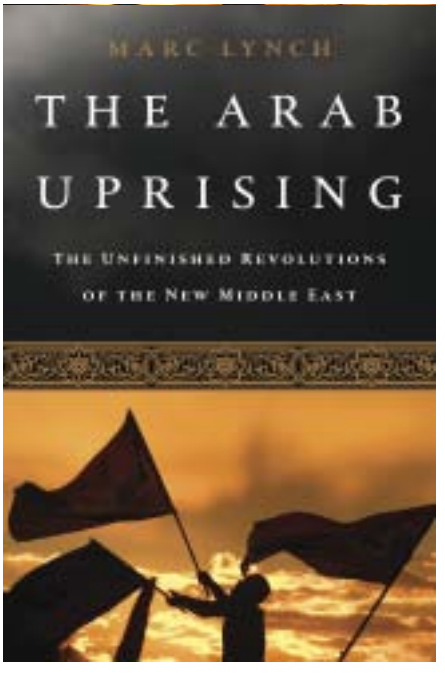
Marc Lynch
PublicAffairs. 288p $26.99

Marc Lynch, a professor of political science at George Washington University, has written one of the best books to date on the popular revolts that have swept the Arab world over the past two years. *The Arab Uprising* is a very readable overview of these remarkable events, suitable both for those with background in Middle Eastern politics as well as those less familiar with the region.

One of the most important of Lynch's contributions is providing historical background. Lynch emphasizes that the mass mobilizations of the past two years are not novel, and he outlines several earlier waves of uprisings in the region. At the same time, he recognizes that these previous protests "did not in themselves challenge any of the basic operating principles of the regional order." By contrast, he notes how the Arab Spring was not only successful in ousting autocratic regimes, but—unlike these previous periods—the regimes' repression backfired and national protests became part of a regional phenomenon.

Lynch is quite frank about the long and sordid history of U.S. support for authoritarianism in the region, including how the United States punished Yemen and Jordan for their genuine, if limited, democratic openings in the early 1990s and then increased aid and assistance as the repression increased. He appropriately dismisses any claims that the U.S. invasion of Iraq advanced democracy in the region and notes how the phony pro-democracy rhetoric of the Bush administration to rationalize for its imperial ambitions actually served to discredit and set back the genuine pro-democracy struggles of indigenous activists.

Lynch not only provides narratives and analysis of individual struggles in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain



and Syria—as well as smaller protests in other Arab countries—but also examines overall trends of protests resisting regime power. Indeed, the comprehensiveness of his coverage of these remarkable events in just 235 pages is quite impressive, though I was disappointed that he failed to mention the large nonviolent protests in Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara, which preceded the Tunisian revolt by two months.

The author takes a sober and realistic view of the struggles, avoiding falling into either an overly idealistic or overly cynical view of the revolutions' eventual outcomes. Noting how previous waves of protests in the Arab world actually led to greater repression, he recognizes that there would inevitably be some reversals, disappointing political outcomes and competitive foreign interventions that would frustrate aspirations for freedom and justice. He recognizes that the problems facing the Arab world are deep and structural and span generations. Yet he also recognizes that while happy endings are not guaranteed, Arab peoples will continue to resist authoritarianism and social injustice, and that the combination of political repression and economic hardship that sparked the revolutions will continue to drive popular resistance until political systems are in place that provide at least some hope of addressing these grievances.

Another important contribution is Lynch's refusal to deny agency to those who made the revolutions possible—the ordinary Arab citizens who faced down the tanks, often with their bare hands. He recognizes that the driving forces were not traditional opposition leaders or foreign governments, but the people themselves. He also refuses to overstate the role of Twitter, Facebook and other social media, recognizing that while they can be beneficial tools in a popular struggle, they are not causal factors.

Lynch defends President Obama from criticisms from both the right and left, recognizing that the president had the wisdom to recognize the limits of American influence and that the future of the Middle East belonged to those represented in these

popular movements for democracy and social justice. Lynch acknowledges that strategic issues still often trump concerns about human rights—as with the administration's support for the autocratic monarchy in Bahrain despite their brutal crackdown against that island nation's pro-democracy movement. But there are points where Lynch, who served as an advisor to the White House during the uprisings, is perhaps too forgiving of the administration's slowness in breaking with allied dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen and its continued support for the region's autocratic monarchies.

Similarly, he makes convincing arguments against some of the more simplistic criticisms of the NATO intervention in Libya and correctly notes the surprisingly strong support for the military campaign in the Arab world, but he fails to address adequately some of the more valid, nuanced critiques or consider less violent alternatives.

Perhaps the biggest disappointment is the book's failure to address more thoroughly the centrality of strategic nonviolent action or exhibit much understanding of these increasingly widespread methods of struggle. Lynch tends, for example, to blame the failure of nonviolent means in Libya and Syria on the ruthlessness of the regimes rather than on the countries' unique circumstances, which made any kind of revolutionary challenge problematic or the strategic failures of the opposition to apply nonviolent tactics more effectively. For example, Lynch argues that Assad's officers "had none of the Egyptian or Tunisian qualms about shooting on their own people." In reality, Egyptian security forces killed over 800 protesters over an 18-day period, an even higher rate of killing than during the nonviolent phase of the Syrian revolt, and the refusal of Tunisian officers to shoot into crowds as ordered by President Ben Ali was less about moral qualms as it was the awareness that their soldiers were unlikely to obey.

Overall, however, if I were to suggest just one book to read about the revolutions that have swept the Middle East in the past two years, *The Arab Uprising* would be my choice.

STEPHEN ZUNES *is a professor of politics and coordinator of Middle Eastern studies at the University of San Francisco.*

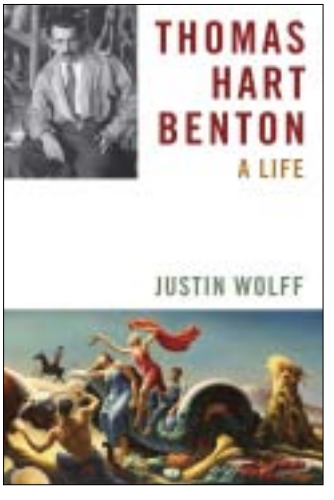
WILLIAM LANOUETTE

GRUMPY GENIUS

THOMAS HART BENTON
A Life

By Justin Wolff
Farrar, Strauss and Giroux. 401p $40

Paris, Manhattan and Martha's Vineyard are hardly places we envision when thinking about Thomas Hart Benton. Yet in this engaging and surprising biography, the celebrated muralist and Regionalist painter owes as much to these three places as to his home state of Missouri and the Midwest prairies he painted so often. Benton was a self-professed "half-hobo and half-highbrow." A grumpy and grandiose genius. An American original.



"I taught what I was trying to learn," Benton said of his instruction at the Art Students League in New York City during the 1920s. He was updating Renaissance and Baroque composition using a "semi-Cubistic" process. For him, form and composition overpowered color and light, and Benton commonly made clay models before painting. His scenes had "bumps and hollows" that defined power in both landscapes and human figures.

Achieving that personal style—then defending it, sometimes with fury and quick fists, to artists and critics—became a lifelong struggle that led Benton to personify the 20th century's turbulent politics and aesthetics. Born in 1889 in Neosho, Mo., he was the son of a U.S. Congressman and great-nephew of namesake Senator Thomas Hart Benton, a populist advocate for Manifest Destiny. Resisting his father's wish for a political career, Benton still felt empowered by debates about the public good. "My original purpose," he said of his art, "was to present a people's history in contrast to the conventional histories which generally spotlighted great men, political and military events and successions of ideas. I wanted to show that the people's behaviors, their *action* on the opening land, was the primary reality of American life…"

Young Tom first discovered murals when he wandered from his Capitol Hill home into the Library of Congress and espied sweeping images by Elihu Vedder depicting "Government" as a struggle between "Corrupt Legislation" and "Good Administration"; both forces balancing panels that pit "Anarchy" against "Peace and Prosperity." At his mother's urging, Benton studied art in Washington and became a newspaper cartoonist in Joplin, Mo. Studies at the Art Institute of Chicago led in 1909 to Paris and the conflict between modernism and tradition.

An art history pro-

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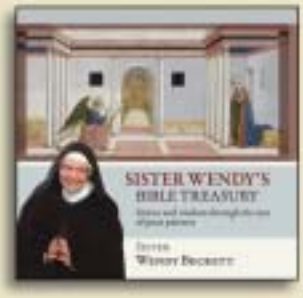

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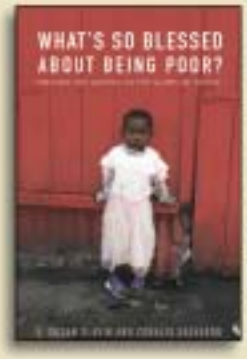

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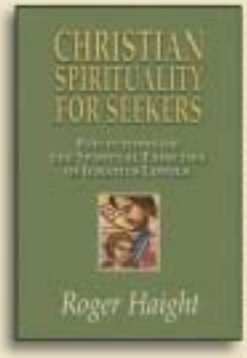

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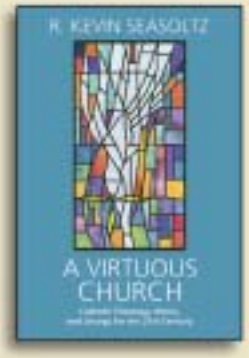

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fessor at the University of Maine, Justin Wolff tells Benton's story in rich detail and an open, unaffected style. He traces trends in politics and art with authority and ease, showing us how Benton's leftist beliefs drove his art. Karl Marx, George Bernard Shaw and the American historian Charles Beard all informed Benton's views, and Beard especially imbued Benton's socioeconomic interpretation of American expansion. But while Benton taught art at The New School in New York during its socialist heyday, he rejected many of the left's political dogmas.

Benton dabbled in abstract painting, but rejected the European modernism promoted in New York by Alfred Stieglitz. Instead, he embraced American populist themes that celebrated "localized knowledge" as essential for artistic integrity. With the Iowan Grant Wood and the Kansan John Steuart Curry, Benton created American Regionalism, which celebrated rural life. Their efforts led to Time magazine's first cover story on art in 1934, depicting a self-portrait by Benton.

Wolff's Benton is a contrary and contentious artist with a life and works as turbulent as his country's scarred history. He meets Robert Henri, George Grosz, Diego Rivera, John Marin and Gertrude Stein in Paris; and in New York knows George Bellows, Marcel Duchamp, Stuart Davis and Rockwell Kent. He teaches and mentors (and his wife, Rita, mothers) Jackson Pollock, whose abstract expressionism Benton rejects, but whose troubled life he comforts. Benton jokes and sips bourbon with Harry Truman before beginning a mural at his presidential library in Independence, Mo. He debates art's utility with Frank Lloyd Wright, argues politics with William Carlos Williams and Lewis Mumford and plays harmonica in a band with Pete Seeger's father.

For Benton, especially, seeking the truth through art meant revealing America's greed along with its goodness. In commissioned murals celebrating Missouri's history, Benton painted the "Frankie and Johnny" legend about lust and revenge; and in one for Indiana he included a Ku Klux Klan rally. A panel titled "Aggression" in his mural on "The American Historical Epic" highlighted mutual slaughter by Indians and settlers.

Unlike Wood and Curry, Benton found authentic subjects on Manhattan subways and Martha's Vineyard beaches. The Vineyard's shifting moods come alive in his intriguing "Self-Portrait with Rita" on an ocean-side bluff, and in a horrifying painting of a family's tragic escape from tidal waves during the 1938 hurricane. "People of Chilmark" shows island natives at work and play, their entwined and fluid figures rowing, sailing, swimming, raking, dancing and clutching a beach ball with all the color and brio of a Titian or El Greco. Benton said he felt truly himself on the island, where he spent summers and other seasons for half a century. He died there, of a heart attack, in 1975.

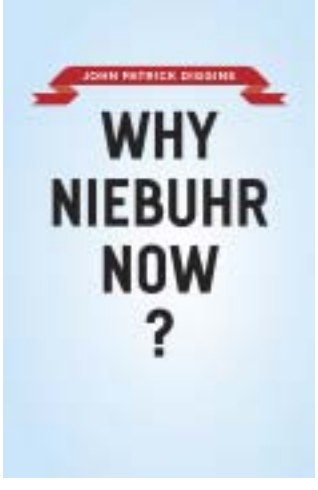
WILLIAM LANOUETTE *is the author of* Genius in the Shadows: A Biography of Leo Szilard, The Man Behind the Bomb.

GEORGE DENNIS O'BRIEN

A CHRISTIAN REALIST

WHY NIEBUHR NOW?

By John Patrick Diggins
University of Chicago Press. 136p $22



John Patrick Diggins was raised a Catholic but said "in the early 1950s I lost my faith and found my mind." He went on to be a distinguished American intellectual historian, the author of books on such diverse cultural figures as Abraham Lincoln and Eugene O'Neill. He died in 2009 before completing a manuscript of the present book. (The final version was assembled by his partner, Elizabeth Harlan, and his most prized student, Robert Huberty). Given Diggins's personal history and academic specialty, it is not Niebuhr's theology that is the focus of this brief study, but Reinhold Niebuhr as a critic of American history. On that subject he remains a powerful voice.

In the brief compass of 117 pages, Niebuhr is placed in conversation with commentators on America from John Adams and Alexis de Tocqueville to Henry Adams and Walter Lippmann. Diggins's brief summaries of the various commentators on the American soul are pointed. The only limitation is that it can be difficult to capture the depth of the great quarrel about the American soul when major thinkers like Thorstein Veblen or John Dewey appear only as walk-ons.

Reinhold Niebuhr died in 1971. Why Niebuhr now? Because political advocates left and right have recently claimed his legacy as their own. The right applauds his legitimation of American military power, the left lays claim to his deep concern for social justice. If Niebuhr right and left seems a paradox, it is because paradox is cen-

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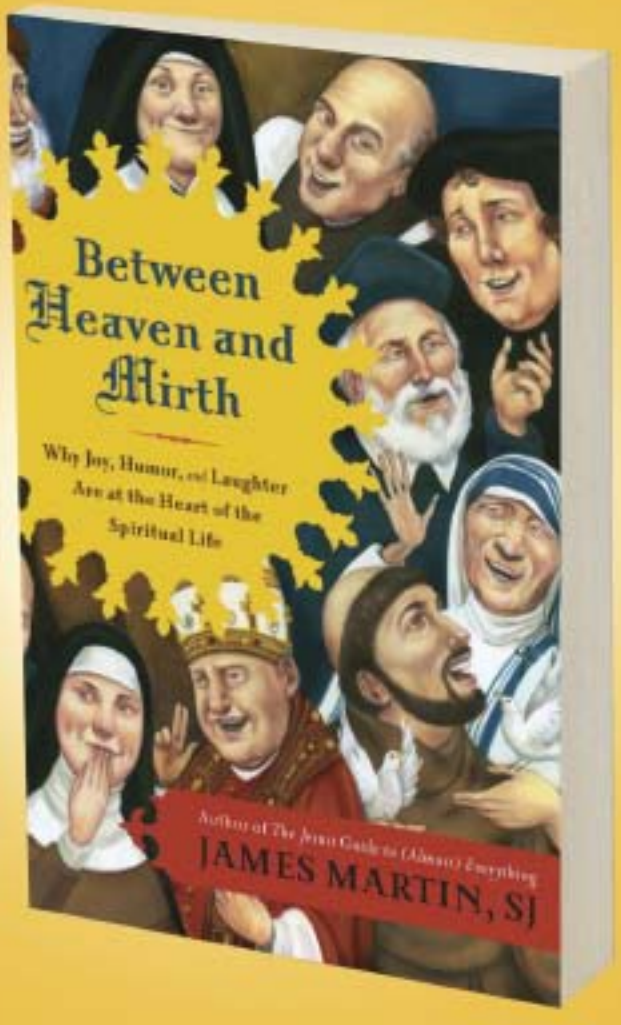

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tral to his thought. Barack Obama's Nobel Prize speech, in which he acknowledged the paradox of a peace prize given to the commander-in-chief of two wars, was straight Niebuhr—as was noted by many commentators.

Through the crises of the Depression, World War II and the cold war, Reinhold Niebuhr was an ever-present figure in public debate in books, preaching, articles, speeches and as a consultant to the State Department. The cover of the 25th anniversary of Time magazine featured his picture. (The article was by Whittaker Chambers.) Given the gloomy history of poverty and war through which he lived, one can understand the appeal of his thought. Niebuhr saw human beings as free but finite. The inevitable failure to resolve freedom and finitude shadows even our best actions. A quip that appeared in the London Times Literary Supplement was a special favorite of Niebuhr: "The doctrine of original sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith."

To the dismay of rational or religious idealists who see clear human progress through reason or ardent faith, Niebuhr posited the persistence of sin. Why? The realism of power. Diggins comments on Niebuhr's *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932): "Niebuhr agreed that individuals may use their capacity for reason and the love of God to transcend their natural drives and self interest, but he argued that the individual conscience is lost as soon as human behavior becomes collective."

Given the paradox of power, it is easy enough to see why right-wing political conservatives claim Niebuhr. Individuals can be moral, but collective behavior leads to overweening government. To them, socialism is sin. The left has its own concerns about collective power. It is not the government that is the true enemy, it is the concentrated power of industrial capital that threatens the quest for a just society. In

the 1920s Niebuhr was a pastor in Detroit. He was appalled by urban poverty and during his life was deeply involved in the labor movement. The collective power of labor was needed to check the sovereignty of corporations. He supported New Deal legislation and helped found the "left wing" Americans for Democratic Action.

In 1928 Niebuhr moved to Union Theological Seminary in New York as professor of practical theology. What stance should a professor of practical theology take toward the growth of Nazism and the war which eventuated from German aggression? John Dewey, a consistent critic of Niebuhr, spoke from the presumed standpoint of reason and liberalism in a 1939 article "No Matter What Happens—Stay Out!" If reason said, "Stay out!" so did many Christian commentators caught up in Oxford Group pacifism. Niebuhr rejected isolationism and pacifism as idealistic; neither knew sin. Peace with Hitler would not come from rational dialogue or prayer; it required the assertion of military power. Power is not, however, self-justifying; it too stands convicted of sin. Niebuhr defended the war but publicly condemned the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as a sin against the law of God and the Japanese people.

For Niebuhr, sinful use of power can be a special American temptation. If America is John Winthrop's "city upon a hill," patriotism will take on a high moral gloss. Americans will go to war only for the very highest motives. The great Civil War anthem begins, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." World War I would "make the world safe for Democracy." Niebuhr's comment is telling:

> The paradox of patriotism transmutes individual unselfishness into national egoism. Loyalty to the nation is the highest form of altruism when compared to lesser loyalties and more parochial interests. It...expresses itself, on occasion, with such fervor that the critical attitude toward the nation and its enterprises is almost completely destroyed. The unqualified character of the devotion is the very basis of the nation's power and the freedom to use power without moral restraint. Thus the unselfishness of individuals makes for the selfishness of nations.

Given our present wars pursued for nothing less than freedom, Niebuhr's warning about sin remains.

Theological Postscript: Not many theologians make the front page of anything. Another theologian to make a Time cover was Stanley Hauerwas in 2001, the same year that he delivered the Gifford Lectures, the same lectureship that was the basis of Niebuhr's major work, *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (1939). Hauerwas devoted two long lectures to questioning Niebuhr as a theologian. There is something to that charge.

Diggins notes that Niebuhr never offered any argument for the existence of God, and God is never mentioned in the titles of his many books. What impressed Niebuhr was sin: "the only empirically verifiable truth of Christian faith." Hauerwas questioned whether God can be reached by "empirical truth." Do we need "sin" to believe Lord Acton's epigram, "Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely"? Sin is a peculiarly religious notion that reaches beyond mere history. Hauerwas argues that Niebuhr, like William James, justified only the will to believe, not belief itself. There can be practical consequences. Niebuhr's empirical history can, when pressed, necessitate war. For Hauerwas, God's Word in Jesus commands us to turn the other cheek.

GEORGE DENNIS O'BRIEN, *a philosopher, is former president of the University of Rochester.*

TIMOTHY O'BRIEN

LET US PRAY

THE PROVINCE OF JOY
Praying With Flannery O'Connor

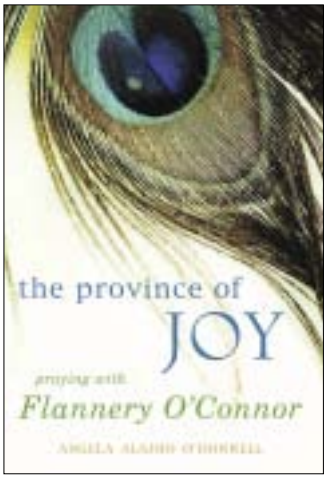
Angela Alaimo O'Donnell
Paraclete Press. 160p $16.99

SAINTS OF THE ROMAN MISSAL, PRAY FOR US

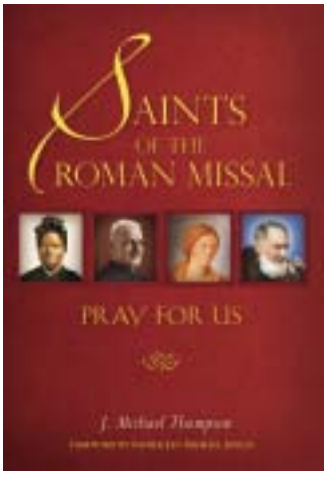
J. Michael Thompson
Liguori. 144p $14.99

A WORLD OF PRAYER
Spiritual Leaders, Activists, and Humanitarians Share Their Favorite Prayers

Rosalind Bradley, ed.
Orbis Press. 240p $25



There are as many ways to pray as there are people who pray, a diversity that extends to books about prayer as well. These three recent releases are quite different, but each touches upon important aspects of the spiritual life that undergirds Christian living.

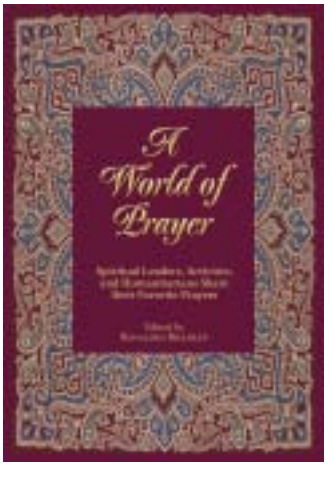


Recent years have seen an outpouring of popular and scholarly books about Flannery O'Connor. Despite the intense literary and biographical focus accorded this Catholic novelist, emphasis on her own life of faith and prayer has been comparatively rare. *The Province of Joy*, by the Fordham University professor and **America** contributor Angela Alaimo O'Donnell, helps fill this notable gap.

All who pray (or want to pray) will profit from this slender and attractive volume—not just Flannery devotees. The true fruit of O'Donnell's work comes in praying with it, as opposed to merely reading along. The book contains a week's worth of morning and evening prayer, adapted from the Liturgy of the Hours. Each day centers on a theme drawn from O'Connor's life (e.g., blindness and vision, limitation and grace) and each "hour" includes brief texts from her letters and writings, offered for meditation.

O'Donnell has helpfully included poems and prayers that Flannery herself found spiritually fruitful and which offer a glimpse into her own prayer. Taken together with the excerpts from O'Connor's own writing, these underscore that nonsacred texts are privileged places where graced contact with God can occur. This is a refreshing idea for novice and more seasoned pray-ers alike, and one that opens up the vast poetic and literary riches of Christianity as wellsprings for personal prayer.

The only drawback of this book is that there is not more of it, literally. Typically, only two passages from Flannery's writings are presented for meditation each day, one each at morning and evening prayer. Consequently, the texts grow familiar rather quickly. What there is is quite rich, however, and Angela Alaimo O'Donnell has done a great service in preparing this text.



Also within the framework of liturgical prayer, J. Michael Thompson's *Saints of the Roman Missal* offers supplementary resources for the saints added (or, in some cases, re-added) to the latest English version of the Roman Missal. For each of these, Thompson includes a short biography, text for reflection and a brief prayer—features that would be of service to preachers or religion teachers in particular. The format also has the happy effect of highlighting the international face of the latest Roman Missal, which includes saints from around the globe and even some venerated in non-Latin rites.

The book's distinguishing mark is that Thompson, a liturgical musician, has prepared new hymns (set to familiar melodies) for each saint. Fitting new words to old music is a challenging task, but it is one Thompson typically does well. At times, however, the pairing of tune and text feels somewhat incongruous. A good example is verse two of the hymn honoring St. Christopher Magallanes and Companions (May 21), set to Beethoven's "Ode to Joy": "In a time of persecution/ When the Church in Mexico/ Suffered in the fiercest manner/ And the streets with blood did flow,/ God called men and women martyrs/ That their lives in sacrifice/ Might be freely, fully given/ For their faith beyond all price." Though the lyrics match

the tune's meter, singing about blood-soaked streets feels a bit disorienting when the hymn's tempo seems much more amenable to "Stars and angels sing around Thee/ Center of unbroken praise." In the main, though, Thompson has given us settings that can be helpful for communal worship, making this book a worthy companion for parish music ministers.

Rosalind Bradley's edited volume, *A World of Prayer*, approaches the spiritual life from an interreligious angle, offering a collection of favorite prayers from noted individuals rather than a how-to manual for spiritual types. Herself part of an Australian interfaith organization, Bradley does this with an eye towards "finding ways to transcend religious divides and foster understanding and mutual respect between the world's religions."

The prayers themselves point to areas of commonality among religious traditions as diverse as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Sikhism, Quakerism, Hinduism, Baha'ism and Taoism. Submissions from over 100 individuals of note—mostly humanitarians and religious leaders—are included, and the array of personalities surveyed is truly remarkable. It is no small feat to assemble reflections from Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., Archbishop Rowan Williams and Yusuf Islam (the performer formerly known as Cat Stevens).

Bradley's book is successful at giving a sense of how other people pray. Just reading the selections challenges rigid distinctions between "our" prayers and "their" prayers, however conceived. On the other hand, the text's utility for deepening one's own prayer life is somewhat less apparent. And though the goal of the text is to increase understanding across faiths, the entries included sometimes give a better sense of the individual practitioner than of his or her religious tradition.

These issues are minor, however, and Bradley is surely correct on a major point: that prayer, common to all faiths, can lead individuals to bridge religious divides. In that spirit, this text can serve as a valuable resource for those who work in interreligious dialogue or who are interested in it. Better still, it is of use for all of us who seek to deepen our religious literacy in a world that is growing increasingly more diverse.

TIMOTHY O'BRIEN, S.J., *is a graduate student at the University of Chicago Divinity School and assistant editor of The Jesuit Post (www.thejesuitpost.org).*

JAMES T. KEANE

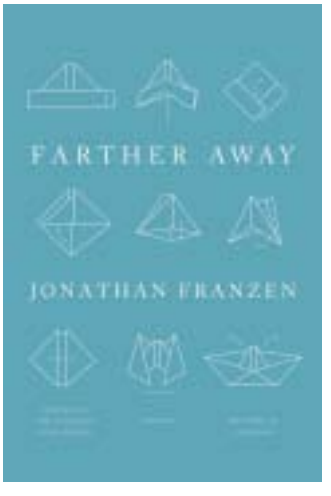
BROKEN WINGS

FARTHER AWAY

By Jonathan Franzen

Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 321p $26

Can anyone hold a candle to Jonathan Franzen in the world of contemporary American *belles lettres*? Perhaps the best candidate was the late novelist David Foster Wallace, whose unfinished posthumous novel *The Pale King* was a finalist for the 2012 Pulitzer Prize (which was ultimately unawarded). *Farther Away*, a new essay collection by Franzen, includes among its most poignant moments Franzen's reflections and ruminations upon the life and death of his friend and fellow literary darling. No one who reads this collection could doubt that the 2008 suicide of "DFW" was an overshadowing event that affected Franzen deeply, and his writings on that relationship alone would make for an intriguing collection of essays. There is more here, however, and much of what else is found is lacking, making for an uneven and sometimes jarring collection.



Wallace, Franzen writes in the essay from which the book takes its name (all 21 essays included were previously published), was a mentally ill and depressed friend whom he simply loved, but also a friend who killed himself "in a way calculated to inflict maximum pain on those he loved most, and we who loved him were left feeling angry and betrayed." In attempting to make sense of his own struggle—between seeking to honor Wallace but simultaneously rejecting efforts to canonize his life or sanitize his death—Franzen writes some of the most moving nonfiction of his career. Wallace was "as passionate and precise a punctuator of prose as has ever walked this earth," Franzen comments in another essay (drawn from his remarks at DFW's memorial service). He was also someone for whom love and fear existed in equal amounts, and ultimately the author of *Infinite Jest* "had all too ready access to those depths of infinite sadness."

On less gut-wrenching topics, Franzen's efforts are spottier. The number of book reviews here seems out of context, particularly sandwiched in as they are with long-form essays. There is an extraordinarily well-crafted essay, "On Autobiographical Fiction," in which Franzen's views on the writer's craft prove fascinating. At one point he

reflects on a conversation he had with his own mother on her deathbed, in the context of a writer's attempt to overcome his or her own self-consciousness. After he delivers a kind of apology to her for his life's idiosyncrasies, she forgives him by noting, "Well, you're an eccentric." Franzen pushes beyond her apparent absolution, however, identifying her comment with a perhaps-unconscious desire to communicate to him that he takes himself too seriously. "And this was one of her last gifts to me: the implicit instruction not to worry so much about what she, or anybody else, might think of me."

Every writer knows that struggle—from Harold Bloom's literary theory of "the anxiety of influence" to the endless silent competition among peers (Franzen admits his own rivalry with Wallace) that makes up such a part of the writing life. Reading Franzen on these matters, we see him at his most human—despairing of choices made in life, cognizant of the danger of excessive self-reflection, adoring of the genius of his friends. And writing, and writing.

There are also, unfortunately, moments where Franzen comes across as somewhat sanctimonious and elitist, someone with little interest in religion or morality who has filled in the space left by their absence with a humorless and unimaginative kind of tsk-tsk moralizing about the bad manners of others. Anyone living in Brooklyn, in Berkeley, in Madison, in Seattle, in any urban neighborhood whose name ends with "Centre" or "Village," has friends who remind one of Franzen in his more smug moments. I am terrified I sound like smug Franzen myself. Regularly when I encounter others like this, I think *these people are actually reading Franzen*. More often, they are talking in a monotone delivery (learned by osmosis from NPR, I am certain) about someone they saw smoking, about the distasteful mention of Jesus in public discourse, about the regrettable attention being paid to some public human tragedy, the coverage of which is inevitably referred to as "lachrymose."

A good example of this tendency can be found in the first essay, adapted from a graduation speech Franzen delivered at Kenyon College in 2011, where Franzen notes that "trying to love all of humanity may be a worthy endeavor, but, in a funny way, it keeps the focus on the self, on the self's own moral or spiritual well-being." Exactly *three pages later*, he confesses that "it's a long story, but basically I fell in love with birds." Love of birds, he notes (unlike love of humanity?), "became a portal to an important, less self-centered part of myself that I'd never even known existed." If you have read Franzen's novel *Freedom*, you'll recognize the character of Walter right there, a man who finds love of birds an escape from narcissism but love of humanity somehow self-serving.

In the same vein (and speaking of birds), an essay on endangered songbirds reinforces this occasional sense of unintentional self-parody. In "The Ugly Mediterranean," a long and interesting but heavily moralizing essay about poaching, he segues at the very end into a brief discussion of St. Francis of Assisi. By his reckoning, no one since Jesus has lived the Gospel better than Francis. Francis, he writes, "went Jesus one better and extended his gospel to all creation." This particular bit of environmentalist sanctimony appears in the same essay where Franzen openly admits to illegally eating endangered songbirds. His sorrow for the poaching of said songbirds has nevertheless caused him to conclude "the blue of the Mediterranean isn't pretty to me anymore." We are a long way from the Pulitzer here.

The ultimate impression one takes away from this uneven collection is that Franzen is an extraordinarily talented writer whose best subject (when it comes to non-fiction), is writing itself. He is sincere in his love of what he loves and the people whom he loves, but he can also be a bit of a predictable bore. When the subject matter is right, Franzen is the best; when the subject matter is not, dare I say Franzen is for the birds?

JAMES T. KEANE *is a former associate editor of* ***America****.*

ART | MICHAEL ANTHONY NOVAK

MISUNDERSTOOD MASTERPIECE

Salvador Dalí's 'The Sacrament of the Last Supper'

Since its purchase in 1956 by the National Gallery of Art in Washington, **The Sacrament of the Last Supper**, an oil painting by Salvador Dalí (1904-89), has replaced Pierre-Auguste Renoir's "Girl With a Watering Can" as the museum's most popular work (pushing her "into the mud" as Time magazine quipped). The popularity of Dalí's image has persisted despite critical hostility toward the painting and the gallery's own ambivalence. It hangs in a corner by the elevators.

Theologians, like the Protestants Francis Schaeffer and Paul Tillich, have also weighed in. For Schaeffer, Dalí's image was a clear example of Christian meaning being lost to a vague existentialism: "This intangible Christ which Dalí painted is in sharp contrast to the bodies of the apostles who are physically solid in the picture. Dalí explained in his interviews that he had found a mystical meaning for life in the fact that things are made up of energy rather than solid mass. Because of this, for him there was a reason for a vault into an area of nonreason to give him the hope of meaning."

Tillich's view of the painting, conveyed during a lecture on religion and art, was reported by Time magazine: "Tillich deplored Dalí's work as a sample of the very worst in 'what is called the religious revival of today.' The depiction of Jesus did not fool Tillich: 'A sentimental but very good athlete on an American baseball team... The technique is a beautifying naturalism of the worst kind. I am horrified by it!' Tillich added it all up: 'Simply junk!'"

Both theologians misunderstood the image, however, as a depiction of the Last Supper. That is not surprising. Familiarity with the Leonardo da Vinci masterpiece causes most of us to make that leap when we encounter Jesus at table with 12 men around him. But Dalí has given us something more.

Salvador Dalí, Catholic

Dalí returned to the Catholic faith in 1949. His journey home had started years earlier when he found himself

"THE SACRAMENT OF THE LAST SUPPER," BY SALVADOR DALI. 1955. PHOTO: NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

stirred by the poetry of of the Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross. Dalí's first painting with an explicitly religious theme, the surrealist "Temptation of Saint Anthony," appeared in 1946. By the time of his public embrace of Catholicism, however, Dalí had broken with the Surrealists (though he remains the most well-known of the Surrealist painters) and had announced his intention to "become classical," combining Surrealist visual liberties with a High Renaissance treatment of the body.

Dalí was excited by the possibilities of expressing mystical ideas in light of new visions of reality made possible by nuclear physics. He dismissed the "science versus religion" dichotomy, noting "not a single philosophic, moral, aesthetic or biological discovery allows the denial of God." His Surrealist art had been dominated by Freudian motifs, but from then on, his art would take on the Christian heritage in its content and depth. Dalí began to explore a mystical edge of Christianity that had been particularly challenged by a sterile view of modern science.

A Close Look

By placing Christ's face at the center of the painting, which intersects with the horizon line, and by placing the sunlight's source at that intersection point, the figure of Christ dominates "The Sacrament of the Last Supper." The Christ then directs our eye upward to the figure that would otherwise dominate the painting, a giant torso whose arms span the width of the picture plane. This figure is likely the intended focus because our eye is directed around the canvas to this spot; both figures are transparent. Christ gestures with his left hand toward himself and with his right hand points to the figure above. He looks like a visual representation of Jesus' reply to his disciple Philip, who asked at the Last Supper, "Lord, show us the Father…." "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?" Jesus replied, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:8-9).

The Father's face is appropriately off the canvas; this is the transcendent God who warned Moses, "You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Ex 33:20). The full presence of the Triune God is made complete by the inclusion of an illusory Holy Spirit dove perched on Christ's left shoulder, composed of the lines of his hair and jaw.

The setting is distinctive: a dodecahedron, or 12-sided space, that we perceive in the pentagon-shaped windowpanes behind the table. The architecture is also transparent. The dodecahedron is an ancient symbol of heaven, where this event is taking place. This is the realm of the Father, who casts a shadow on the otherwise invisible architecture. With his outstretched arms the Father embraces both heaven and earth.

Assuming traditional symbolism, we would identify those at table as the Twelve Apostles. A second look makes us question that assumption. For these are mirror images of one another: six sets of twins around the table, not the historical followers of Jesus. The figures painted here are not important for their personalities, but for their actions: their reverent prayer and worship. They direct their attention not to Christ, for he is not visibly seated with them, but toward the altar. What inspires their worship is set on the table, solid and casting shadows: the bread and the wine. This is the Eucharist, the sacrament of the Last Supper.

The Real Presence

Instead of painting a historical Last Supper as Leonardo did, Dalí gives us the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

The real presence is a cornerstone of Catholic spirituality. The mystical aspect of the doctrine caught Dalí's attention. The classic definition of a sacrament (a visible sign of an invisible reality) conveys well the Catholic understanding. On the table are the bread and wine. Also depicted is the invisible reality—Christ, the sacrament of God on earth, the Father in this mystical 12-sided heaven—truly and really present to those who receive him.

Dalí's intention is to make visible what occurs in every celebration of the Mass: that the worship on earth makes present the realities of the worship in heaven. The real presence of Christ means the real presence of the Father. The community drawn together in recognition of this miracle—the church—reveals the real presence of the Holy Spirit. Where the Trinity is, heaven is: unseen with our eyes, but sensed and recognized in our prayer.

MICHAEL ANTHONY NOVAK *is visiting assistant professor of Catholic theology in the department of religious studies at Loyola University New Orleans.*

LETTERS

Time to Draw the Curtain

I admit to a certain wistfulness on the part of those of us old enough to remember photos like the one on the cover of the Oct. 8 issue showing Good Pope John. I felt I was in a time warp, again viewing this scene, replete with the copes and a retinue of clerics that characterized the triumphant panoply of pre-Vatican II ceremonies.

It is therefore ironic that so many of us have moved on from being edified by that kind of display of liturgical life to being completely alienated from it except for nostalgia. We have moved into what the spirit of Vatican II has emphasized as the "people of God" and the more ancient "priesthood of all believers." This marked a pivotal moment in our experience of liturgy, church and identity.

This photo thus symbolizes the transitional death-knell of medieval liturgy to the birth pangs of the church in aggiornamento. It also symbolized the eventual demise of a liturgical experience that was so powerfully evocative of the transcendent for many of us a few generations ago.

DAVID E. PASINSKI
Fayetteville, N.Y.

Let It Fall

America's cover "Celebrating Vatican II" (10/8) left me nonplussed. Celebrate? My parish, St. Alice in Springfield, Ore., now situates the tabernacle centered behind the altar table. It's the central focus. We use a translation of the Sacramentary that suggests the word "consubstantial" is somehow holier than "one in being with the Father," and our pastor (administrator) tells us how fortunate we are to be allowed to use this and such Latinized words in the new translation. We extol the Manichaeism of Augustine with "And with your spirit." Laypeople still assist in the distribution of the Eucharist but are forbidden to enter the sanctuary before the priest first consumes the sacred species.

The Rev. Andrew Greeley, speaking from an expertise totally alien to the American hierarchy, showed that a parish can be judged mainly by the excellence of its music and its homilies. Since Vatican II, I would add the quality of its liturgy. Music, preaching, liturgy. I have no idea where to find this parish today.

What have we to celebrate, except perhaps the spirit, who is waiting for the whole corrupt house to fall before we can build it up again?

(REV.) MR. RICHARD WARREN
Springfield, Ore.

Who Has the Spirit?

Thank you for the issue marking the anniversary of the Second Vatican Council (10/8). It is one of your best ever. But most of the articles skirt around the issue of the present pope, many bishops and the Curia being obsessed with authority, power and control.

Why can't you just say it? In spite of their protests, they would like to dump the progressive changes in the church and go back to the church as pope and hierarchy—forget the people of God. I think they sincerely believe that the Spirit speaks to and through them only.

J. PETER SMITH
Vero Beach, Fla.

They Knew It Was Wrong

Re "Obama's Scandal" (Editorial, 10/22): In Guantánamo, almost all of the detainees transferred to other countries have been released upon transfer or shortly after transfer. Only a small minority of transferred detainees are alleged to have engaged in terrorism or violence directed against the United States (and it is possible in some cases that their terrorist activity or hostility was caused by their captivity in Guantánamo rather than predating it).

U.S. officials knew that many or most of the Gitmo detainees were there by mistake. Seymour Hersh reports in *Chain of Command* that an early internal analysis by the Central Intelligence Agency determined that more than half of the detainees did not belong there. Jane Mayer reported in *The Dark Side* that early on, Maj. Gen. Michael E. Dunlavey thought that one third of the then 600 detainees were there by mistake, and he later raised the estimate to one half. Also, another counterterrorism expert from the Federal Bureau of Investigation estimated that "there are no more than 50 detainees worth holding in Guantánamo."

Publicly, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld described the detainees as "the worst of the worst," but in private he wrote that "we need to stop populating Guantanamo Bay with low-level enemy combatants." Larry Wilkerson, chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell under the Bush administration, testified under oath in 2010 that Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld knew in 2002 that most of the Guantanamo detainees were innocent.

JAMIE MAYERFELD
Seattle, Wash.

We're Stuck

Concerning "Obama's Scandal": Sure, innocents all over those battlefields captured by bored soldiers offering Afghan fighters free trips to Cuba makes perfect sense. Whatever word one can use about Guantánamo and the detainees, "innocent" is not one of them. So why hasn't President Obama closed the place? Why are trials starting now? What would Gitmo's opponents use to replace it? Bash Bush, get elected, then do the same. The president and his people never talk about this issue—for a reason. There is no better solution identified so far.

VINCENT GAITLEY
Exton, Pa.

Red Tie, Blue Tie

"Who Shall Lead Us?" (Current Comment, 10/22) contrasts the appearance and dress of today's presidential debaters with Lincoln and Douglas, concluding that today's debaters "differed only in the color of their ties and their skin." I may be a minority of one, but I thought I saw significant differences. One regards the office of president of the United States with profound seriousness, the other simply profoundly wants that office—at the cost of integrity, consistency and truth.

DENNIS MacDONALD
Bedford, Nova Scotia, Canada

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"He left everything to his friends on Facebook."

CARTOON BY HARLEY SCHWADRON

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Comfort Zones

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), NOV. 11, 2012

Readings: 1 Kgs 17:10—16; Ps 146:7—10; Heb 9:24—28; Mk 12:38—44

"This poor widow put more than all the other contributors" (Mk 12:43)

Have you ever wondered what the Bible meant by *scribe*? Minimally, scribes were educated people who read and wrote for a living. Scribes could be hired by illiterate people (the vast majority) for legal and financial matters. More typically, scribes were also experts in Torah (the Mosaic law), and the New Testament often refers to them as lawyers. We might consider them a combination of pious theologians and civil lawyers. Lived rightly, it was an honorable profession. Sirach says that "the scribe's profession increases his wisdom" and describes him as one who "devotes himself to the study of the Law or the Most High. He explores the wisdom of all the ancients and is occupied with the prophecies" (38:24; 39:1).

We encountered such a pious scribe in last week's Gospel reading. It appears, however, that many scribes were far less pious. Our Gospel reading this week begins with the sentence "Beware of the scribes." Jesus then denounces them as inclined to ostentation and places of honor. Then comes his great criticism: "They devour the houses of widows and, as a pretext, recite lengthy prayers." The situation would work like this: a widow, with no social power or protection, might have to rely on a scribe to act as a conservator of her estate. An unscrupulous scribe could take great advantage of her weakness, enriching himself and impoverishing her. This would be especially easy if he appeared particularly devout, and Jesus was scandalized by their public campaigning. In condemning the exploitation of widows, he follows notable prophets who had done the same (Is 1:23; Jer 7:6; Ez 22:7).

Whether they were cheats or not, Jesus observes that their piety was worse than compromised; it was downright hypocrisy. In our Gospel reading, such a religious sham contrasts with the poor widow who humbly contributes two small coins to the Temple treasury. He also contrasts her with affluent contributors who give far more than she: "For they have contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood."

Much ink has been spilled on whether contributing all one has is a wise, authentic expression of radical faith, utter foolishness or something in between. Literally relinquishing all one's possessions is surely unwise, unless one is called as St. Francis was. I think most of us would do well to be guided by St. Paul's comments when collecting relief funds to the impoverished church in Jerusalem. He encouraged generosity, of course, since by it God would "increase the harvest of your righteousness" (2 Cor 9:10). One's generosity, however, should be "according to what one has, not according to what one does not have; not that others should have relief while you are burdened" (2 Cor 8:12–13).

It strikes me that what the poor widow best models for us is humility (contra the scribes) and extraordinary generosity. What she gives really costs her, while for them it was merely a part of their "surplus wealth." Many of us are generous and kindhearted. But we are usually so only until our comfort zone gets threatened.

One of the great studies of the human condition is *Shantung Compound*, a narrative by the theologian Langdon Gilkey about life in a Japanese internment camp during World War II. As Gilkey describes it, the Japanese treated these Westerners relatively well, and they adjusted to this quasi-imprisonment. There were conflicts, however, when people were asked to give up some comfort for the common good. Those called upon for a small sacrifice were resentful and complaining, and they contrived all kinds of reasons why it would be more just for others to be imposed upon, instead of them. Gilkey's experiences led him to abandon his optimism concerning human nature, and he came to regard humans as deeply narcissistic. We can be generous, he thought, just as long as it doesn't really cost us by violating our comfort zone. Push the edges of that, and it is dog-eat-dog. Today, Jesus points to the poor widow. Be like her, he tells us; make it cost.

PETER FELDMEIER

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Ask yourself what you could give to others during Advent that would take you out of your comfort zone.
- Ask the Lord for the courage to make that gift, and then step forward.

ART: TAD DUNNE

PETER FELDMEIER *is the Murray/Bacik Professor of Catholic Studies at the University of Toledo.*


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