

America

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The Syrian Refugee Crisis

DANIEL G. GROODY

SPIELBERG'S 'LINCOLN'

OF MANY THINGS

Good for Fordham University! The school's College Republicans have cancelled an appearance by Ann Coulter, the prominent conservative pundit known for her slash-and-burn rhetorical tactics. The students could have gone ahead with the talk. Joseph McShane, S.J., Fordham's president, made it clear that in the interest of freedom of expression, the university would not stand in the way if the club really wanted to provide a platform for Ms. Coulter.

Still, to say that Father McShane was not enthusiastic about Ms. Coulter's pending appearance could be the understatement of the semester: "There are many people who can speak to the conservative point of view with integrity and conviction," Father McShane wrote in an open letter, "but Ms. Coulter is not among them. Her rhetoric is often hateful and needlessly provocative."

Father McShane, then, did not object to Ms. Coulter's appearance at Fordham because she is a conservative. For all we know, he may have some sympathy for her positions on certain public policy questions. No; Father McShane did not want Ms. Coulter at Fordham because, in a word, she's mean. Whatever else it means to be a Catholic institution, it should mean at a minimum that the community esteems charity above all else.

Ms. Coulter has spent many years cultivating a mass market for her particularly potent form of political snake oil. The type of controversy that beset New York City's Jesuit university is exactly the kind of public frenzy that builds Ms. Coulter's brand and helps sell her books. Ms. Coulter is a mega-star in what the columnist David Frum calls "the conservative entertainment complex...people who have made politics a theater for identity politics for a segment of America, rather than as a way to solve collective problems."

It's not just some conservatives who are building and profiting from a political entertainment complex; liberals can

be just as cynical. A recent Pew study found that left-leaning MSNBC's coverage of the 2012 presidential campaign was even more biased than right-leaning Fox's. Yet both networks made fresh millions from their neo-yellow journalism, while the decorously objective CNN limped across the Nov. 6 finish line with fewer viewers and even fewer advertising dollars.

Before we jump to any self-righteous conclusions, however, we should recall that the only reason these media outlets do what they do is that we watch them. Quite a few of us are watching, in fact, even some of us, the numbers suggest, who claim we're not. If things are going to change, as this week's editorial suggests, then all of us need to take an honest look at how we are part of the problem. It is not enough to point fingers, sigh and move on, as if it's only our neighbors who profit from our commercialized political culture.

That last point is the first point that John Kavanaugh, S.J., might have made in his next column for *America*. Father Kavanaugh died the day before Election Day. Remarkably, John first wrote for these pages in the year I was born. We treasured his analysis, his wisdom and his wit. He would not hesitate to challenge his readers, but he always did so with charity and humility; as a Jesuit, a priest and a journalist, he lived according to the Golden Rule. We would do well to remember his words: "To resist a consumerist culture," Father Kavanaugh once wrote, "that weaves itself into every fabric of our lives, we must engage our personhood with our whole heart, our whole mind, our whole being. Not only will we find ourselves more able to counter the culture's dogmas; we will also be more ardent disciples of Christ."

The public debate in this country desperately needs more John Kavanaughs, especially now that it no longer has the John Kavanaugh this journal relied on and loved for more than 40 years. **MATT MALONE, S.J.**

America

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Cover: Syrian refugees protest living conditions at Boynuyogun refugee camp in October. Reuters/Murad Sezer

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ON THE WEB

Matthew Kunkel, S.J., reports on his journey along the path taken by **migrants to the United States**. Plus, Daniel G. Groody, C.S.C., speaks on our podcast about his visit to **Syrian refugee camps**. All at americamagazine.org.



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Who Cares?

One of the most overused terms of the 2012 election season was “job creator.” In campaign parlance, job creators occupied hallowed ground, not to be interfered with by government in any way as they went about their important work. Little noted was the fact that many job creators are women; according to one study, women will help create five million jobs in the United States by 2018.

Contrary to campaign wisdom, there is one key area where government could provide these job creators with special help: child care. Many women are unable to work a full-time job or spend the time they would like at work because they have few affordable options for child care. Affluent families may be able to afford full-time care for their children, but many would-be entrepreneurs are unable to exercise their skills because it is simply not cost-effective for them to enter the marketplace.

Increasingly, this is true for men as well as women. Many families choose to have one parent stay at home because an additional salary is not sufficient to cover the cost of child care. It is a wonderful thing when a parent can stay home to help raise the children; but this decision should be made out of choice, not necessity.

Clearly the free market has not provided families with the necessary support services. Who else but the state can step in? One effective government program provides affordable day care, tax breaks for families employing nannies and universal free preschool. Regrettably, those benefits are only available to residents of France.

Tracking Bigotry

There was some guardedly good news from the Anti-Defamation League last month. The A.D.L.’s annual audit of anti-Semitic incidents, released on Oct. 29, recorded 1,080 anti-Semitic incidents in the United States in 2011. That figure represents a 13 percent decrease from the number of incidents in 2010.

That is a significant reduction of public manifestations of anti-Semitism, and it is cause for measured relief. Still, more than 1,000 recorded incidents—and surely many more go unreported—is hardly insignificant. The acts that were tracked in 2011 leave plenty of reason to remain vigilant about anti-Semitism in the United States. According to the A.D.L., even as anti-Semitic harassment and threats decline, anti-Semitic vandalism and physical assaults are holding steady. There were 19 physical assaults on Jewish individuals last year and 330 cases of anti-Semitic vandalism, by far the two most serious

expressions of anti-Semitism.

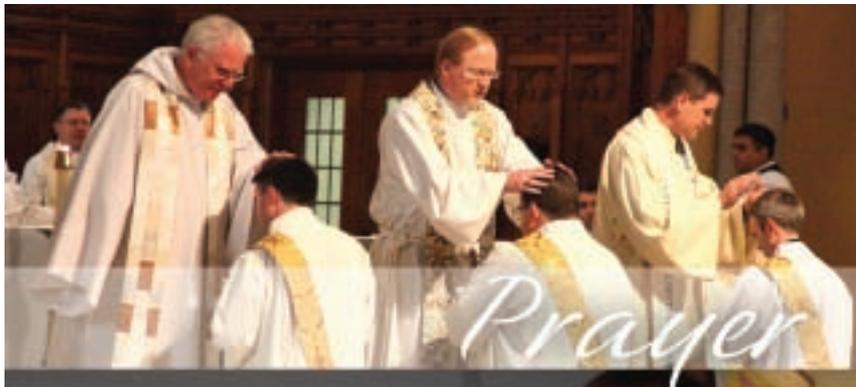
In addition, the A.D.L. has been alarmed by a “continued outpouring of online hatred” against Jews on conspiracy Web sites and blogs. It appears the impulsive and usually anonymous world of the Web has provided a new digital breeding ground for this oldest of bigotries. That trend is accompanied by a lower-tech version of anti-Semitism in bullying among school children. As always, parents must remain alert to the influences their children will be exposed to or tempted to replicate, whether in the schoolyard or online.

Demographic Detonation

China’s “one child” policy has been a human rights catastrophe since its “temporary” institution in 1980. The policy has been ruthlessly enforced through coerced sterilizations and abortions and crippling fines or job losses for violators. The phenomenon of “gendercide”—the systematic abortion of girls, female infanticide and the abandonment of baby girls—has been a direct result.

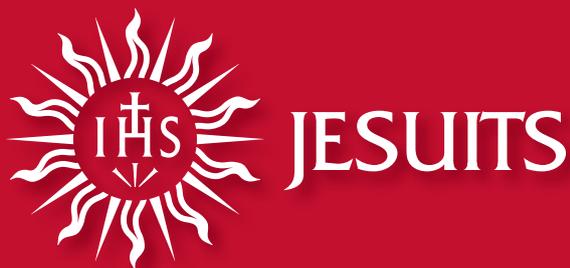
Beyond the moral horrors propelled by the policy, one-child has always represented a potential demographic and social breakdown that now seems to have become fully realized. In China, the birth ratio of girls to boys is the most skewed in the world: 100 girls born for every 118 boys. These “excess males,” an estimated 37 million of them, are coming of age, and the shortage of partners is driving a demand that has led to human trafficking, forced marriages, sexual exploitation and even the outright abduction of young women and children. China’s shrinking workforce and growing proportion of seniors threatens to strain government social services, and the one-child policy itself—actually a misnomer for a complicated program that can be haphazardly applied—has created widespread internal tensions and encouraged official corruption.

In October some high-level recognition that this 30-year-old policy may require retooling finally appeared. A government-sanctioned research center, the China Development Research Foundation, offered an unprecedented criticism of the one-child policy, acknowledging its many drawbacks and urging the government to implement a nationwide two-child policy by 2015. Beyond 2015, the foundation suggests allowing China’s families to decide for themselves how many children they want to have. China-watchers say the C.D.R.F. has strong connections to government leadership, so the agency’s willingness to go on the record suggests that the change, even abandonment, of the long-resented policy may be inevitable. More clarity on the issue can be expected over the next few months as China’s once-in-a-decade leadership transition continues.



"The Church needs you, counts on you and continues to turn to you with confidence, particularly to reach the geographical and spiritual places where others do not reach or find it difficult to reach."

Pope Benedict XVI, address to the Society of Jesus, General Congregation 35, February 21, 2008



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The Work Ahead

In one of the most hotly contested presidential elections in decades, President Barack Obama won his bid for re-election over a challenger who, just a few weeks earlier, seemed to have the presidency within his reach. Mitt Romney, the former governor of Massachusetts, a formidable campaigner and debater, was gracious in defeat. Mr. Romney telephoned the president shortly before 1 a.m. to congratulate the man he had tried to unseat and to offer his support in the next four years. “This is a time of great challenge for America, and I pray that the president will be successful in guiding our nation,” he told supporters.

Whether that prayer is answered depends on whether Americans can be as gracious to one another as Mr. Romney was on election night. The new Congress and the president must find a way to break the political gridlock that has paralyzed the capital. Politicians, however, are hardly the only ones who have demonstrated an inability to listen and a pernicious habit of name-calling. The sad fact is that Catholics and other Christians can be just as divisive, and just as overly partisan and ideological, as the rest of our fellow citizens. At times in this election, a disinterested observer could be forgiven for failing to discern a qualitative difference between the public discourse among American Catholics and that of the country at large. The so-called Catholic left too often accused the so-called Catholic right of not being Christian enough, while the right too often accused the left of not being Catholic enough. Such tactics are incompatible with our self-understanding as a communion of believers.

Still, Catholics also made positive and meaningful contributions. The 2012 election was marked by a remarkable degree of Catholic participation. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and many Catholic leaders and citizens joined in the public debate, defending the traditional definition of marriage, debating the ethical implications of the Affordable Care Act and working to strengthen the church’s prophetic pro-life voice. Other voices, including the Nuns on the Bus group, which grew in prominence as the election continued, emphasized the church’s teachings on other matters of social justice, the need to care for the poorest of the poor and to preserve the social safety net. Catholic commentators and theologians of every political stripe were also not shy in offering their “Catholic perspective.” Ultimately, because both major presidential candidates held positions at odds with important Catholic teachings, neither candidate dominated the Catholic vote. Mr. Obama’s margin of victory among

Catholics was only two or three points.

The church in the United States now faces a dual task. In addition to continued witness and advocacy on behalf of the poor and vulnerable, the church must also draw on its spiritual resources to forge a new form of discourse, one based in charity.

So how can we model cooperation in an era of gridlock? Catholics understand that the Holy Spirit works in all people. In our tradition the most unlikely people sometimes have the most to contribute to the church; saints are often drawn from the ranks of the poorest and most obscure. Every life is sacred, and everyone has a unique vocation to help the church in its mission on earth. In the secular sphere, this notion that everyone at the table has something to contribute may help to unite an increasingly fractious country. Only when one holds to the principle that the “other side” might have something meaningful to say does genuine listening become possible.

At the beginning of his classic *Spiritual Exercises*, St. Ignatius Loyola offers these words: “Let it be presupposed that every good Christian is to be more ready to save his neighbor’s proposition than to condemn it. If he cannot save it, let him inquire how he means it; and if he means it badly, let him correct him with charity. If that is not enough, let him seek all the suitable means to bring him to mean it well, and save himself.” In other words, give the other person the benefit of the doubt. Assume that he or she is working for the good. This is as important in political life as it is in the spiritual life. Emotionally charged public policy issues like abortion, same-sex marriage, health care, defense spending and religious freedom are difficult and complicated enough without the added hindrance of hyperbole and invective.

This magazine, of course, is not immune to the disease we diagnose. At times in our history, we too have been a part of the problem. With Christians everywhere, we seek forgiveness, for what we have done and for what we have failed to do. We pray that all people of faith, that Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, indeed that every citizen will reject the politics of division and remember that everyone at the table is not only welcome, but worth listening to. While the progress of both the church and society relies ultimately on the grace of God, it also depends in no small measure on our willingness to trust one another.



SIGNS OF THE TIMES

U.S. / ISRAEL

Bibi and Barack: Can This Relationship Be Saved?

What a difference an Election Day makes. After more or less signaling a preference for Mitt Romney in the White House, defying the Obama administration on settlements in the occupied West Bank and repeated efforts to pressure the administration into a more bellicose posture on Iran, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu scrambled on the morning of Nov. 7 to deal with a new reality: four more years of Barack Obama.

The Israeli prime minister was among the first to call the president after his victory and quickly pulled together a photo op in the company of U.S. Ambassador Dan Shapiro to publicly congratulate the president. Those gestures were not enough to placate Israeli media or forestall an opportunistic censure from the Israeli Labor Party, apparently seeing an opening before January elections. Critics charge that Prime Minister Netanyahu badly misjudged in his various provocations of the Obama administration and that his bet on the wrong candidate would damage U.S.-Israeli relations.

But can Prime Minister Netanyahu's sudden enthusiasm for the re-elected U.S. president help revive what has been a faltering Middle East peace process? That's a definite "maybe," Philip Wilcox, a retired U.S. diplomat who now serves as president of the Foundation for Middle East Peace in Washington, told *America*. Wilcox said a "positive sign" is that Netanyahu "believes he now has to take Obama seriously."

"In the past he has treated him almost contemptuously," Wilcox said, "believing that he controls the U.S. Congress and that he could handle the U.S., and the [Obama] admin would bow to his wishes."



U.S. President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the United Nations last year.

In Washington some suggest that the president could use his new leverage for political payback as Israeli elections approach on Jan. 22, but Wilcox argues it would be a huge mistake for the administration to become overtly

ENVIRONMENT

The Church and Climate Change

The link between respecting the environment and the sacramental life of the church is inseparable for one bishop, who oversees a diocese that encompasses a collection of small islands in the South Pacific. When Bishop Bernard Unabali of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, baptizes a new member of the church or confirms someone or even when he ordains a priest, he asks individuals to plant 10 trees as a way to give rise to new life.

"[I] use this situation," Bishop

Unabali told participants at a symposium in Washington, D.C. on Nov. 8, "which is going to be affecting us more drastically than probably in the past, to help people recapture our relationship to the environment."

Bishop Unabali's diocese includes the Halia people of the Carteret Islands. As ocean waters slowly overrun their atoll communities, more than 700 Halia are widely believed to be the world's first climate refugees. The bishop said the remaining Halia are coping with diminishing land, but that

he expects that within decades all will be forced to live elsewhere.

The symposium, hosted by The Catholic University of America, brought together Catholic theologians and philosophers to discuss the implications of Pope Benedict XVI's biblically based ecological vision for the church. The symposium was sponsored by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change and C.U.A.'s Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies.

The symposium began just over a week after Hurricane Sandy, the largest and second costliest Atlantic hurricane on record, devastated por-



involved in Israeli politics. Despite his apparent misstep in handling the special relationship with the United States, Netanyahu's right-wing coalition remains strong, says Wilcox, while the Israeli left and center show contin-

uing weakness. The coalition may lose some seats in January, said Wilcox, but Netanyahu is likely to survive.

Happily, his instincts for survival could prove useful. "Netanyahu is something of an ideologue," he said. "I think he genuinely believes that Israel owns" the occupied West Bank and that it has every right to suppress the nationalist ambitions of the Palestinians who live there. Wilcox added, however, that throughout his career Netanyahu has demonstrated a willingness to compromise when he is under pressure. "He is not a fanatic," said Wilcox. "I think his principle objective is to remain in power."

To that end, Netanyahu may accede to renewed pressure to end settlement construction on the West Bank and settler expansion into East Jerusalem as the Obama administration has long advocated. "The U.S. is Israel's best friend these days—perhaps its only major friend," said Wilcox. "Israeli voters will be critical of Netanyahu if he is clearly at odds again with the President of the United States. He cannot afford

to create a significant breach in this relationship." And the prime minister will no doubt recall, said Wilcox, that the last time he locked horns with a U.S. president—Bill Clinton in the late 1990s—he was turned out of office at the next opportunity.

Wilcox does not expect to see any rapid response on Middle East policy from the Obama administration. He suspects it will first focus on pulling the United States back from its so-called fiscal cliff, the automatic spending cuts and tax hikes in January that threaten to trigger another recession. After that crisis is presumably resolved, however, Wilcox suggests the Obama administration could put together a domestic coalition including key leadership from the Jewish-American community that could press Netanyahu to halt further settlements on the occupied West Bank and return to the two-state peace process. "It will take courage and persistence," Wilcox said, but it is a diplomatic feat that could be accomplished if the Obama administration has "the skill and the will."
—KEVIN CLARKE

tions of New York, New Jersey and other states along the U.S. East Coast. The reminder of nature's destructive potential was not lost on symposium participants.

Sandy came up "as an example of what we might expect more of as the planet warms," said Dan Misleh, executive director of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change. He added, "There is no way to argue a clear connection between climate change and events like Sandy; however, most scientists believe that climate change has a multiplier effect on such storms," droughts and other adverse climate events.

According to Misleh, the scholars agreed "that the Catholic community

is very fortunate to have the tradition of Catholic social teaching and a pope who highlights environmental stewardship and sustainability to help us see a way forward in educating more Catholics on these issues." He said that while serious scholarship needs to continue on climate change, it must be made accessible through educational outreach. Catholics, according to Misleh, should embrace an ethic of stewardship that is consistent with church teaching and Benedict's leadership. "This is not some fringe

teaching," he said, "but a core part of who we are and ought to be as Catholics."



Was Hurricane Sandy an anomaly or a sign of things to come? Mantoloking Bridge, N.J., Nov. 1.

Welcome the Migrant

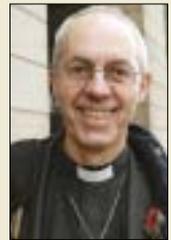
The treatment of immigrants in the United States violates the biblical and ethical norms that God requires of his people, according to speakers at a conference at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago on Nov. 2 about the ethics of immigration. Deportations, for example, often cause suffering for families and children. William O'Neill, S.J., an associate professor of social ethics at the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University, Berkeley, Calif., pointed out that throughout salvation history God reminds the people of Israel that they are to "love the stranger and the migrant" because they themselves were once exiles. The Gospels describe how Jesus, born away from home, was forced to flee and was brought back, mirroring the story of the Jewish people. "To oppress the alien is no less than a betrayal of faith," said O'Neill. "It is apostasy. Hospitality is the measure of righteousness and justice.... Hospitality is the very heart of Christian discipleship. It is not offered to kith and kin, but to those whose only quality is vulnerability and need."

Vatican Delegation To Syria Canceled

Deteriorating conditions in Syria prompted Pope Benedict XVI to cancel a planned visit by a delegation of cardinals and bishops. Instead, the pope announced on Nov. 7 that he had sent a smaller group, including Cardinal Robert Sarah, president of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, to Lebanon to deliver a \$1 million donation and boost the church's humanitarian response to the crisis. The pope appealed for dialogue to end the conflict. "I renew my invitation to the parties in conflict," he said, "and to all

NEWS BRIEFS

The effort to reintegrate the **Society of St. Pius X** into the Catholic Church "absolutely does not mean" that the church will accept the anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic positions espoused by some society members, said Cardinal Kurt Koch on Nov. 7 in *L'Osservatore Romano*. + Bishops in Cuba called on Nov. 6 for emergency assistance to help feed and shelter victims of **Hurricane Sandy**, which cut a devastating path through the eastern part of that island. + The **new archbishop of Canterbury** is Justin Welby, 56, a former oil executive who "was unable to get away from a sense of God calling." + Two of the nation's **largest Catholic hospital systems**, Michigan-based Trinity Health and Pennsylvania-based Catholic Health East, are exploring a consolidation. + Congress will become a shade **more religiously diverse** this January after the election of two Democrats from Hawaii—Tulsi Gabbard, the first Hindu-American congresswoman, and Mazie Hirono, the nation's first Buddhist senator. + After almost three and a half years at the Vatican, the U.S. **ambassador to the Holy See**, Miguel H. Diaz, is returning home to resume teaching at the University of Dayton.



Justin Welby

those who have the good of Syria at heart, to spare no effort in the search for peace and to pursue through dialogue the path to a just coexistence.... I continue to follow with great concern the tragic situation of violent conflict in Syria, where the fighting has not ceased and each day the toll of victims rises, accompanied by the untold suffering of many civilians, especially those who have been forced to abandon their homes."

Presidential Prayers

In a message of congratulations on Nov. 7, Pope Benedict XVI sent best wishes to President Barack Obama and assured him of his prayers "that God might assist him in his very great responsibility," the Vatican said, and told the president he was praying that "the ideals of liberty and justice that

guided the founders of the United States of America might continue to shine." Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, likewise congratulated President Obama in a letter on Nov. 7. The bishops, he said, "offer our prayers that God will give you strength and wisdom to meet the difficult challenges that face America." He added that the bishops pray that Obama will "help restore a sense of civility" and "that you will exercise your office to pursue the common good, especially in care of the most vulnerable among us, including the unborn, the poor, and the immigrant. We will continue to stand in defense of life, marriage and our first, most cherished liberty, religious freedom."

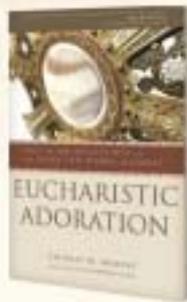
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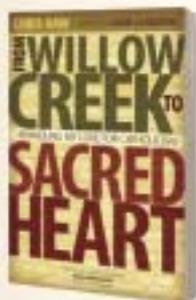
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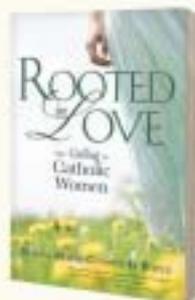
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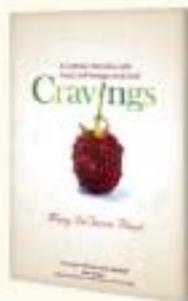
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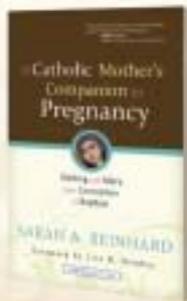
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Poll Vault

With 97 percent of the national vote counted, President Barack Obama led Governor Mitt Romney by 50 percent to 48 percent. According to National Election Pool data analyzed on Nov. 7, the morning after, by Dr. John Lapinski, the top NBC News survey analyst and my esteemed colleague at the University of Pennsylvania, the Catholic vote perfectly mirrored the national vote: 50 percent for Obama to 48 percent for Romney.

Catholic voters shadowing the mass electorate is nothing new. In 2000, for example, the electorate split 49 percent for Vice President Al Gore to 48 percent for Gov. George W. Bush, and Catholics split the same way. Even when one disaggregates all relevant data from 1992 to 2012 in various ways (by race, ethnicity, religious habits), Catholics still emerge as America's most reliable swing voters.

In each of two Pew surveys released in the month before Election Day 2012, we learned or confirmed two important sets of things about America's Catholic voters and their intragroup differences. The first set concerns white Catholics; the second concerns Latino Catholics.

Catholic America has its two highly partisan and ideological wings, but the median-voter character of the Catholic electorate is sustained by the white Catholics who self-identify as

"moderates." This subgroup of the white Catholic electorate accounted for about 42 percent of all Catholic voters in 2000 and about 32 percent in 2008.

Still, in 2012, 31 percent of all white Catholic voters self-identified as "moderate," while 30 percent self-identified as "conservative," and 11 percent self-identified as "liberal." By a ratio of 2 to 1, these white Catholic "moderates" prefer "smaller government, fewer services" to "bigger government, more services," but only 38 percent attend Mass weekly or more; and by roughly 2 to 1 they favor allowing same-sex marriage and oppose making abortion "illegal in most/all cases." They lean ever more strongly to the Democrats.

Obama could not have been elected in 2008, or re-elected this year, without them.

Catholic America is increasingly a Latino Catholic America. The fraction of all Catholic voters who are Latino increased from 13 percent in 2000 to 21 percent in 2008. In 2012, Latino Catholics mirrored all Latinos in partisan leanings, with about 70 percent self-identifying as "Democratic/lean Democratic." Still, Latino Catholics are at once more churchgoing (45 percent attend Mass weekly or more), more pro-government, more pro-life and less supportive of same-sex marriage than white Catholics.

Latino Catholics are America's demographic and democratic future. By the time Election Day 2048 rolls around, the nation's total Latino pop-

ulation will constitute about one in three U.S. residents. Even if the Catholic fraction of that population dips from more than two-thirds to just half, Latino Catholics will be about as big a fraction of the total electorate as white Catholics are today. Fully one fifth of today's Latino Catholics are ages 18 to 29. While 28 percent of white Catholics who self-identify as "conservative" are age 65 or older, only 15 percent of all Latino Catholics are senior citizens.

As Lapinski has noted, even in a general election season like the one just passed, in which religion "was not discussed much," voters' respective religious self-identities make a huge

difference to election outcomes.

Since 1980, Republicans at the national level have banked largely on churchgoing white evangelical Christian voters, about three-fourths of whom have voted their way. They were the key to President Bush's reelection in 2004. But if Republican leaders do not catch up to the Latinos in general, and Latino Catholics in particular, then the Grand Old Party will go the way of the Whigs.

And if the church does not start teaching, preaching and actively promoting "faithful citizenship" in a way that really resonates with Latino Catholics (which means more than just being pro-immigrant or keeping some Latino-serving urban Catholic schools going), then the American Church could go the way of Europe's.

Latino Catholics are America's demographic and democratic future.

JOHN J. DIJULIO JR. is the co-author of *American Government: Institutions and Policies (2012)* and other books on *politics, religion and public administration*.

'We Are Dying Here'

AN EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

BY DANIEL G. GROODY

In the last chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses ascends to the top of Mount Nebo; from the east side of the Jordan, God shows him the land promised to Abraham and all his descendants. The view of this territory is one of the last things Moses sees in this life, but he never sets foot there. It is left to his descendants to cross over the river and enter the land of promise.

I had a chance recently to look at the world from atop Mount Nebo. I went there as part of a delegation, led by Bishop Anthony Taylor, with the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services. We were sent to the Middle East to examine the situation of refugees in the countries around Mount Nebo, particularly Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Our mission was to better understand the Syrian refugee crisis, strengthen networks of support between the bishops and other relief organizations, stand in solidarity with the people who suffer and recommend possible durable solutions to policy makers.

The surrounding land shows that little has changed since biblical times. Brothers here are still selling brothers (Gn 37:27-28); families are still enslaved (Ex 1:1-22); people are still in captivity (2 Kgs 25); Rachel is still weeping (Mt 2:18); nations are still living in exile (Ps 137); refugees are still wandering in the deserts (Dt 2:1-37); and refugee cities are still being created (Dt 4:41-43). Only now these narratives are echoed by contemporary stories: of trafficked victims in Egypt, tortured Eritreans in the Sinai, persecuted Christians in Iraq and Iran, unaccompanied minors throughout the region and displaced Syrians in the crossfire of a civil war. Throughout my time there, I kept wondering: Is it still possible to see the land of promise amid this desert of human suffering?

The situation is critical. The office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that the number of Syrians fleeing their country's violent conflict could reach 700,000 by year's end and 1.5 million by June 2013. Some refugees are twice displaced: first from Iraq to Syria, then

from Syria to anywhere they can find protection.

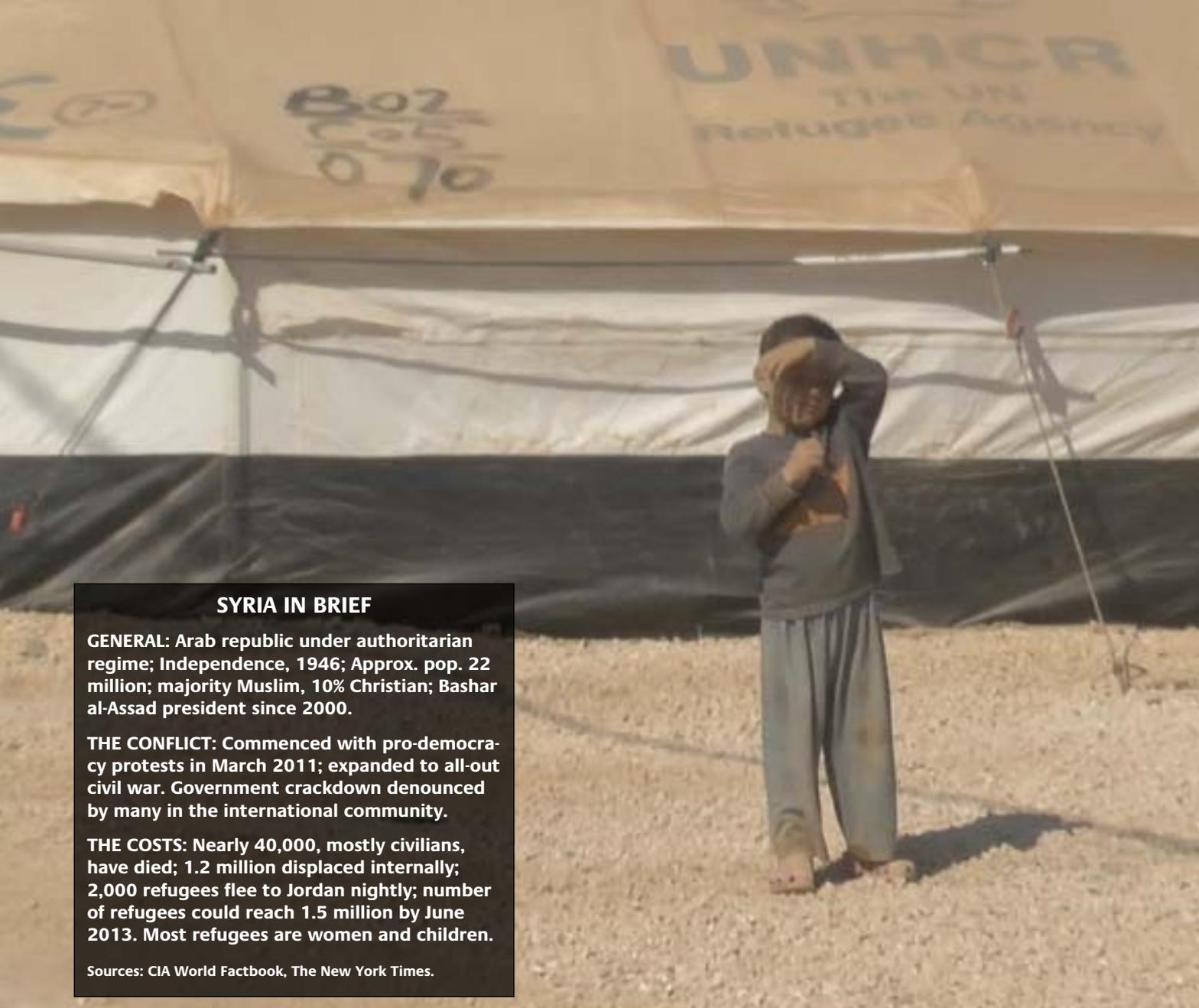
At a makeshift camp on the Lebanon-Syrian border, inside a precarious, plastic-covered shelter, we visited a number of families displaced by the fighting. Three sisters-in-law, each in her early 20s, had just lost their husbands in the Syrian war. One widow showed us a cellphone video taken just after their husbands had been brutally killed. Then the mother of those men came in, weeping and sobbing uncontrollably, holding in her hands the heart-breaking report that her grandson had been killed the day before. Until that moment I had only seen pietàs carved out of stone. There I saw one carved out of the suffering of Syrian refugees.

A Mission of Refuge

As Syria plunges deeper into chaos, many churches, mosques, nongovernmental organizations and governments of some Middle East countries are doing their best to respond. But the scope, severity and urgency of this crisis require much broader international collaboration because the pressing human needs far outstrip the available resources. The official camps set up by the governments of Turkey and Jordan offer a thin line of protection for these refugees, providing some basic shelter, security, food and medical assistance. But the camps are inadequate to rebuild shattered lives. They are, at best, a stopgap solution for what is likely a long-term issue. In these camps we met people recovering from blasts, bombardment and battles. In a tent a baby had just been born and wrapped in a blanket, a sign that the persistent power of life still bursts forth even amid this deadly reality.

The mission of the church in this part of the world extends not only to other Christians but to any human being in need. As one organization put it, "Being Syrian does not make you our client; being extremely vulnerable does." As the church drills down beneath the complex historical factions, religious differences, social crises and economic problems of this situation, its missiological foundation rests on the bedrock of the gratuitous love of God and the human face of the refugee. When viewed from the perspective of those who are most vulnerable, the issues are

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SYRIA IN BRIEF

GENERAL: Arab republic under authoritarian regime; Independence, 1946; Approx. pop. 22 million; majority Muslim, 10% Christian; Bashar al-Assad president since 2000.

THE CONFLICT: Commenced with pro-democracy protests in March 2011; expanded to all-out civil war. Government crackdown denounced by many in the international community.

THE COSTS: Nearly 40,000, mostly civilians, have died; 1.2 million displaced internally; 2,000 refugees flee to Jordan nightly; number of refugees could reach 1.5 million by June 2013. Most refugees are women and children.

Sources: CIA World Factbook, The New York Times.

indeed very basic. The refugees wanted us to bring back the message that they are hungry, needy, homeless and moving into the winter months, with little protection from the elements.

“We are human beings,” said one woman, and “the hardest part is not knowing when this conflict will end.” “We are not living here,” said another refugee. “We are dying here.”

Crossing the Jordan

Even though refugees are not a new phenomenon in this part of the world, each generation defines itself in relation to how it responds to them. According to stipulations of the covenant, inheritance of the Promised Land is inextricably linked to care for those who are most vulnerable (Dt 10:12). Our spiritual ancestors were once refugees in these parts, and God heard their cries (Ex 3:7). Others are living that

reality right now. Memory plays an important role in biblical spirituality precisely because it helps us see something of our own lives in those who suffer. When the plight of such suffering fails to move us, then something inside us has become alien, for we have become disconnected from the fundamental bonds that join us not only to God but to one another.

Biblical faith also reminds us that the true greatness of a nation is measured not by its military might or economic assets but by the wealth of its character, expressed particularly in its responsiveness to human need (Mt 25:31-46). Movement toward the Promised Land is not simply movement toward a physical location but also toward a place of human solidarity. We cross the Jordan River, a symbol of our baptismal commitment, every time we create a safe space, foster human dignity, fight for human rights, provide

basic needs, advocate for just systems, create opportunities, build networks for resettlement and integration, join people in a shared human vulnerability, denounce injustices like human trafficking, challenge attitudes of xenophobia and create an oasis of hope.

The work of the U.S. Catholic bishops, which resettles about 20,000 refugees each year (more than any other organization in the world), is a step in the right direction. But it is only a small step in relation to the overall need. The humanitarian response to the Syrian refugee crisis requires not only faith-based actors but also governments and nongovernmental organizations, indeed the whole human community. In the face of the world's many needs, this suffering can overwhelm us and make us numb, at times. Yet even if we cannot do everything, we can do something.

A View of the Promised Land

Before leaving the United States, I anticipated that our delegation would help me understand the refugee situation in the Middle East. After speaking with political leaders I attempted to analyze it. In talking with U.N. officials I tried to evaluate it. In conversations with faith-based organizations I faced the scope of it. But conversations with refugees and seeing their plight made me progressively more silent as

time went on. The more I heard, the more speechless I became, recognizing that no thought or words could touch the pain of the people we encountered. By the end I was weeping. For a moment I could feel God's heart breaking over what is happening there.

God continues to offer his life not only for those who are trying to help but also for those who are struggling to hope. As people's lives are torn asunder, faith is all many have left when everything else has been taken from them. God remains a refuge for all who place their trust in him (Ps 16:1), even as these refugees do from the exile of their shattered lives.

Christ himself not only migrated to this territory but also became a refugee in these parts. And Christ still migrates into these broken territories of human existence, especially through those who reach out to the refugees in their need. But whether there is room for these refugees in the "inn" of our human community (Lk 2:7) remains an open question. Perhaps, like Moses, some future generation will see a territory of human solidarity on the horizon, where each person's basic needs are met for protection, food and shelter. But the view of the Promised Land from Mount Nebo today—and the situation of refugees surrounding it—suggest that we still have a vast desert in front of us and a long road ahead. **A**

ON THE WEB

Daniel G. Groody, C.S.C., talks about his visit with Syrian refugees. americamagazine.org/podcast

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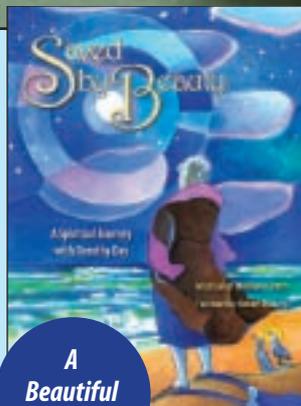
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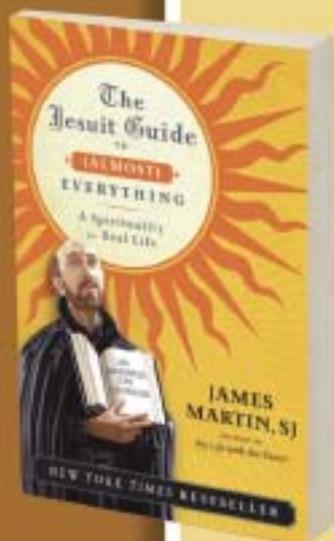
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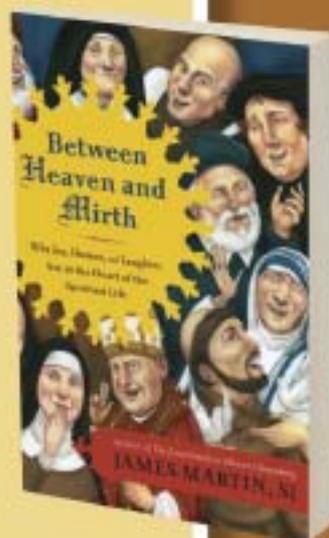
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Great Expectations

Joy and the Visitation

BY JAMES MARTIN

In the first chapter of the Gospel of Luke, the angel Gabriel appears to a young girl named Mary, who lives in the small, backwater town of Nazareth. The angel announces the birth of a son, to be named Jesus.

Not surprisingly, Mary is at first fearful and then doubtful. “How can this be,” she says, “since I am a virgin?” In response, the angel offers an obscure answer. “The power of the Most High will overshadow you.” Then, as if to remind Mary of God’s power, he says, in effect, look at what God has already done. Her cousin, Elizabeth, is already pregnant, says the angel, even though the elderly woman was thought to have been unable to conceive. “For nothing will be impossible with God,” says Gabriel.

Seemingly satisfied with this answer, and overcoming her initial fear and doubt, the young woman assents. “Let it be with me according to your word,” Mary says.

This passage in the Gospel of Luke, called the Annunciation, is one of the most beautiful in the entire New Testament. It is also one of the most mysterious. Like many passages from Scripture it seems to raise as many questions as it answers. For example, did an angel appear to Mary in precisely this way? Perhaps. After all, nothing is impossible with God. (If God could create the universe from nothing, then sending an angel to a young woman and having her conceive miraculously seems relatively easy.) Did her encounter with the

transcendent mystery of God happen in another way—say, in a dream? Or was a meeting with an angel the best way that Mary could communicate an incommunicable story?

Who can say? We do not have access to Mary’s inner life. As the esteemed Scripture scholar Joseph A.

Fitzmyer, S.J., wrote about this passage, “What really happened? We shall never know.” The story of the Annunciation, beloved as it is, can seem completely removed from our human experience.

The next part of the story, however, is far easier to understand. “Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country.” She is going to visit her cousin Elizabeth. This part of the tale, which I would like to focus on, is called the Visitation.

Why is Mary portrayed as traveling to the hill country? Several reasons suggest themselves. First, Elizabeth is elderly and so will probably need some help in childbirth. It would be natural for a young woman, once she has heard news of her cousin’s pregnancy, to visit her. Perhaps Mary’s parents even encouraged her to visit Elizabeth as part of her familial duties. On the other hand, the last verse of the passage,

which says that Mary stayed for only three months, implies that she apparently left at the time of Elizabeth’s greatest need—though perhaps Mary left as her own pregnancy was progressing.

Another possible reason for her journey: Mary may have been frightened. Perhaps terrified by this strange encounter with the divine (in whatever way it occurred), she may have sought out the advice of an older woman. She may have had a close relationship with Elizabeth and felt the need to dis-



JAMES MARTIN, S.J., is a contributing editor of *America*. This essay is excerpted from his book *Between Heaven and Mirth: Why Joy, Humor and Laughter are at the Heart of the Spiritual Life* (HarperOne), which was recently released in paperback.

cuss her situation with her older cousin. Perhaps she even felt closer to Elizabeth than to her parents. Who knows how Mary's parents responded to her situation? In Jewish law, Joseph, to whom she was betrothed (a formal arrangement somewhere between engagement and marriage), would have been within his rights to divorce her upon hearing of the pregnancy. Likewise, Mary's parents could be forgiven if they were not thrilled by her news, at least initially. Perhaps Mary's parents sent her away for her own good, until any scandal died down. Or, the young woman may have feared her parents' reaction to what she knew would sound outlandish, ridiculous, even blasphemous.

Both concern for Elizabeth and her own fear may have motivated Mary's "haste" to visit "the hill country" of Judea. You can imagine her journeying to help a relative; or eager to meet someone who might help her make sense of her mysterious encounter and strange predicament; or simply seeking counsel from a wise, older woman.

Another Option

But there is another possibility: joy. For the first words out of Mary's mouth when she meets Elizabeth is a jubilant song of praise. "My soul magnifies the Lord," says Mary, "and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...." There are few more beautiful words in the entire Bible. The following verses have often been set to music and are known by the first word of the Latin translation of Mary's song: *Magnificat*. *Magnificat anima mea....*

Mary is happy. The young Galilean woman, like most women then and now when they hear such news, was filled with joy at the prospect of giving birth to a child. And she is filled with joy at greeting Elizabeth, who is also expecting a

child. Both of them are joyful at God's activity.

This is not so far from our own experience—man and woman alike. Think of times when both you and a friend, or

you and someone in your family, have received good news at the same time. Is there anything more joyous? Perhaps you have both passed a difficult course in school or gotten into the college of your choice or received a promotion. How exciting it is to celebrate together! You want to be with your friend, to rush right over and share your dual joy. So Mary sets out "with haste." And on greeting Elizabeth she opens her mouth in praise.

Mary is filled with joy, first, for what God has done for her. "For he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant," she says. "Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me." Like many of us in times of good news, we feel like we are bursting with joy and want to declare praise to God. If we receive a promotion or fall in love or find out that we are going to become parents or get a good diagnosis from the doctor, we want to sing, with Mary, "My spirit

rejoices in God my Savior." On a literal level as well you might say that she is "filled" with joy: filled with Jesus.

But Mary is not happy simply for herself; she is happy for what this means for Israel, for God's people. Her song now widens noticeably to include the larger community. God has reversed the fortunes of those who were suffering. God has heard the cries of the poor, those who were hoping for some sort of salvation. "He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts," she says. "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty."

The Visitation and the Magnificat

Lk 1:39-56

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." And Mary said:

My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness
of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their
hearts.

He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

Who isn't joyful when they finally see things set right?

Mary's Magnificat is often used by Christians who work with the poor and advocate on their behalf, as a way of pointing to another reality: what the Kingdom of God is like. In the Kingdom of God, one of Jesus' favorite themes, things are finally made right: the lowly are lifted up, the proud are cast down from their thrones and the rich are sent away empty. In Jesus' ministry, a similar reversal of fortune happens, one that he himself brings about on earth: the blind see; the lame walk; the deaf hear. God

ON THE WEB

A Jesuit journey along the migrants' path.

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reverses things and upends our usual expectations, so that those who had been on the bottom are on the top. God has fulfilled his promises to his people. So Mary, a poor woman, is joyful.

And Mary praises what God has done. Often the Jewish and Christian Scriptures point to a hopeful future, based on the past. God has done this, and so God will do this in the future. The angel Gabriel says something of the same to Mary. Look what God has already done for Elizabeth. Fear not!

Scripture scholars note that the Magnificat is based largely on Hannah's prayer in the First Book of Samuel (1 Sm 2:1-10). Mary's praise hews very closely to Hannah's, often called "The Song of Hannah." Hannah, thought to be barren, has given birth to Samuel. "My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God," she says. As in the Magnificat, Hannah goes on to praise God for reversing the fortunes of his people. "[The Lord] raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honor."

What then are we to make of Mary's Magnificat? Did Luke place those words in her mouth at that point in his story, to link the story of Jesus to that of Samuel, an Old Testament figure? Perhaps. Some scholars even posit that the story was originally associated with Elizabeth, the older woman in the story, thought to have been barren. But there is also the distinct possibility that Mary (and Elizabeth) knew the song of Hannah. A devout Jewish woman might have known of the story of a strong woman from her religious tradition. So perhaps it was natural for her to make use of familiar images and language in her daily life, as it would be today for someone familiar with Scripture.

Of Exaltation

Mary is not the only one who is joyful. Elizabeth too seems overwhelmed not only by her own unexpected pregnancy but by this amazing visit. When she first hears the voice of Mary, she exclaims "with a loud cry" the following: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your



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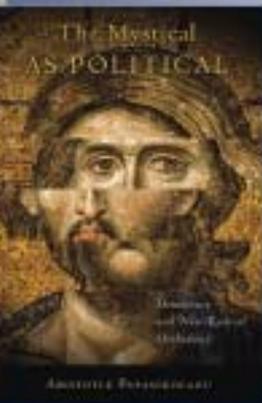
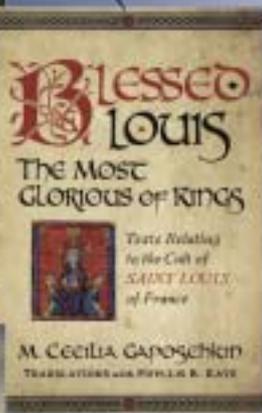
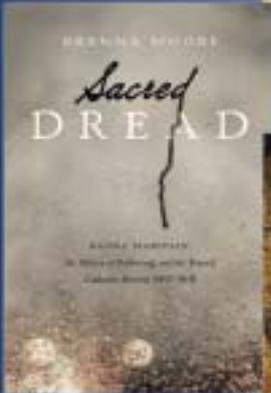
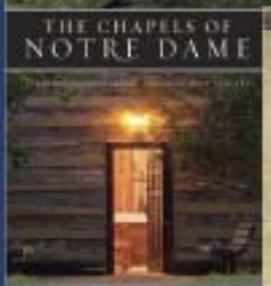


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womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.”

The child leaps for joy! Mothers know of the experience of a child moving—sometimes, mothers say, it feels like jumping—in their womb. What a beautiful image is presented to us in Luke. At the sound of Mary’s voice, something literally stirs within Elizabeth. The child of course is John the Baptist, the “cousin” of Jesus, who will later prepare the way for Jesus.

The baby’s leap is a marvelous response to anyone who thinks that religion is about being gloomy. The Greek word used here is *agalliasis*, sometimes translated as “exaltation.” As Luke Timothy Johnson translates it in his book on Luke for the *Sacra Pagina* series, the baby “leaped with gladness.” It is the same word used by Mary a few lines later, when she says that her spirit “rejoices.”

“The context makes clear that by leaping John recognizes his Lord, Jesus,” says Robert J. Karras, O.F.M., in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. “John’s joy is the most appropriate response to God’s fulfillment of promise in Jesus.” Joy is the response to the Good News.

Mary is joyful. Elizabeth is joyful. Even the baby John leaps for joy. Joy virtually leaps off the page in this story of the Visitation and in Mary’s great Magnificat. Other Bible stories will also reveal joy, if we just know where to look for it. **A**

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Never Too Late

Seeking reconciliation 150 years after the Dakota Uprising

BY SUSAN WINDLEY-DAOUST

I grew up in the American South, born the year before Martin Luther King Jr. was killed. I came into adulthood with people who had in near memory segregation and integration, habits of and challenges to “the Southern way of life.” Southern culture was and is constantly figuring out what makes up the daily practice of reconciliation. So when I moved to the upper Midwest years ago, it was with some apprehension. I worried that my new neighbors would simply wonder, “How could you stand living with all those racists?” I asked a friend whether Midwesterners would be able to see that thousands of people in the South are trying to overturn a history of injustice day by day.

“Don’t worry,” he said. “Moving to Minnesota? Mention the 1862 Dakota Uprising. They’ll drop their rocks fast.”

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the Dakota Uprising, often called the “civil war within the Civil War.” The Minnesota Dakota were starving. The U.S. annuities promised to them—paid out as food—were continuously delayed. When asked about the looming mass starvation, the trader Andrew Myrick commented, “Let them eat grass.”

Soon after, a group of Dakota outside Mankato, Minn., swept through the European settlers’ farms, killing up to 800 people—including Myrick. He was found dead with a mouth full of grass. The U.S. military struck back,

SUSAN WINDLEY-DAOUST is an assistant professor of theology at Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota, Winona campus.



hanging 38 Dakota men on Dec. 26, the largest mass execution in U.S. history. An act of Congress expelled the Dakota from Minnesota permanently.

As an outsider to Minnesota, I often tripped on the half-buried roots of local history, caught off-guard. Discussions on justice for Native Americans would inevitably yield to someone sputtering some racial slur (and, predictably, another would respond, “Hey, I’m part Ojibwe!”). Treaty disputes on fishing rights provoked heat and even violence. I married into a family with Blackfoot ancestors, but know nothing about them; the elders considered the connection something “not to be discussed.” Thomas Maltmann (who presents these events in the historical novel *The Night Birds*) says that many people of Dakota and European ances-

try earnestly urged him to “get it right”—which he assumed meant to tell their side of the story alone. We still stumble through a painful history and a wounded present.

Gathering at the River

This complex history is what makes the Great Dakota Gathering all the more remarkable. I moved from the Twin Cities to small-town Winona: a Mississippi river town planted in gorgeous bluff land that made Mark Twain wax eloquent and loggers thirst for profit. Nine years ago, as many celebrated the 1854 Grand Excursion up the Mississippi to “open up” this land to settlers, a few local men remembered: there were others here first. Those men, hat in hand, traveled to visit Dakota leaders. They invited the Dakota to visit Winona. The Dakota accepted. From

PHOTO COURTESY OF AUTHOR

this came the Great Dakota Gathering. Dakota from across the United States and Canada come to Winona for three days each year for a celebration of homecoming, education and reconciliation. Winona has embraced this weekend, signing a covenant of friendship and welcome with the Dakota (who, technically, remain banned from Minnesota). The event is a mix of good planning and a laid-back atmosphere that invites conversation, not confrontation. Significantly, each year, there is a daily "reconciliation circle," to which everyone is invited.

This year's theme was "Reconciliation and the 1862 Dakota Uprising," no question the most challenging theme of the gathering's existence. To celebrate the Dakota people today is one thing; to test the ties of new friendship and seek reconciliation on the anniversary of such violence and its painful aftermath is another. But people decided to risk reconciliation, and the event was moved to coin-

cide with the date the uprising began. Under a clear sky by a sparkling lake, 150 years later, hundreds of Dakota and European descendants talked rather than screamed, listened rather than killed, danced rather than hid, prayed rather than raged, learned rather than destroyed. They ate a unity feast instead of grass.

But the event was more than just pretty words. Reconciliation cannot undo the past, and how to truly make amends remains a challenge. But to make the simple decision to be vulnerable, to sit, listen and commit to a peaceful way forward draws out the poison of acts from generations past. To commit to that listening as a ritual once a year gives reconciliation weight and reality. It gives all of us a way to live with a history none of us asked for, and let that history not rule, but inform our present efforts toward friendship. We learn to be humble. We learn to listen to hard truths. We practice respect. And in so doing, we make a space for the Holy

Spirit. It becomes possible to recognize, even within tragic history, that we are all members of God's family.

Reconciliation is a daily work, the work of the people. I am in awe of the townspeople who, to use Dorothy Day's words, "were just sitting around talking" and thought to invite the Dakota to their homelands. I am inspired by the Dakota, who after decades of injury, embraced that invitation. This has been what Day would call a "personalist" project of the highest order: the people are doing this. More precisely, God, through the people, is doing this: to see a people stand up and say, "We'll do something different here" is as fresh as the breeze was that September weekend. We remember evil is not the last word.

May we always remember God calls us to be reconciled before laying our gifts at the altar. May we give thanks for people who quietly risk the inbreaking of God as their everyday work. 



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FILM | JOHN ANDERSON

ABE, HONESTLY

Steven Spielberg's 'Lincoln'

Daniel Day-Lewis as Abraham Lincoln



PHOTO: CNS/DREAMWORKS

Daniel Day-Lewis gives us the president we want in Steven Spielberg's *Lincoln*. And Spielberg gives us the movie we expect. Positioned for Oscars and likely to get them, it's a canonization for sure, as Abe might say. Spielberg enjoys such an exalted stature in the public mind that he could not do anything less.

At the same time, the filmmakers bestow upon Lincoln a highly calibrated sanctity, one that acknowledges the politician behind the man behind the image behind the myth. Like the picture of Mr. Lewis in the ubiquitous print ads for the movie—think of a penny, held at a downward angle—the Lincoln of “*Lincoln*” is slightly askew.

The fractured humanity of Spielberg's *Lincoln*—who is also the Lincoln of the screenwriter Tony Kushner and the historian Doris Kearns Goodwin—makes him endearing but also precludes the movie's being dismissed as an American liberal whitewash of a problematic president. Lincoln had his issues. As Mr. Kushner told this writer, the 16th president came from a state that was institutionally hostile to blacks; he was personally acquainted with very few; he was genuinely surprised when he met one who could read and write. He was not entirely comfortable with the idea of racial equality.

But there is a sense throughout the film that Abraham Lincoln's education parallels the nation's. And this raises questions about the timing of the movie's release. It is hard to miss the message one gets from “*Lincoln*” that a vote against Barack Obama is a vote against Abraham Lincoln. And yet the film was held back until three days after the election. (Spielberg's response to questions about this have ranged from oblique to ridiculous.)

If one were being unkind, one would say that Mr. Spielberg, who is as in control of the marketing machinery surrounding his movies as any director alive, considers his film above mere presidential politics. If so, he should have informed his screenwriter. The incandescent Mr. Kushner (“Angels in America”), drawing largely from his fellow Pulitzer laureate Goodwin’s *Team of Rivals*, creates a Lincoln of contradictory parts and an iconic whole. A weary sainthood hangs on his shoulders like the shawl that the increasingly wraithlike Abe wears as he prowls the White House halls at night, worrying whether he can end slavery and war without one plan canceling out the other. In a very early scene involving a battlefield visit, shot

over Lincoln’s shoulder, at first, to ease us into Lewis’s uncanny impersonation, several soldiers are given an audience with their president, including an educated black man from Massachusetts. He bemoans the slow pace at which the Army promotes African-American officers. At this rate, he says, black men might get the vote in, oh, 100 years. Not to think about President Obama at this moment is impossible.

Mr. Kushner’s screenplay is far more sophisticated than the film around it, which, per Mr. Spielberg’s usual M.O., relies on John Williams’s intrusive music, which goes so far as to emulate Gabriel’s trumpet and is always leading one’s heart by the hand (if that’s possible). Mr. Kushner’s intentions might be equally obvious, but the viewer doesn’t feel quite so manipulated. When Lincoln explains the intellectual gymnastics he had to perform in issuing an Emancipation Proclamation that usurps the states’ rights issue at the heart of the slavery question, it is lawyerly but thoroughly accessible and illuminates for the legally unschooled viewer (like this one) the knotty questions with which the president had to contend. Instead of Lincoln’s biography, it is the fight over the 13th Amendment, which is what really freed the slaves, that serves as the plotline of the movie, and its intrigues seem to exist only half in the past. In fact, when the Rahm Emanuel-like secretary of state, William Seward (David Strathairn), assesses the odds of the amendment passing the House (“When have the

Republicans ever been unanimous on anything?”), we are jerked back to the present as abruptly as if Mitt Romney suddenly showed up dressed as Mary Todd Lincoln.

Speaking of whom: Playing a flying nun early in your career seems to make people take you less seriously than they might; and despite two Oscars for Best Actress, Sally Field is never mentioned in the same breath as, say, Meryl Streep. This may change. Field’s Mary Todd Lincoln, usually dismissed as one of the premier loonies of American history (thanks largely to Gore Vidal) is given a complex, contoured portrayal by Ms. Field, who applies layers of character and conflict onto a first lady whose personal grief matched that of any soldier’s mother, North or South. In the film, as in fact, she is a woman of emotional volatility, which has caused her husband no small degree of anxiety. But she is also cultured, intellectual, educated and clever. When she dresses down her husband’s chief congressional ally, Thaddeus Stevens (a terrific Tommy Lee Jones), she does so with surgical sarcasm and brittle eloquence. She is also, in this one key scene, clearly a woman who is barely keeping it together, played by an actress who has it all together.

Then there’s Mr. Lewis, who, as many will agree, is the greatest actor currently making movies and has been such for quite a few years and in quite a few films: “The Boxer,” “The Crucible,” “Gangs of New York,” “In the Name of the Father.” While far too much emphasis is placed on the importance of the Academy Awards—which are, after all, industry awards given in an industry town—Mr. Lewis has won the Best Actor prize twice, for “My Left Foot” and “There Will Be Blood.” And if he wins for “Lincoln,” he will become the only actor ever to win three.

No one could be more deserving. While the movie around him is typical

Crow Koan

Jet-black flyer, wintry clime,
Sheen refracting sun-lit feathers,
How to parse a bird so fine,
Dark as pitch what e’er the weather.
Can it be that such a hue
Carries with it thoughts of death,
Has us ponder, ask anew,
What remains for us of breath?
Or do such colors as the crow’s,
Call attention to the light,
Set against New England snows,
The opposite of death and night?
A deep enigma, what’s the answer?
Let me ask the crow, Zen Master.

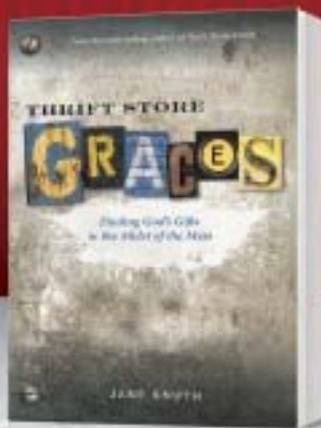
VINCENT J. CLEARY

VINCENT J. CLEARY is retired from teaching the ancient classics at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He is the author of *Amherst Massachusetts 01002: One of the Best Small Towns in America (2003)*.

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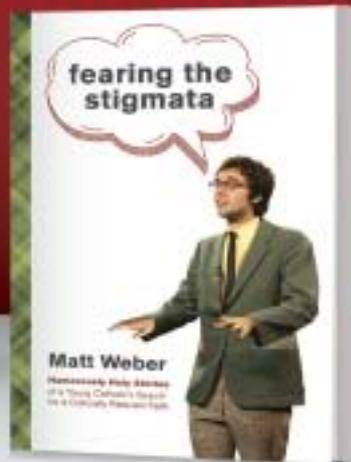


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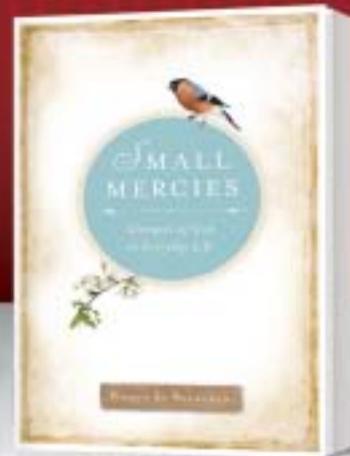
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Spielberg—too much music, too much sentiment, too much movie—Mr. Lewis occupies its center like a pearl in a particularly untidy oyster. His Lincoln is gentle and fierce, philosophic and poetic, a crackerbarrel yarn-spinner and a ruthless manipulator. In fact, much of the pure fun to be had from

“Lincoln” comes in watching the three shady operatives that Seward sends out, with Lincoln’s tacit approval, to buy votes. The trio (James Spader, Tim Blake Nelson and John Hawkes) hilariously do their dirty business among the capital’s craven and soon-to-be-morally-compromised congressmen. And in this, we can look back on the Washington of Abraham Lincoln with a lofty, superior attitude: Our politics would never stoop so low or be so corrupt—not so transparently, at any rate.

At the same time, the questions of political courage that make “Lincoln”

as much a suspense thriller as a biopic are not so easily answered now. The resolution of slavery called for independence of mind and allegiance to something other than party, conditions which seem at this point in our politics all but antediluvian. In very recent years, blocs of politicians have

voted unanimously for matters far less important than the freedom of their fellow man, and likely will again. For all the excesses of the film, it seems that Mr. Spielberg and Mr. Kushner, and perhaps Mr. Lewis too, recognize that “Lincoln” is not about evoking nostalgia or pride or heroism, but a longing for moral clarity. And it will, as long as we are the country Abe Lincoln thought we were.

ON THE WEB
 Leo J. O'Donovan, S.J., reviews the art of Ferdinand Hodler.
americamagazine.org/culture

JOHN ANDERSON is a film critic for *Variety* and *The Washington Post* and a regular contributor to the Arts & Leisure section of *The New York Times*.

perhaps no better way to understand these collisions than through the multiple struggles over the ever-changing face and color of Christ.

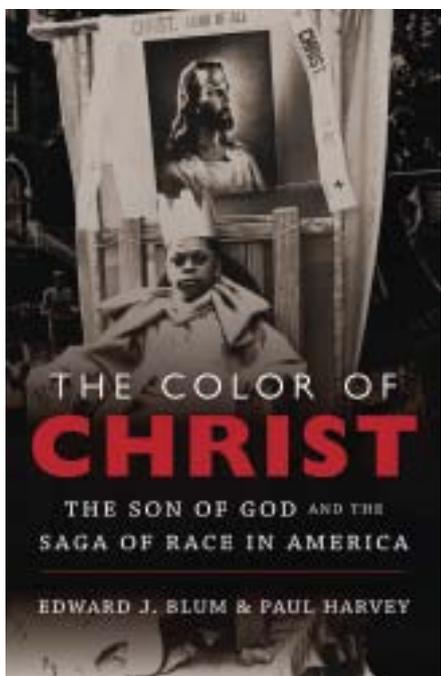
To Edward J. Blum, author of *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion and American Nationalism* and Paul Harvey, author of *Freedom's Coming: Religious Cultures and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era*, the often divergent, mutable, contradictory, conflicting and self-justifying ways Americans whitened, colored and remade the Son of God time and again into a symbol of their deepest fears, highest aspirations, devastating terrors and hopes for racial supremacy or justice, reveal deep truths and myths of American history.

Blum and Harvey dissect how the combustible elements of race and religion, gender and sex and the development of manufacturing, technology and communication were put at the service of racial hierarchy, namely, white projections of Christ reproduced in postcards, pamphlets and books to reinforce the assumption that white domination was a God-given right. If whiteness has been a central marker of identity and privilege in American history, Blum and Harvey describe how white Jesus figures have been reconfigured constantly to fit varied circumstances and create the perception that whiteness is sacred and everlasting.

One of the great strengths of *The Color of Christ* is its contribution to an understanding of how whiteness gained ascendancy in the early republic and, although white images of Christ were appropriated for opposing purposes in the North and South during the Civil War, they became the dominant image of Christ propagated in schools, homes and diverse publications in the United States and beyond.

Although the whiteness of Christ is an enduring, if mercurial, projec-

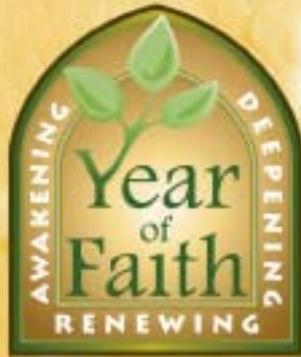
BOOKS | ALEX MIKULICH
IN WHOSE IMAGE?



THE COLOR OF CHRIST
The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America

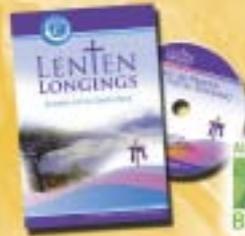
By Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey
 University of North Carolina Press. 336p
 \$32.50

Beyond death and taxes, there are perhaps two additional certainties in American culture: religion and race. Collisions of race and religion recur at many crossroads of U.S. history, including the Atlantic slave trade, the founding of the nation, the Indian removal and the Trail of Tears, the European migrations, the Civil War, Jim Crow, civil rights and, four years ago, the first election of a man of color to the U.S. presidency. There is



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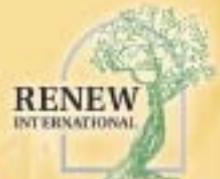
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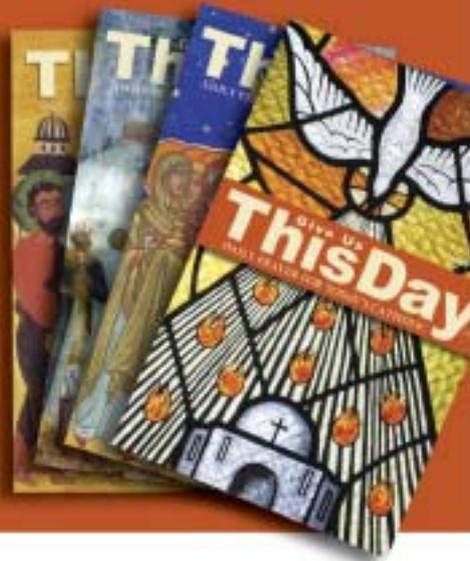
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LITURGICAL PRESS

tion of white power and self-image that is central to American history, it is only a part of the story.

Blum and Harvey expose three myths of American history: first, that particular racial or ethnic groups necessarily create God or gods in their own image; second, that Americans simply replicated European iconography and, third, that black liberation theology was born in the 1960s.

Regarding the first myth, *The Color of Christ* deals not simply with the projection of images of Christ. For the Puritans, who were deeply influential in the founding of the republic, iconoclasm was a critical part of the religious ferment and migrations of the 17th century. That the image of Christ was nearly absent from the revolutionary debates and founding documents of the nation is due to colonial anti-Catholic iconoclasm and some of the founding fathers, who believed Jesus was nothing more or less than an "enlightened sage," reflecting the philosophical influence of the Age of Reason.

The authors recount how, when white images of Jesus emerged in the 19th century, Harriet Beecher Stowe drew upon a white Jesus not to support white supremacy but to oppose slavery. The original version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* depicted a white Jesus who was morally opposed to slavery but, disturbingly, did nothing about it. Nat Turner and John Brown deployed more provocative images of Jesus as a revolutionary devoted to a holy war against slavery and racial oppression.

Simultaneously, Mennonites, Quakers and Shakers drew upon a pacifist Christ to resist slavery and the Civil War.

The second myth, that Americans simply replicated European iconography, misses the fact that the images of Jesus that were distributed globally from the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries drew upon uniquely American 19th-century

visionaries and the description of Christ in the “Pentulus Publius” letter, a medieval forgery that could have gained traction only in the soil of American historical ignorance.

The third myth, that black liberation theology was born in the 1960s, was widely propagated by the U.S. press during the controversy around the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, in which the presidential candidate Barack Obama was criticized for attending Wright’s church in Chicago that drew inspiration from the liberationist theology originally taught by James Cone in the late 1960s.

Blum and Harvey show how, long before the uprisings of the 1960s, slaves re-interpreted the master’s Jesus into a trickster who turned the master’s world upside down, how Native Americans used images of Jesus to resist U.S. expansionism and how former slaves, like Richard Allen, who founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1794, were devoted to a liberating Christ.

If the media and others had known that liberation theology is more deeply rooted than academic theology in the struggles of many diverse ordinary people of color throughout U.S. history, perhaps we would not have had the controversy, or at least we might be more willing to converse with, and learn from, the divergent religious and racial experiences that formed the nation.

The Color of Christ is a timely antidote to the amnesia and nostalgia of contemporary political and religious movements that pine for a past religious, constitutional or racial purity that never existed. Culture in the United States was never united under any single conception of God or Jesus. In Blum’s and Harvey’s telling, there never was a universal American culture for Jesus to uphold.

The Color of Christ reveals tremendous complexity, multiplicity and ambiguity to the rich intercultural

and interracial relationships and conflicts that have continually changed American culture. Blum and Harvey’s latest work deserves to be widely read so that we may yet know how our past endures in the present. We have stories to hear that are rooted in our common past. If we attend to these stories, perhaps, Americans may yet learn alternative possibilities for a

MAURICE TIMOTHY REIDY

HOMECOMING

HOUSE OF STONE A Memoir of Home, Family, and a Lost Middle East

Anthony Shadid
Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 307p \$26

Anthony Shadid put his life in harm’s way so many times that his death in February 2012 has come to seem fore-ordained. Here was a reporter who made his name in the crosshairs of war: in Iraq, of course, but also in Israel and Lebanon. In 2002 he was shot by an Israeli sniper in Ramallah while reporting for *The Washington Post*. The episode put an end to his fraying first marriage and foreshadowed his ultimate end. Shadid died on assignment for *The New York Times*, felled by an asthma attack as he and a colleague were crossing the Turkish border from Syria. They were in the desert, far from the medical help Shadid needed to survive.

The scene of his death was both tragic and fitting. Shadid was covering a conflict in Syria that still threatens to plunge the entire region into war. It was a story that Shadid had been covering in one way or another for most of

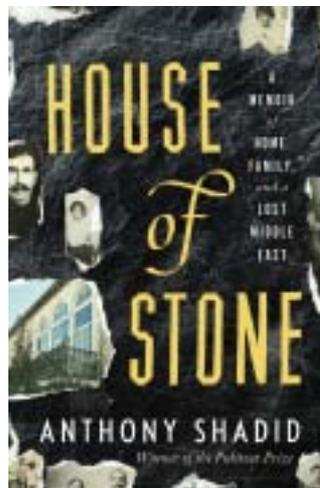
truly multireligious, multiclass and multicultural democratic future. Then we may yet see the divine image in all of us.

ALEX MIKULICH, an associate at the *Jesuit Research Institute* in New Orleans, is co-author of the forthcoming *The Scandal of White Complicity in U.S. Hyper-incarceration: A Nonviolent Spirituality of White Resistance*.

his career. He died in a region, the Levant, that his family once considered home. He was too young, though his salt and pepper beard made him look older than his 42 years. Perhaps someday his only daughter, Laila, will take comfort in the fact he died witnessing to history in a part of the world that he could fairly claim as his own.

House of Stone is the story of that homecoming. Published shortly after his death, it is an unexpected book from a war correspondent, ruminative and impressionistic, devoid of the life and death drama one might expect. Yet it is a book of unusual intelligence and feeling that sheds light on Shadid’s unique gifts as a reporter.

Shadid grew up in Oklahoma, the descendant of immigrants from Lebanon. In his memoir he recounts the story of their immigration to the United States alongside a more unorthodox tale: Shadid’s return to Lebanon to rebuild his great-grandfather Isber’s house in the town of Marjayoun. It was a crazy and quixotic endeavor. Ever since World War I, war “had been more familiar than peace” in Lebanon. From



the brutal 15-year civil war to the Syrian occupation, Lebanon was the scene of regular turmoil. The idea of an American finding a home in the region, much less physically rebuilding one, strikes more than one local resident as a doomed enterprise.

Yet Shadid persisted with the same doggedness that characterized his reporting. He paints memorable portraits of the assorted contractors and artisans he hires to complete the project. The project moves in fits and starts as Shadid slowly comes to know the place. "The beauty of Lebanon neither shouts nor declares," he writes. "There is a gentleness to the landscape of hills rounded by age and terraces crumbling for centuries."

He seeks to recapture the lost culture of the Levant, a time when the Middle East was not divided by fiercely contested borders. He mourns the diminishment of Arab Christendom, noting that in Marjayoun Christians "were not included in decision making. To persist in that identity, we faced our own extinction." All the while the work on his house proceeds until, finally, he is able to sleep under its roof. "It's part of your body now," a friend

tells him. "It's the womb of your body. It's you...."

As the house finds new life, however, the town around it is dying. Marjayoun was once a crossroads of the Middle East, one resident proudly declares. Townspeople worked in Palestine, Syria and Jordan. It had its own identity, proudly Orthodox, distinct from Catholic Beirut. Yet the reader can see that was a long time ago.

In the spring of 2011, following his arrest and detention in Libya along with three other reporters, Shadid made his way back to Marjayoun. For the peripatetic reporter, born in Oklahoma City, employed by The New York Times, living and reporting from Beirut, it was the one place where he could find peace. He was joined by his new wife, his infant son and eventually, his daughter, Laila. Before she arrives he imagines her "suddenly grown, beside these trees and repeating the Arabic words I would some day teach her." Shadid is gone now, his tongue and his pen silenced. But Isber's house still stands.

MAURICE TIMOTHY REIDY is online editor of *America*.

that the book title was an attention-getting device; yet only in part. As the reader will discover, when Krugman calls our national economic condition a depression, he draws on the definition used in the 1930s by the British economist John Maynard Keynes.

In 1936, just as deficit hawks in Congress had won the day and federal cutbacks were beginning to pull the economy into a second recession that prolonged the Great Depression by five years, Keynes published his magnum opus, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*. The work set in motion the final New Deal push that saved the United States and launched a school of macroeconomic thinking that bears its author's name. Keynes explained the word depression, saying it was "a chronic condition of subnormal activity for a considerable period without any marked tendency either towards recovery or towards complete collapse."

Given recent Bureau of Labor Statistics reports showing that in the three full summer months national unemployment remained stuck at 8.1 percent or higher, Krugman's use of Keynes's term is hardly the showboating of a brilliant economist. Indeed, unemployment has remained at more than 8 percent for 42 months.

Does Keynes's description sound vaguely familiar to our wallets today?

A depression need not be called "great." In an op-ed column in The New York Times last July, Krugman suggested replacing "Great Recession," an utterly inadequate term for the events that began in 2007, with the mischievously teasing term "Lesser Depression" for the condition that remains even after the National Bureau of Economic Research declared the latest recess-

CECILIO MORALES

BRING BACK KEYNES

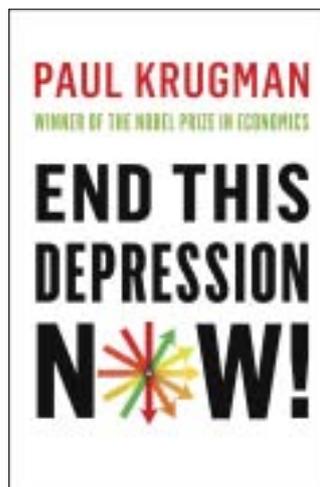
END THIS DEPRESSION NOW!

By Paul Krugman
W. W. Norton. 259p \$24.95

In December 2000, with electoral campaign passions subsiding, the Bush presidential transition teams attempted to inoculate the incoming administration against blame for the inevitable bust end of the longest running boom in U.S. history by invoking the R-word, "recession," to which the Clinton White House replied with another R-word, "ridiculous." Now comes the

Nobel laureate in economics and New York Times columnist Paul Krugman with a D-word, "depression." Should we respond with the D-word "disagree"?

At a recent briefing I attended, Krugman himself seemed fully aware of the impact of calling an economic situation a depression. He admitted sheepishly



sion over in 2009. In fact, the Great Depression designates a period that included two recessions, one caused by the Crash of 1929 and its aftermath, the other caused by the Republican *démarche* on the New Deal spending that by 1936 was beginning to yield weak signs of recovery.

Krugman's book is not about how our depression came to happen, but about the urgency to end it now. "The depression we're in is essentially gratuitous: we don't need to be suffering so much pain and destroying so many lives," he argues.

The Princeton professor makes his case in droll, nontechnical terms, as did Keynes, whose legacy includes the dictum that "in the long term we are all dead." And there are only a dozen charts (on average one every 20 pages), a remarkable achievement for a man who delights in every fluctuation of a trend line.

The teacher in Krugman brings out all the humor he can manage, and it is extensive, to illuminate complex ideas from the dismal science and debunk myths that have blocked effective countermeasures. In doing so he battles with "the Confidence Fairy," sings an aria from the "Eurodämmerung" and lumps a certain Wisconsin Catholic boy, chair of the House Budget Committee and an unsuccessful vice-presidential candidate, with members of the tribe known as the Austerians, whose federal belt-tightening Krugman sees leading to a slump similar to that of 1937.

The reader will also learn that the term Minsky Moment aptly describes the realization in 2008 of the level of risk in existing debt that precipitated the continuing crisis. Or, in more Krugmanesque terms, "The moment is also called the Wile E. Coyote moment, after the cartoon character known for falling off cliffs, then hanging in midair until he looks down—for only then, according to the laws of cartoon physics, does he plunge."

The message, however, is deadly serious, and Krugman is no longer in the minority decrying the puny dosage of the Keynesian cure, given the dimensions of the crisis, both in the United States and Europe.

Krugman alludes to the fact now well known to close observers of policy that the chair of the Council of Economic Advisers at the time, Christina Romer, urged President

Obama to ask Congress for a \$1.4 trillion stimulus package, rather than what was requested: half that amount, a figure that diluted hundreds of millions into tax breaks that yielded the expected extremely small payoff.

Even the hidebound International Monetary Fund surprised the public in midsummer by warning against cutting back on public spending in the United States. The club of advanced

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nations called the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development issued a few days later a call for broad measures of social insurance to deal with record levels of long-term U.S. unemployment. Krugman even suggests that some of Mitt Romney's advisers might silently agree with him, even though it may be too much of a gamble to hope that, should Romney win, he will "rip off his mask, revealing his true pragmatic/Keynesian nature."

Indeed, to Krugman the Keynesian solution makes detailed policies obvious. When the private sector hoards money as it is doing, choking productive capacity (and jobs) out of the economy, the answer is for government to spend. Balancing budgets is for another time, for a future boom when Clintonian federal surpluses can be made to blossom again.

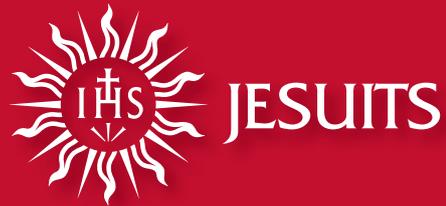
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One easy fix: rehire all the teachers and firefighters laid off by state and local governments when stimulus money began to run out. Such a measure alone, Krugman calculates, would bring unemployment down to 7 percent. Another: raise safety net spending to match needs, not merely costs, of current services. The payoff lies in the proven fact that the poor spend money right away on necessities.

Still, to Krugman the key point is to keep in mind why a massive and vigorous government moves to alter the economic environment for the better is needed: because government is the spender of last resort, and no other sector is increasing its spending.

CECILIO MORALES *has covered federal economic policy as a journalist in Washington, D.C., since 1984. He is currently executive editor of the specialized weekly Employment and Training Reporter.*



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LETTERS

Lip Service

In “A Prayer for Malala” (11/5), the editors write, “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.” I wish I could believe that statement, but I do not. I have one simple test for whether such a statement is real or just lip service: Do women have a voice in the church? Are they invited to participate when decisions are being made? The answer, sadly, is no.

ANNE HECK
Santa Barbara, Calif.

Centrality of Christ

I read with great interest and appreciation Michael Anthony Novak’s article, “Misunderstood Masterpiece” (11/5), about Salvador Dalí’s painting. I have been enamored of this work since I was a Jesuit novice more than 50 years ago. I was so struck by the centrality of Christ and the “geometry” of the painting that I took a ruler to examine the many incorporated perspective lines. What did I find? All of these lines converge to one single point: the mouth of Christ, the Word of God. Centrality of Christ indeed!

The transparent, unfinished body above Christ’s head is more mysterious. While I appreciate Novak’s interpretation that this is a representation of the Father, let me offer an alternative interpretation. Both hands of Christ are pointing to himself—transparently seated at table and the transparent, unfinished body with arms extended to take in all the earth and its people. In the tradition of St. Paul and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J., this is the new reality of Jesus, the mystical body of Christ, the cosmic Christ. It is an incomplete body, waiting for us as living cells of that same body to contribute to its full development and maturity.

DANIEL J. GATTI, S.J.
New York, N.Y.

Personal Choices

“Preference for Equality,” by Meghan J. Clark (10/29), is a timely article on an important subject, but it misses the forest for the trees. A recent report on factors affecting health and longevity stated that the most important factor, accounting for 40 percent of the problem, was the personal choice of the individual.

Japan spends far less on health care as a percentage of gross domestic product than the United States or almost any major European country, yet leads in longevity by a wide margin. Why is that? The obesity rate in the United States, 30.6 percent, is about the highest in the world. The obesity rate in Japan, the lowest of all major industrial nations, is 3.2 percent. Bottom line: personal lifestyle choices that affect weight control, not money spent, have a far higher correlation with longevity than expenditures or percentage covered by health insurance.

There is one area already in our Medicare formula that does address personal choice: smoking. Anyone filling out a Medicare application must answer the smoker question, and a positive reply results in a significantly higher payment.

The United States must come up with a health care program that incentivizes good personal health choices and de incentivizes poor ones, or we will simply not make progress on improving the health of the nation at an affordable cost.

WALTER MATTINGLY
Jacksonville, Fla.

Social Forces, Too

The relationship between individual responsibility and conditioning social factors is a complex one. Long ago the great sociologist Robert K. Merton contended that when individuals cannot achieve the cultural markers of success in their society (for example, wealth, power, high educational attain-

ment) due to lack of opportunity, they will often resort to unconventional and even illegal means to attain them.

This is not to say that individuals are not responsible for their decisions. But we cannot ignore the social forces that shape those decisions. If a person lives in what is called a “food desert,” where access to affordable nutritious food is lacking, it is hard to expect that this person will make the most salubrious dietary choices. Even if there are grocery stores in poorer neighborhoods, healthy food is far more expensive than junk food.

Our society needs to encourage healthy choices, but I think one important way to do that is to attenuate social and economic inequalities. Professor Clark is right that incomes that rise faster at the bottom than the top would lead to better health outcomes. Producing healthy outcomes is a matter of personal and social responsibility.

GERALD BEYER
Philadelphia, Pa.

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No Pension Needed

Re "Blown Call" (Current Comment, 10/22): A person can work and save for their retirement without the benefit of a pension. I and others I know have done it. It takes hard work and discipline. First, we tithed. God is more generous than we could ever imagine. Second, I saved before spending. That means we sacrificed buying stuff, taking expensive trips or spending more than we made.

Study the stock market and become aware of what a balanced budget is. This is hard and ongoing work; it is not a mystery or a matter of blind luck. I invested and never touched the money for retirement. I was in business for myself until I was 53 years old. Then I worked for a corporation that offered a 401(k) plan. I saved 10 percent, at first. As the last child left home, I saved 20 percent. I saved all bonuses. I just retired. I do not have to worry about money because it is there.

PAT SHANNON

Dallas, Tex.

Opening Doors to Faith

Re "How To Evangelize?" by James C. Gorman and Robert S. Rivers, C.S.P. (Web only, 10/15): We are called to heal the sick, comfort the grieving, visit the prisoner, welcome the stranger. This is the work of the Gospel. When we do so, and do it with love, we create relationships that serve as the catalyst for sharing more deeply the good news. The act of healing or feeding or whatever else we do often leads to an invitation to talk about faith; it opens doors that welcome discussion about a person's faith. And when the door is open, the Spirit enters. Without those acts we are just another Sunday morning preacher with empty words.

GER LUONGO

Ringwood, N.J.

Fearless Dialogue

I was moved by "A Time to Harvest," by Ladislav Orsy, S.J. (10/8). Father Orsy cites our need for "trust in the Spirit, the capacity for friendly debates and an air of freedom in God's field."

Couldn't we maybe begin working our way out of the polarization so many experience in the church today by simply talking with each other a little more?

I recently attended an adult formation event at my parish on the legacy of Vatican II. A local theologian asked us to consider this: "We aren't afraid to talk to anybody." He had a PowerPoint slide that listed a smorgasbord of religious bodies and denominations with which the church has taken up earnest dialogue.

After it was over, I told the theologian how impressed I was by all the folks outside the Catholic Church with whom we have struck up conversations. Yet I wondered: Where is the conversation inside the church? Where is the fear-free dialogue there? "That's a very good question," he said.

BOB McCABE

Chesapeake, Va.

Role of Chastity

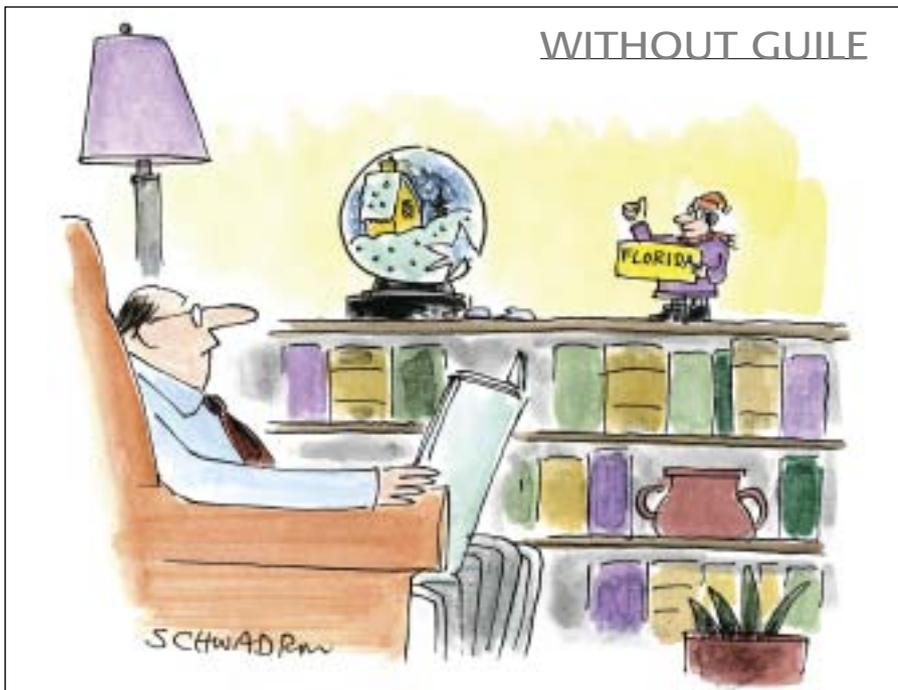
Your three commentators on *Just Love*, by Margaret A. Farley, R.S.M. (9/24) seem, like Sister Farley herself, to pay no attention to the self-regarding virtue of chastity and thus base a whole sexual ethic on the other-regarding virtue of justice. Such an ethic is seriously inadequate. The true foundation of a Christian sexual ethic is expressed by Dietrich von Hildebrand in *Man and Woman*: "The sexual act, because it is destined to be the consummation of [the] sublime union and fulfillment of spousal love, becomes sinful when desecrated by isolation." Or by St. Paul in the First Letter to the Corinthians (6:13-20).

ROBERT E. RODES JR.

Notre Dame, Ind.

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Advent Invitations

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (C), DEC. 2, 2012

Readings: Jer 33:14–16; Ps 25:4–14; 1 Thes 3:12–4:2; Lk 21:25–36

“Be vigilant at all times” (Lk 21:36)

There is an ancient story that depicts a man entering the gates of heaven. Once inside he discovers nothing but a place to sit facing a huge wall. When he asks his escort, St. Peter, for an explanation, Peter says, “You have but entered the antechamber of paradise. Paradise itself is on the other side of the wall. An opening in the wall will appear, but only once a year. It could emerge at any time: possibly in the next hour, possibly in many months. Keep vigil and watch. If you miss it, your waiting will continue.”

There are two striking similarities between this man’s situation and our own. First, like the man who has already passed the gates of heaven, we too are already saved, already sisters and brothers of the Lord and blessed by his Spirit. And yet we wait for the consummation of that salvation. We wait for the second coming, and in a very real sense we are in exile from the Lord (1 Pt 2:11). Today we begin Advent. In this month-long season, we prepare to celebrate the incarnation of the Word made flesh, the coming of our salvation. And yet our Advent Gospel reading is apocalyptic, anticipating the second coming. Jesus predicts “signs in the sun and the stars,” where “the powers of heaven will be shaken.”

The first and second comings have

everything to do with each other. We could say that the end time itself began with the incarnation. Christ is God’s final word to humanity (Heb 1:1–3) and his presence is destined to be the “fall and rise of many in Israel” (Lk 2:34). Jesus says in the Gospel today that those who resist him will experience “dismay” and be “perplexed” (literally, “panicked”). The faithful, in contrast, are invited to “stand erect and raise your heads because your redemption is at hand.” We need not fear the second coming, but can anticipate it with great hope and joy. Indeed, the joy of Christmas includes the anticipated joy of the second coming.

Given these considerations, what kind of posture should we assume during Advent? Jesus commands us to avoid being “drowsy from carousing and drunkenness and the anxieties of life.” Rather, “Be vigilant at all times.” Like the man before the walls of paradise, we prayerfully watch.

Being prayerful and attentive brings us to the second way the opening story resonates with our own situation. A state of spiritual vigilance is exactly what we ought to cultivate during this period between the first and second comings. As many wisdom figures in our tradition have insisted, God often

blesses us with opportunities to know him more intimately, but we can easily miss them by simply not paying attention. It is hard to be alert, to be present to the moment with a spacious heart. It is hard not to let “the anxieties of daily life” absorb us. It is easy to get lost in the minutiae of endless tasks and plans, many of them unnecessary.

When a student knocks on my door unexpectedly, I am welcoming, of course, but sometimes my first thought is, “How long is this going to take?” Could not the Lord desire to speak to me in this encounter? Could I be unknowingly entertaining an angel (Heb 13:2)? What is the quality of my presence when I am preoccupied? Not great, that’s for sure. I need to remind myself that my experience of



PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Consider everyone you meet today as God’s messenger.
- What in your life can you let go of?
- Take on an extra half-hour of daily prayer in Advent.

God (or lack thereof) here and now not only has everything to do with the quality of my spiritual life but also represents the very foundations of my future life with God.

Advent invites us to do more than simply commemorate Christmas; it invites us to embrace a larger vision. Advent draws us to prepare to live the mystery of the Word made flesh here and now. Life is Advent. Perhaps this can be our daily reflection in this season: “Trust in the Lord and wait for his light; for it is easy in the eyes of the Lord suddenly, in an instant, to make the poor rich” (Sir 11:21).

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

ART: TAD DUNNE

People, Look East

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (C), DEC. 9, 2012

Readings: Bar 5:1-9; Ps 126:1-6; Phil 1:4-11; Lk 3:1-6

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths” (Lk 3:6)

The Book of Baruch is a beautifully poetic biblical text that takes us back to the period of the Exile, a time of darkness for Israel. They are a broken people, far from their homeland, which was ravaged by the Babylonians. Just before our reading, desolate Jerusalem speaks as a mother to her lost children. She recognizes their suffering from afar and charges them with courage and faith (4:9-29).

Now, in our first reading, the prophet speaks to her: “Jerusalem, take off your robe of mourning; put on the splendor of glory from God forever... Up, Jerusalem! Stand upon the heights; look to the east and see your children...for God is leading Israel in joy by the light of his glory.”

Look to the east: that is, look out at your children coming home in glory from exile. Jeremiah had prophesied God’s intent to re-establish Israel in peace: “For I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, not for woe! Plans to give you a future full of hope” (Jer 29:11). As we know, Israel’s return from exile was as shaky as it was glorious. That is the human condition. Still, it was astonishing. Look to the east and see God’s glorious salvation.

That historical moment both testi-

fies to God’s love for a broken people and foreshadows the coming of his glorious son. This foreshadowing brings us to the Gospel reading. Luke describes how John the Baptist prepares for the Lord by “proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,” thereby fulfilling what was written in the Book of Isaiah (40:3-5). John becomes “A voice crying out in the desert: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord...and all flesh will see the salvation of God.’” This passage, which initially referred to the return of the exiles, is now used to describe the fullness of that salvation in Christ.

John is a brilliant transition figure from the Old Covenant to the New. In his person, he encapsulates the whole prophetic anticipation of God’s salvation for Israel. He is the Elijah figure prophesied by Malachi: “Now I am sending to you Elijah the prophet, before the day of the Lord comes” (3:23); for John had the “spirit and power of Elijah” (Lk 1:17).

John is unnerving, as all prophets of repentance are. The story goes that when a commissioned statue of John the Baptist arrived at a certain Benedictine abbey in the United States some 50 years ago, several of the monks did not like the fact that he looked so unnaturally gaunt and grave.

The abbot is said to have remarked, “I suspect that the reason you don’t like it is that it vividly reminds you of a life you abandoned long ago.” Whether apocryphal or not, the story points us to a man unwavering in his demand for repentance.

Yet John is ultimately a presence of hope and light. To those willing to listen and be baptized, he pointed metaphorically to the east, toward the rising sun, where a new era was emerging. Repentance is really all about hope. It is a purification in anticipation of union. As Jesus promised, the pure of heart will see God (Mt 5:8). John leads us to the Lord and thus our salvation. In this sense, we are Jerusalem, still in too much darkness, still being called to look east.

Advent is a time when the spirit of John the Baptist calls us to purification

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Consider what needs purification for Christmas.
- Consider what deeply burdens your soul.
- Invite the Lord’s light into all your darkness.

and prayer. His is a baptism, Luke tells us, of *metanoia*. The word literally means a turn-around. Of course, the turning here is a turning from sin. *Metanoia* is a good image also for turning from gloom to joy, from desperation to anticipation, from darkness to the light of the world.

We should let John the Baptist take charge of us this Advent, unnerving as he is. We should let him encourage us to purify our hearts. And we should listen to the invitation he and the whole prophetic tradition offers: turn around to look east.

PETER FELDMIEIER



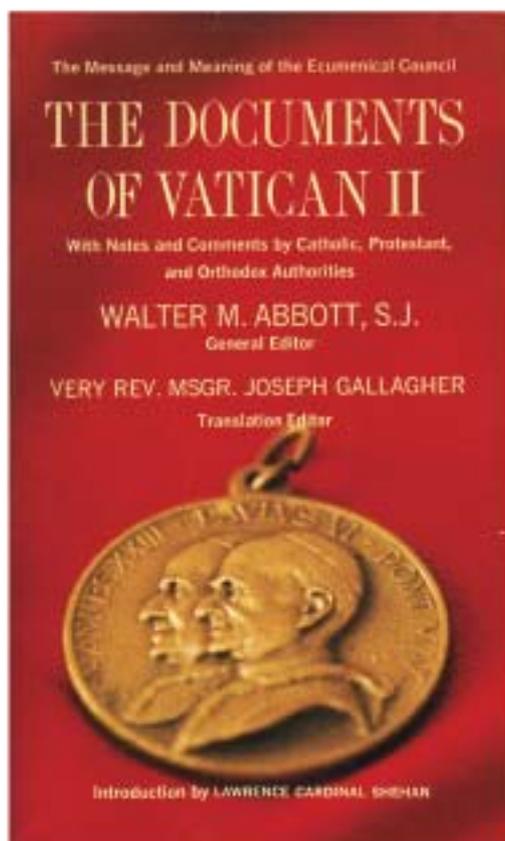
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