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Easter 2008

The Pope's Easter Proclamation
Gerald O'Collins

Abraham's Sacrifice
Patrick J. Ryan

Of Many Things

"We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come." We repeat these words every Sunday at the conclusion of the Nicene Creed, followed by the acclamation, "Amen." I have recited them thousands of times, yet the strangeness of what we profess still strikes me. The resurrection of the body provokes scores of questions, perhaps more than any other Christian doctrine. Chief among them: How, exactly, will this work?

An enduring temptation is to interpret the idea of the resurrection metaphorically. Of course the dead will not rise at the end of time. Surely it must be their spirits that will live. The idea that the dead will actually walk again beggars belief. This is what the Gnostics thought. The Spirit is holy, but flesh is sinful. At death we will finally be able to shuffle off this mortal coil.

Yet this is not what we believe. During the Easter season especially, we profess that the dead will walk again, as Jesus did on the road to Emmaus, the wounds in his hands and his side proof that he was no mere apparition. "For if the resurrection of the flesh is to be denied, the prime article of faith is shaken," Tertullian once wrote; "if it is asserted, the faith is established."

Our flesh may betray us over time, but there are few of us who would want to do without its pleasures in the life to come—the satisfaction of a good meal, the sublime wonders of music, the healing that comes with touch. The genius of the Christian narrative is that it promises life in the Spirit lived in the flesh.

Over the centuries, the doctrine of bodily resurrection has been a great comfort to believers facing the overwhelming fact of death. In a forthcoming book, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (Cornell), Mark S. Schantz writes that "a vision of heaven that literally restored bodies to wholeness" had a powerful effect on the young men sent off to fight in a gruesome war. The doctrine was also no doubt a comfort to the parents of the slain, many of whom never were able to see their child whole again.

Yet there was a propensity then, as there is among some Christians today, to imagine the afterlife as simply a heavenly reflection of life on earth, the only difference being that we can enjoy the company of the deceased. If the awesome nature of the resurrection teaches us anything, it is that a God capable of such miracles is beyond our comprehension. Imagining the kingdom is a futile activity.

A more fruitful exercise is to consider what other faiths can teach us about the world to come. *Resurrection: The Power of God for Christians and Jews* (Yale), by Kevin D. Madigan and Jon D. Levenson, traces the Jewish roots of the Christian belief in resurrection. Perhaps the "least known teaching in Judaism," resurrection is in fact "a defining doctrine," argue Madigan and Levenson, a Christian and Jew respectively, both professors at Harvard. During the time of Jesus, the Pharisees professed belief in resurrection, though the Sadducees did not. In the first and second century of the common era, the authors write, the rising of the dead was linked to political revolution, as Jews believed that "God was about to make a new creation and to vindicate his loyal people." Today a common Jewish prayer ends with a paean to God's life-renewing power: "Faithful You are to revive the dead. Blessed are You, O Lord, who revive the dead."

Although there is no explicit reference to resurrection in the Old Testament until the Book of Daniel (12:1-3), one of the later texts, Madigan and Levenson detect seeds of God's ultimate promise in earlier episodes of Jewish history. Consider the many stories about childlessness in the Hebrew Bible. For Abraham and Sarah, who cannot conceive a child, and Job, who loses his 10 children to God's mysterious wrath, a life without children is comparable to death. Seen from the reverse angle, birth is a form of resurrection, a taste of the new life that awaits. The birth of Isaac to the previously infertile Sarah and the creation of a new family for Job are miracles that foreshadow Jesus' own rising—and our own.

Indeed, the miracle of birth seems like an especially good place to contemplate the miracle of resurrection. As a sage Jewish scholar once remarked, if God can create life out of nothing, then surely the feat of rebirth is not so unbelievable.

Maurice Timothy Reidy

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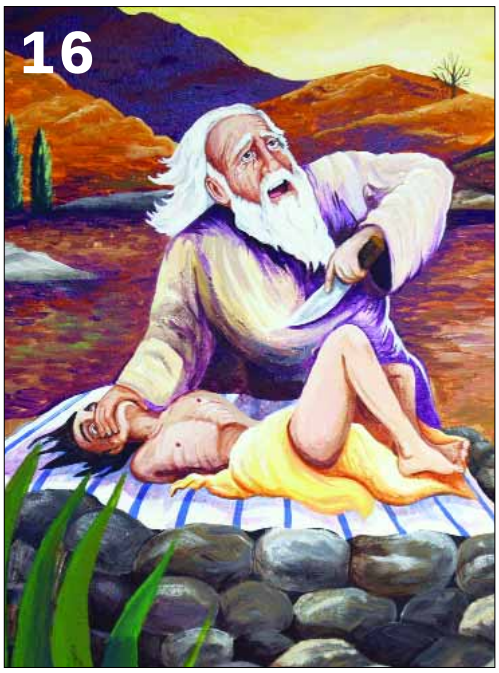

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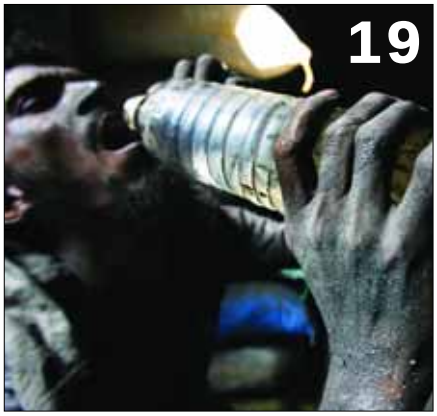
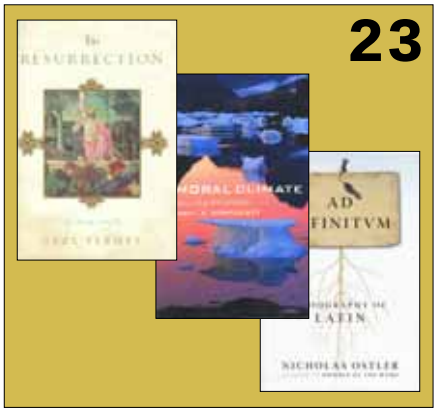




This week @ America Connects

Video meditations for Holy Week, and the editors on *Populorum Progressio*, from 1967. Plus, on our podcast, Michael E. Lee remembers Archbishop Oscar Romero on the anniversary of his death. All at americamagazine.org.

It Ain't Over Till It's Over

Many pundits predict that the 2008 presidential election will be close no matter which Democrat runs against the probable Republican nominee, John McCain. If true, that may portend ill for the conduct of the race, which could be tougher and uglier than when one candidate enjoys a large majority of support. As both candidates try to attract the nation's growing number of independents, party leaders must conduct massive voter registration drives. Current excitement over the primaries already has attracted more first-time voters than usual. Since participation is vital to democracy, citizens and civic-minded organizations (including churches) also should register voters and encourage voting in November. Voter turnout, however, is hardly the final step in the election process.

Rather, in light of the 2000 and 2004 elections, a host of practical and mechanical concerns—regarding ballots and voting machines able to produce a paper record for a recount—needs attention now. Just as crucial is the need to prevent irregularities at the polls that in effect disenfranchise some voters. Given the record turnout in primary after primary this year, how is it that Ohio failed to have enough ballots on hand for its voters? Which other states, cities or towns will be unprepared for the inevitable? Consider too the inadequately trained officials at local polling places. To ensure fairness and accuracy on election day, trained election monitors should be on hand. Elections are the finale of a long, arduous process. It takes years of effective planning to produce one day of grassroots democracy at the ballot box.

Inhuman Conditions

"We have no food, there is a lack of doctors and medicines, the hospitals are full of dead people, and people are treated in the streets, under inhuman conditions." That firsthand description of daily life was voiced by the Rev. Manawel Mussalam, the pastor of the Catholic parish of the Holy Family in Gaza. It is similar to the description supplied by eight nongovernmental organizations based in the United Kingdom in a report issued jointly on March 5. Save the Children, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (known as Cafod), Christian Aid and Care International, among others, have painted a picture of horror in Gaza. Of the approximately 1.5 million people living in the territory, fully 80 percent are dependent on aid organizations for survival. Humanitarian groups and legal observers are concerned that the blockade of Gaza by Israel is in violation of international law, inasmuch as it constitutes collective punishment of an entire people. The embargo has worsened problems of poverty and unemployment, which is 40 percent and rising, and has undermined the school system. Daily blackouts can last from eight to 12 hours.

Whatever may be said to deplore the activity of militant terrorists and intransigence of political leaders, not to mention the use of apparently indiscriminate military force, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza demands a solution. The European Union has been called upon by its own citizens to provide one. The involvement of the United States is considered completely inadequate by those who are suffering most, the people of Gaza. This must change.

A Change and a Chance

Russia's pantomimed presidential election concluded on March 2 with a result as predictable as snow in Norilsk. Dmitri A. Medvedev, President Vladimir Putin's former chief of staff and handpicked successor, won over 70 percent of the vote in an election observers described as unfair but probably still reflective of the country's wishes. Among U.S. policymakers, there is uncertainty about what Mr. Medvedev's election means for the Russia/U.S. relationship, especially since Mr. Putin is staying put at the Kremlin, albeit in the technically subsidiary post of prime minister.

Whatever else Mr. Medvedev's election may mean, it should lead to a reassessment of a U.S. policy toward Russia that has helped to strain relations between the two countries. Mr. Medvedev indicated on the campaign trail that he is interested in moving Russia away from some of the authoritarian practices of Mr. Putin, allowing for greater political and economic reform. Washington should take him at his word for now and should signal in return a new determination to fix its relationship with Moscow. To that end, the United States could exempt Russia from the obsolete Jackson-Vanik Amendment restricting trade, or revisit its decision to place a largely unnecessary missile defense system in eastern Europe, or indicate a renewed desire for further reductions in the nuclear arsenals of both nations.

Each of these overtures, long advocated by independent U.S. policy analysts, would assure Russia that the United States has at last abandoned its adversarial mentality and would help thaw a frost in the U.S./Russia relationship that, if left unchecked, augurs a renewed cold war.

Christians in Flight

CHRISTIANS HAD BEEN FLEEING Iraq for years before the U.S. invasion in 2003. The ancient Assyrian Church of the East saw four-fifths of its members emigrate before 2000 and its ancient patriarchate transferred to Chicago. The government of Saddam Hussein persecuted the Assyrians because of their resistance to Arabization and adherence to their traditional language, Syriac. Now other Christians who survived under Saddam have succumbed to the combined pressures of radical Islam and the chaos of war. More than half the remaining Christian population has fled Iraq since the U.S. invasion.

The vulnerability of Christians became more evident Feb. 29 with the kidnapping of the Chaldean archbishop of Mosul, Faraj Rahho. Despite the apparent decline in violence following an increase in U.S. troops with last year's surge, there has been no letup in the pressures on Iraqi Christians. The depopulation of the churches continues; hundreds of thousands of Christians now live an uncertain existence as refugees in Jordan and elsewhere, with no path to a better future. In the last year, many of those who hoped to remain in Iraq had moved to the relative quiet of northern Iraq, where Mosul is the major population center. The high-profile disappearance of the archbishop may prove the fatal blow to the Christian presence in Iraq.

The churches of the Middle East are the inheritors of rich religious traditions in liturgy, theology, spirituality, language and culture. Prior to the U.S. invasion, Iraq was home to an array of Christian communities. Some Assyrians, members of the Church of the East, remained. The largest Christian church consisted of their Catholic cousins, the Chaldeans. In addition, there were Syrian and Greek Orthodox, Latin (Roman) as well as Melkite (Greek) Catholics and evangelicals. The disorder that followed the American occupation increasingly made Christians victims of violence. Their businesses were burned, their churches bombed, women harassed and priests murdered. Now they are deprived of their homeland, a disabling blow to the identity of people who take pride in their heritage. The loss of historic variety, as these eastern Christians either languish in exile or assimilate to foreign cultures, diminishes the world Christian community, including the Christian West.

In general, crimes against Christians have been perpetrated by jihadists and xenophobic criminals unleashed by war's chaos. In the long term, the surest route to security for the region's Christians lies in a peace that includes not only a political settlement but also the ascendancy of moderate Muslims and the taming of radicals. This is true not only of Iraq but also of other war-torn countries in the region, like Lebanon and the Palestinian Territories.

In addition, a wiser, less bullying foreign and military policy on the part of the United States is in order. The invasion of Iraq, the U.S. backing for Israel's war on Hezbollah and the U.S. failure to be an honest broker in the Middle East peace process have accelerated the flow of Christian emigration from the region. In Iraq, where domination by force had failed atrociously, the surge has had modest success because it combines a restrained show of force with on-the-ground diplomacy and civil-political initiatives.

The lessons of General Petraeus's counterinsurgency strategy need to be applied more broadly to U.S. policy in the region and to the U.S. alliance with Israel. The American public also needs to discourage politicians who posture about security. In moments of crisis, preserving an image of toughness inevitably increases pressure to do the wrong thing. Such falconlike thinking led to the Iraq war, the Israel-Hezbollah war and, predictably, to the crisis Christianity now faces across the region. What is needed instead is a sober realism that understands the place of justice and the perception of justice, as well as of the use of limited force, in securing a peaceful and stable world.

IN THE MEANTIME, THE UNITED STATES owes a debt of honor to grant admission to Iraqi refugees who are unable to return to their country, Christians chief among them. Given the pool of two million refugees, the projected admission numbers (7,000 for 2007) have been paltry; and the low number of actual admissions (1,608) is a disgrace. In the wake of the Vietnam War, the United States was able to absorb 760,000 Vietnamese refugees. Where strategic interests are involved, as with concern for Soviet Jews during the cold war, admission is a high priority. Today the United States bears significant responsibility for the displacement of the Christian population from the Middle East. It can make amends for its offense by setting much higher admissions quotas for Iraqis to enter this country, by supporting countries like Jordan, which bear the burden of hospitality for the émigrés, and by working with other countries for their resettlement.

Pope and Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew Pray Together

Pope Benedict XVI and Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople spent almost half an hour speaking privately March 6 before going into a small Vatican chapel to pray together. Although it was the patriarch's first visit to the Vatican since Pope Benedict's election, the visit was not a formal, orchestrated affair. The pope and the patriarch did not exchange speeches, but instead sat across a table from each other. And instead of participating in a liturgy, they walked into the tiny Chapel of Urban VIII near the papal library, stood in front of a painting of the Nativity and prayed silently. After a few moments, the two began reciting the Lord's Prayer in Latin. When the prayer was finished, the pope turned to his guest—as if to see if he was ready to leave—and the patriarch began reciting the Hail Mary in Latin. The pope joined in. When the prayer was finished, the two turned to their aides and together blessed them. It has also been reported that Benedict XVI has invited ecumenical patriarch Bartholomew to take part in the upcoming synod of bishops, scheduled for October, and to give an address to the assembly, together with the pope himself.

Pope Benedict XVI and Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople look at a picture during a private meeting at the Vatican March 6.

The news of the invitation, not yet released by Vatican sources, comes during Bartholomew's visit to Rome for the 90th anniversary of the Jesuit Pontifical Oriental Institute. The invitation to attend the synod was extended during lunch. In itself, the presence of representatives of other Christian Churches and confessions is a normal practice for synod assemblies, ever since Vatican Council II invited the "fraternal delegations." What makes this event significant is the personal invitation extended to Bartholomew, the solemnity reserved for this and the atmosphere in which it took place. This academic year His All Holiness Patriarch Bartholomew is the holder of The Sir Daniel and Countess Bernardine Murphy Donohue Chair at the Orientale in Rome, which allows for his interaction with the pope and other Vatican officials as well as his contribution to the academic and ecumenical life and vitality of the Pontifical Oriental Institute, where Bartholomew himself studied.

Pope Expresses Alarm at Holy Land Violence

Pope Benedict XVI expressed alarm at a new wave of violence in the Holy Land and urged Israelis and Palestinians to set aside the logic of revenge. "In recent days, violence and horror have once again bloodied the Holy Land, feeding a spiral of destruction and death that seems to have no end," the pope said at his noon blessing March 9. On March 6 a Palestinian gunman killed eight Jewish seminarians and wounded 11 others. The attack came after an Israeli military assault on Gaza left more than 100 Palestinians dead. The pope prayed for the innocent victims of the attacks and expressed his condolences to the families of the dead and wounded. He asked everyone to pray for peace in the region. "I ask everyone, in the name of God, to leave the twisted paths of hatred and revenge and to responsibly take up the paths of dialogue and trust," he said. The attack on the seminary was a "monstrous" atrocity, said a former director of Jerusalem's Franciscan seminary. Father Artemio Vitores, O.F.M., vicar of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, said he has lived through five wars and two Palestinian uprisings in the Holy Land; but the attack on the seminary, or yeshiva, affected him on a more personal level. "Seminaries have another atmosphere, whether they are Jewish or Christian students. They are young students dedicated to their religious studies. We have to avoid hate. That is not taking us anywhere."

Fewer Abuse Allegations, But Rising Costs

The costs to the Catholic Church for legal settlements in abuse cases, therapy for victims of sexual abuse, support for offenders and legal fees soared to more than $600 million in 2007, the fourth year of reporting on the handling of abuse cases by U.S. dioceses and religious orders. The 2007 *Survey of Allegations and Costs* released by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops March 7 also reported a continued decrease in the number of new credible allegations of abuse: 599 new allegations were made in 2007, compared with 635 in 2006, 695 in 2005 and 898 in 2004, the first year of the survey. According to the survey, conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University, dioceses and religious institutes paid $615 million for legal settlements, therapy, support for offenders, attorneys' fees and other costs. In the four previous years of the survey, the highest amount paid out was $466 million in 2005. Of the $615 million, dioceses spent $499 million and religious orders paid $116 million. Teresa Kettelkamp, executive director of the U.S. bishops' Office of Child and Youth Protection, said the costs may remain high in coming years.

Students Killed in Pakistan Bombing

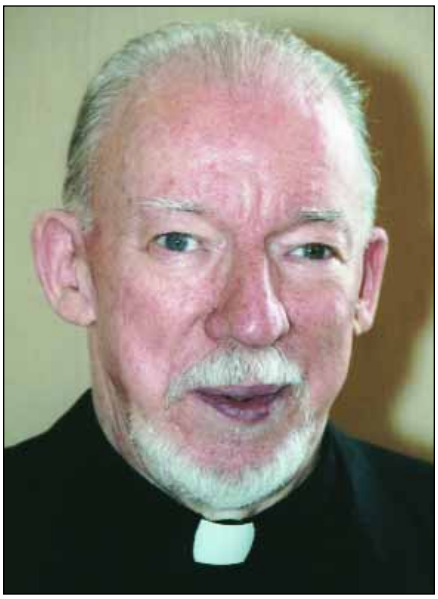
Rescuers gather at the site of a bomb attack in Lahore, Pakistan, after two suicide bombings March 11.

A massive suicide bomb targeting a government building killed 23 people and badly damaged Catholic buildings in Lahore, Pakistan. The bomb exploded at 9:30 a.m. March 11 outside the Federal Investigation Agency office, causing serious damage to nearby Sacred Heart Cathedral, Sacred Heart Cathedral High School, St. Anthony's College, St. Paul Communication Center, the Caritas Pakistan building, a Catholic press building, a convent and a catechists' house, according to the Asian church news agency UCA News. Initial reports said the blast killed two students at the church schools—one at Sacred Heart and one at St. Anthony's—and injured more than 100. Four members of the Caritas Pakistan staff were hospitalized for their injuries. Caritas Internationalis is the Vatican-based umbrella group for national Catholic charities around the world.

Jesuits Conclude General Congregation

The Jesuit General Congregation concluded two months of work by approving five decrees, including one on obedience and a separate document reaffirming the Jesuits' allegiance to the pope and fidelity to church teaching. The 225 Jesuits elected to represent their almost 20,000 confreres around the world marked the end of their meeting on March 6 with a Mass of thanksgiving in Rome's Church of the Gesu, site of the tomb of St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus. Meeting reporters March 7, Father Adolfo Nicolás, who was elected superior general of the Jesuits in January, called the meeting an experience of "the union of hearts, the union of the Society" and of its "union with its head, who is the Holy Father." The congregation approved formal decrees focused on the Jesuit mission in the modern world; Jesuit identity; collaboration with those outside the Jesuits; internal governance; and obedience to one's superior as well as to the pope.

Jesuit Editor Walter Abbott Dies



Walter Abbott, S.J., known for his work with the Second Vatican Council, ecumenical and interfaith relations, and biblical scholarship, died March 5 at the Jesuit infirmary in Weston, near Boston. He was 84. A funeral Mass was celebrated March 11 at the Campion Center, the Jesuit renewal center and retirement home in Weston. A member of the Jesuits' New England Province, he spent many years of priestly ministry at the Vatican, to which he was called from his position as associate editor of **America** by Cardinal Augustin Bea, S.J. Among his accomplishments was editing a book of English-language translations of the Vatican II documents that included scholarly commentary. The 1966 paperback book, *The Documents of Vatican II*, with its familiar red cover showing the image of a coin bearing the likenesses of Popes John XXIII and Paul VI, remains a well-thumbed staple in many libraries. Father Abbott also served for 10 years as the executive secretary of the Vatican Office for Common Bible Work. In retirement he served as a much sought-after spiritual director, especially for younger Jesuits.

From CNS and other sources. CNS photos.

A Plea for Civility

'Cheapening political discourse'

WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY Jr.'s death prompted a wave of tributes, even from some of his ideological foes, for the tenor of the debates he orchestrated on his longtime television program, "Firing Line." Over the years, Buckley played host to hundreds of political figures, writers, thinkers, economists and other public figures who presented arguments for liberal or centrist causes. Few emerged from the encounter without a bruise. But most would agree that they were treated with respect and civility.

The contrast with the tone of today's political debate is clear. Buckley's "Firing Line" could become passionate indeed, but fans of the show would be hard-pressed to recall a time when either the host or a guest was reduced to shouting or hurling personal invective in the place of reasoned argument. Today's political talk shows, however, have replaced argument with anger (real or feigned), paragraphs with sound bites and reasonable disagreement with personal attacks.

Of course, the cheapening of political discourse is not simply the work of ratings-obsessed producers and show-off hosts. Politicians, too, have either followed or led the vulgarization of civic discourse. Just a few days after Buckley's death, an aide to Senator Barack Obama resigned after a British newspaper quoted her calling Senator Hillary Clinton a "monster." The aide's comment was just another low point in the 2008 campaign. Several months ago, two aides to former Senator John Edwards quit his presidential campaign after they posted hate-filled remarks about Catholics and Catholicism on a Web site.

There is an argument to be made that none of this is new. "Monster" would have been one of the nicer things uttered in the presidential campaign of 1800, when partisans of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams engaged in what may still rank as the nastiest race in American political history. And Alfred E. Smith probably suffered the most disgraceful attacks ever heaped upon a single candidate during the 1928 campaign, when he became the first Catholic to win a major-party presidential nomination.

This year promises a repeat of 1928 in the sense that the fall campaign will feature either the first woman or the first African-American as a major-party nominee for president, just as 1928 featured the first Catholic. The country, we would like to think, has come a long way from 1928, when crosses were burned during Smith's campaign stops in Oklahoma. But we will soon see if we have come far enough to shield Clinton or Obama from the kind of attacks Smith endured.

Weeks before the Democratic campaign developed into a thrilling historical milestone, a group of civic-minded Catholics signed and released a bipartisan appeal for civility in the 2008 presidential campaign. Thomas Patrick Melady, a former U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican and a lifelong Republican, and Timothy J. May, a senior partner at Patton Boggs and a lifelong Democrat, wrote the letter after hearing Cardinal Theodore McCarrick deliver a plea for civility during a Mass last year in the nation's capital.

"We wanted the letter to be bipartisan, and we wanted it to come from the laity," said Ambassador Melady. "We thought it was important to point out that people can be very clear about their differences and yet be civil to each other. John Paul II was always civil, but he also had very clear views. You can be clear and civil—that's the message we wanted to get out."

Nearly 80 prominent lay Catholics—including Alfred E. Smith IV—signed the letter May and Melady drew up. The letter is specific to Catholic issues, outlining principles that the signatories believe will set an example of civility for the rest of the country. The letter asserts, for example, that Catholics should "not enlist the church's moral endorsement for our political preferences." Pointedly, the letter insists that Catholics "should not exhort the church to condemn our political opponents by publicly denying them holy Communion based on public dissent from church teachings." Four years ago, Democratic nominee John Kerry faced the threat of such a censure because of his views on abortion, as have other Catholic politicians.

The letter sensibly noted that U.S. bishops should not permit the church "to be used, or appear to be used, as a partisan, political tool." This is a special source of contention among many laypeople who deplore ham-handed attempts to preach partisan politics from the pulpit. Just as sensibly, the letter notes that Catholics ought to "keep in mind the common humanity we share with those with whom we disagree." If Catholics in high places in the media followed this rather simple precept, debate in Washington might take on an entirely different tone.

The Melady-May letter, it must be noted, has not received unanimous approval from politically active Catholics. Another group, Catholic Laymen in the Public Square, issued a strongly worded but civil dissent, asserting that the Melady-May letter could serve, perhaps unwittingly, as a means to "silence the pro-life and pro-family movements." About 100 lay Catholics, including the former Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork, signed the document.

The concerns of the Catholic Laymen group are understandable: One person's call for civility can be another person's excuse to silence an irritating prophet. They raise an important point when they note that few people would be worried about civility when confronted by a politician who supported segregation or aggressive war.

Still, as Bill Buckley proved, it surely is possible to argue forcefully for your beliefs and still respect the humanity and integrity of an opponent. It would be a shame, indeed, if that sensibility died with him.

Terry Golway

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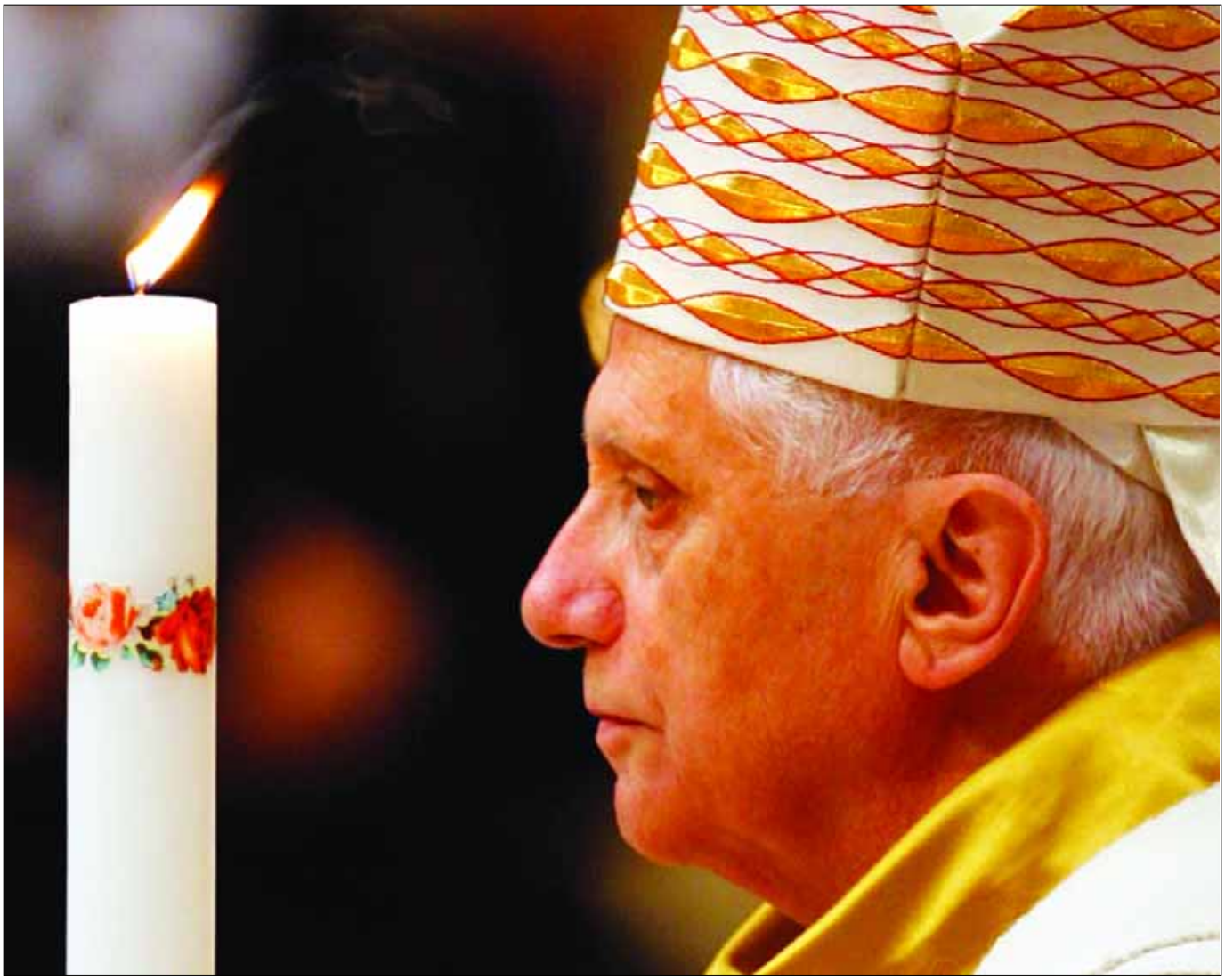

PHOTO: REUTERS/GIAMPIERO SPOSITO

Pope Benedict and Peter's proclamation

Easter Herald

– BY GERALD O'COLLINS –

ON EASTER SUNDAY millions of people will see on television or hear on the radio Pope Benedict XVI's broadcast and blessing. In many languages he will announce to the city of Rome and to the world the glorious news that lies at the heart of Christianity: "Jesus is risen from the dead. Alleluia."

GERALD O'COLLINS, S.J., is research professor at St. Mary's University College, Twickenham, England. He has published nearly 50 books, including *Jesus Our Redeemer.*

We should recognize, of course, the great differences between our cultural and historical setting and that in which, nearly 2,000 years ago, Peter, the first of the apostles, carried out his ministry. Yet in what the pope will do this Easter Sunday there are profound echoes of what happened at the first Pentecost, when Peter announced in Jerusalem the resurrection of Jesus to "Parthians, Medes, Elamites; inhabitants of Mesopotomia, Judaea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene; visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes; Cretans and Arabs" (Acts 2:9-11).

What more could we expect from the bishop of Rome than that, like Peter, he strengthen the whole church's faith in Christ's resurrection?

On this Easter Sunday the television cameras will catch the faces of those who have come to Rome from all over the world to stand in St. Peter's Square and hear from Peter's successor the good news that has changed the world: "God has raised up Jesus and of that all of us are witnesses" (Acts 2:32). St. Peter's witness to the resurrection lives on in a striking way in the Easter proclamation of Pope Benedict XVI.

To be sure, the church was founded on all the apostles. Together they formed the primary witnesses to Jesus Christ. They proclaimed the resurrection of the crucified Savior, admitted members of all nations into the new community and guided the early church with apostolic authority. But within this college of original witnesses, Peter had a special role as witness and foundation. To Peter alone were addressed the words "On this rock I will build my church" (Mt 16:18).

Peter would suffer martyrdom in Rome in fidelity to his crucified and risen master. The church of Rome in time came to be recognized as the seat of distinctive authority and responsibility among all the Christian churches. The bishop of Rome was acknowledged to be called in a special way to do two things: to proclaim the saving truth revealed by Christ, and to maintain the communion of all the local churches in their common faith.

The distinctive role of leadership assigned to Peter did not isolate him from the other apostles. Paul, James, John, Barnabas and the rest also witnessed authoritatively to the good news and maintained unity among the churches. In the centuries that followed, the special responsibility of the bishop of Rome to uphold the truth about Christ and lovingly preserve Christian unity has always been exercised in collaboration with the college of bishops.

Other Witnesses

We should also remember the contributions of all the "founding fathers" and "founding mothers" at the origins of Christianity. Mary Magdalene and her companions were key witnesses to the resurrection. The appearance of the risen Christ to Mary Magdalene (Jn 20:11-18) led early Christian writers to call her "the Apostle to the Apostles" and "another Eve who announced not death but life to the men."

All four Gospels report how on that first Easter Sunday faithful women followers of Jesus discovered the tomb of Jesus to be open and empty. In three of the Gospels, one angel (Matthew and Mark) or two (Luke) explain to them why the body of Jesus is missing: "He has been raised" (Matthew and Mark); "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" (Luke). We must never lose sight of the defining role played by all those individuals recalled by name in the Gospels. They were witnesses to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (Mary Magdalene, Susanna, Joanna and other women) or at least to part of that story (Bartimaeus, Zacchaeus, Simon of Cyrene and other men).

Similarly, today all the baptized bear the responsibility of sharing with others the good news about their crucified and risen Lord and keeping Christians united in their common faith. Luke's Gospel expresses this mission given to all the faithful by recounting not only the sending of the Twelve (Lk 9:1-6) but also the sending of a much larger group of 70 disciples (Lk 10:1-12). A wider mission for all disciples surrounds a core mission of Christian leaders.

Peter's Position and Ministry

As for Peter and his role at the birth of Christianity, the Acts of the Apostles portrays his distinctive ministry as the official witness to Christ's resurrection from the dead. Beyond question, he had other responsibilities. He played a decisive role in admitting Gentiles into the Christian community (Acts 10:1-11:18). Later Paul, Barnabas and James joined him at the Council of Jerusalem to decide authoritatively against imposing on Gentile converts the obligation to observe the whole of the Jewish law (Acts 15:1-29). Peter and John laid hands on believers to bring them the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-17). Peter worked miracles by healing the sick (Acts 3:1-11; 5:15-16) and even bringing a

dead woman back to life (Acts 9:32-43). The first half of Acts presents various dimensions of the leadership role that Peter exercised in the life of the early church. Central was his pre-eminence among all the official witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus.

Of course, the position and ministry of Simon Peter in the emerging church did not rest only on the risen Lord's appearance to him. As normally happens in God's dealings with human beings, other factors were involved. We should not isolate the encounter with the risen Jesus from earlier aspects of Peter's history and vocation. Even before Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter was already being prepared for his mission.

Peter is always mentioned first among the Twelve (e.g., Mk 3:16) and among the smaller circle of three (Peter, James and John). Jesus takes those three with him on such special occasions as the transfiguration and the agony in the garden. The Gospels also tell us that Jesus gave Simon the new name Cephas or Peter ("rock"). Matthew associates this naming with an episode at Caesarea Philippi, where Peter spoke for the others in confessing Jesus to be the long-awaited Messiah, or deliverer of his people. Jesus reacted by promising to make Simon Peter the foundation on which the new community of God would be built (Mt 16:13-19). The promise Jesus made in Caesarea Philippi was matched by the risen Christ's commission to Peter: "Feed my lambs and sheep" (Jn 21:15-17). That charge to shepherd the Lord's flock fulfilled the promise of an authoritative leadership role made during his ministry.

Undoubtedly, there is much relevant data to recall about Peter, his training and his ministry. But the heart of the matter is the tradition about his having seen the Lord after the resurrection and his major role in announcing to the world the good news of Easter.

Among the various roles exercised by the bishop of Rome, the most fundamental is to proclaim the Lord's resurrection. This proclamation shapes and flows into the pope's whole commission to teach the church and the world. This mission involves applying the Easter message to issues of current life. Seen in these terms, the pope's central vocation is to preach the risen Lord and to explain the implications of the resurrection not only for the church but for all human beings. That vocation is beautifully expressed, year by year, in the Easter broadcast from St. Peter's Square.

The Faith of Christians

In recent years ecumenical contacts between Catholics and other Christians have underscored the realization that authentic unity can be realized only in confessing the truth of faith. How best can we express that unity and truth? The essential truth of Christian faith could be formulated by saying, "The crucified Son of God is risen from the dead to give us his Holy Spirit." The paschal mystery says it all. It is the basic truth to be maintained and passed on by all Christians. They have been baptized into Christ's death and resurrection (Rom 6:3-4) to live together through the

power of the Holy Spirit as the new Easter people of God.

What more could we expect from the bishop of Rome than that, like Peter, he strengthen the whole church's faith in Christ's resurrection? How could he better serve the unity of an Easter people than by proclaiming insistently the event that brought the church into being: the resurrection of the crucified Jesus? The pope must also lead the church with the loving authority of a chief pastor and be a model for all worshipers in celebrating the sacraments. But his great task for all the world is to announce that Christ is risen. Nothing can or should ever count against the power and joyfulness of that unique message.

One picture of St. Peter has fixed itself forever in my mind: a huge 17th-century painting of Peter's martyrdom. The painting had been taken down from a church and brought for restoration to the studio of an Italian friend of mine. It shows two soldiers using ropes to pull Peter upside down onto a cross. The saint looks stiff and old, but his face is calm and peaceful. Two cheerful little angels watch the scene as Peter faces death and prepares to meet his master in glory.

Classical painters aimed to express the final character and significance of those they portrayed. They wanted to lead us to the reality and identity of the persons they had chosen to represent. That old painting of Peter in my friend's studio in Rome catches the apostle's courage in the face of death. Originally *martyr* (a Greek word) meant "witness." Peter the great witness became Peter the martyr. He could face martyrdom with such serenity because he had faithfully witnessed to his master's victory over death. He knew that Jesus had died but was now alive forever. In that resurrection Peter found his destiny and final identity.

When he was elected pope, Benedict XVI found his own final destiny and identity. A serene figure in white, he faithfully preaches the Easter faith that holds us all together. When I see him proclaiming the resurrection, he reminds me of another figure also dressed in a white robe: the angelic messenger sitting in the empty tomb of Jesus and announcing to Mary Magdalene and her companions: "He has been raised" (Mk 16:5-6).

In a few weeks Pope Benedict XVI will arrive in the United States. May he continue to fulfill fruitfully his vocation as Peter's successor by announcing to the whole world the unique good news that is Christ's resurrection from the dead. We could desire nothing greater for Benedict XVI than that he continue to show himself to be an Easter pope for an Easter people. A

Video meditations for Holy Week and Easter, at americamagazine.org.

To Sacrifice an Only Son

A reflection on three Abrahams

BY PATRICK J. RYAN

I KNOW SEVERAL ABRAHAMS. Let me mention three, two living and one dead. Ibrahim A. works on the maintenance staff of Loyola Jesuit College on the outskirts of Abuja in Nigeria. A Jukun from Taraba state in northeastern Nigeria, Ibrahim is a Catholic, although many of his closest relatives belong to Pentecostal churches and some are Muslims. He was not himself a convert to Christianity from Islam; the grandfather after whom he was named was the first Christian in the family.

I have another friend who is also, in a sense, named Abraham, or even Ibrahim. He is Khalil K., a Lebanese Catholic and professor who works on international linkages for the Jesuits' Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut. In the Arabic tradition—not just the Islamic tradition in Arabic—Abraham or Ibrahim means quintessentially "the friend of God": *Khalil Allah* in Arabic. The town known in the Hebrew Scriptures as Hebron, the burial place of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 23), is called in Arabic *Khalil*. To be named Khalil, then, is to be named after Abraham, "the friend of God," as he is called (Is 41:8).

There are many Abrahams in this world who use the English form of the Hebrew name *Avraham* as their first name. For Americans, the most famous Abraham is, of course, Abraham Lincoln, perhaps the only American president about whom the judgment of history has remained consistently kind, outside the deep South.

Put to the Test

None of my three Abrahams—Ibrahim, Khalil and Honest Abe—are exact replicas of Abraham, the "friend of God," but each of them has something in common with Abraham as portrayed in the Hebrew Scriptures, the New Testament and the Koran. The one story that all three Scriptures narrate or refer to is the story of how Avraham/Abraham/Ibrahim was willing, at God's command, to sacrifice his only son (Genesis 22). Strangely enough, not one of the scriptural traditions tells us what the long-suffering Sarah thought of the patriarch's obedience, but commentary may make up for that reticence. It is a mind-boggling story. As Søren Kierkegaard reminded us in the 19th century:

> God put Abraham to the test. He called to him, "Abraham!" "Ready!" he replied. Then God said: "Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you."

We know how the story ends: God provides a ram as a substitute for Abraham's only son, delivering "the friend of God" from this horror. The New Testament has no need to retell this story of Abraham's sacrifice, because the New Testament authors regarded the Hebrew Scriptures as the word of the Lord, on which they meditated while attempting to come to terms with their experience of Jesus of Nazareth. The references in the New Testament to the story in Genesis 22, succinct as they are, are redolent of the central themes of the Christian proclamation.

In the Epistle to the Romans, Paul refers once, somewhat obliquely, to the Genesis account of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only son in the context of Paul's meditation on the meaning of Christ's death: "He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?" (Rom 8:32). In the letter of James we read that "Abraham our father was justified by works when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar" (Jas 2:21). The Epistle to the Hebrews cites Abraham among the models of faith: "By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer his only son, of whom it is said, 'Through Isaac descendants shall bear your name.' He reasoned that God was able to raise even from the dead, and he received Isaac back as a symbol" (Heb 11:17-19).

Note that both the Book of Genesis and the New Testament take for granted that the only son offered up by Abraham was Isaac. The Islamic tradition is not so sure of that, although the text of the Koran is not specific. Muslim Koranic commentary normally insists that the son who was to be sacrificed was Isma'il—Ishmael in the biblical tradition. In a sense the Book of Genesis also portrays Ishmael as the victim of sacrifice, a terrible sacrifice, when he is driven with his mother, Hagar, into the desert (Gn 21: 9-21), but that is not the same as the sacrifice in the land of Moriah.

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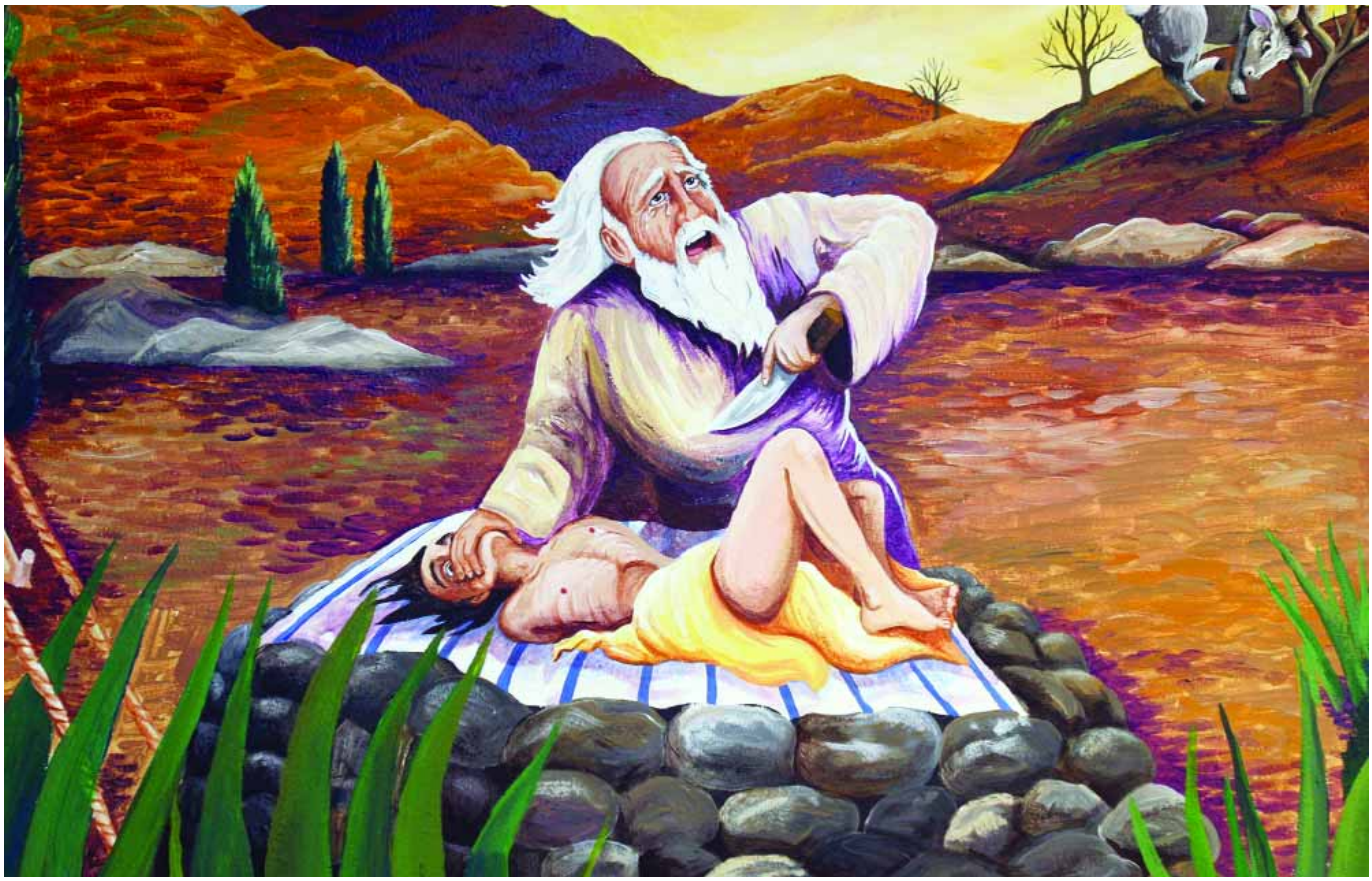

ART BY MARIANNE SAVAGE. PHOTO: CNS/GREGORY SHEMITZ, LONG ISLAND CATHOLIC

The Islamic Tradition

Non-Muslims will be less familiar with the Koranic narrative of the sacrifice of Abraham's only son. I quote it here, with the caution that the Koran uses the royal "We" when God refers to himself. The Koran is very allusive and words have to be inserted parenthetically to make clear in translation to which person reference is made.

> Then We gave [Ibrahim] the good tidings of a prudent boy; And when [that boy] had reached the age of running with him, [Ibrahim] said, "My son, I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice you. Consider now: what do you think?" [The boy] said: "O my father, do what you have been commanded to do. You will find me, God willing, among the steadfast." Then, when they both had submitted [to God], and [Ibrahim] had thrown [the boy] face down, We called on him: "O Ibrahim, you have proven faithful to the vision! It is just like this that We reward those who do good. Indeed, that was a genuine trial." Then We ransomed [the boy] with a great victim (Koran 37:100-7).

Once a year, at the conclusion of the great Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, the *hajj*, Muslims commemorate that substitution of "a great victim" for Ibrahim's only son on the Feast of the Oblation (*Id al-adha*). Much could be said about the reasons why the Islamic tradition usually identifies Isma'il as the only son who was to be sacrificed. Suffice it to say that the only time Avraham/Abraham/Ibrahim had an only son was before the birth of Isaac. Furthermore, the Book of Genesis seems to identify the descendants of Ishmael with the Bedouins of the Sinai peninsula: "Ishmael's sons inhabited the land from Havilah to Shur, which is east of Egypt on the way to Asshur" (Gn 25:18). Muhammad and his monotheistic friends in Mecca, even before Muhammad's experiences of revelation, seem to have regarded Ibrahim and Isma'il as their ancestors, the original builders of the Kaaba in Mecca as a center for worshiping one God alone.

How God Intervened

What significance is there in the fact that all three Abrahamic traditions of faith make much of this paternal willingness to sacrifice an only son, even if the only son in the Jewish tradition is Isaac, the only son in the Christian tradition is (ultimately) Jesus, and the only son in the Islamic tradition is usually identified as Isma'il?

Arnold Toynbee criticized all the Abrahamic faith traditions for a certain bloody-mindedness, a fierceness surrounding stories of sacrifice very different from the traditions of Mahayana Buddhism that exalt instead a *bodhisattva*,

whose self-sacrifice consists in willingness to put off enlightenment and stay in this world in order to draw others in that direction. Is there not a point to Toynbee's critique?

Perhaps. But let me sketch very briefly something that I think the three faith traditions have in common when we narrate these stories of the sacrifice of an only son. All three traditions assure us that God intervened, although the way each tradition assures us of that divine intervention is different. In the Israelite tradition, God rescued Isaac and continued Abraham's promised progeny through him. In the Christian tradition, God does not rescue Jesus from death on the cross, but the New Testament does assure us that in the aftermath of Jesus' death God "raised him to the heights and bestowed on him the name above all names" (Phil 2:9). The Islamic tradition tells us that the ransomed only son of Ibrahim, Isma'il, built the Kaaba with Ibrahim and began there the tradition of monotheistic worship among the Arabs, long before the era of Muhammad: "We made covenant with Ibrahim and Isma'il: 'Purify My House for those who will process around it and those who will meditate in it and those who will bow and prostrate [there]'" (Koran 2:125).

All three traditions recognize that life in this world always involves death and loss. Each one of us has known that. But all three of these traditions live in hope that death and loss are not the end of the human venture. In the long run—sometimes, alas, the very long run—there is God who rescues us from death, who redeems our loss. All three traditions bear witness to that hope.

Back to My Abrahams

Ibrahim A. has faced many tragedies in his family, including the death a few years ago of his only sister. His sister and her unemployed husband had four sons; and when the widower remarried a few years ago, his new wife did not want those four sons in her household. Ibrahim has taken them in and feeds and educates them along with his own four children. I think of Ibrahim A. as a living saint.

Dr. Khalil K. lives, as do all Lebanese, with the struggles of the contemporary Middle East as they affect Lebanon. This "friend of God" is a friend as well to the students at Université Saint-Joseph (Shiite and Maronite, Sunni and Orthodox), who lost their support for university tuition when their homes were bombed in the Israeli incursion into southern Lebanon in summer 2006. Together with the rector of the university, Dr. Khalil K. has raised money to help them continue their education.

Of Abraham Lincoln, who can say enough? Lincoln was not much of a churchgoer. But he risked his life and finally lost his life to save the Union and to bring freedom to slaves. "As I would not be a slave," he wrote, "so I would not be a master." There have been few people in the history of the world, or in the history of our country, who better deserved the name "father of faith" than did Lincoln. He delivered this country from its foundational sin: he led us out of the twin horrors of being slaves or owning slaves.

These three Abrahams continue to embody the faith of the patriarch Abraham, the faith that moves mountains, the faith that is reckoned to them by God as righteousness. A

Michael E. Lee discusses Archbishop Oscar Romero's prospects for sainthood, at americamagazine.org.

Poem

Old Age

Our old maple is half dead,
some branches long ago amputated,
deep rot in its lightning-cloven core.
We make idle guesses at its age
and imagine it crashing into our house
in some violent storm.
Next to the blue spruce and hickory
it's clearly a venerable fossil,
an ancient great-grandmother
to maples across the street.
Our dying arboreal pet.
So it's always a surprise—
that first green salvo
of its huge and senile branches
every spring,
its dense foliage dappling our summer yard,
the raging fall colors that, sun-gilt,
are the uncontested splendor of our street,
the distillation of accumulated autumns
now defying, once again,
dire expectations.

Patricia Schnapp

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A Renewed Challenge

Assessing Paul VI's 'Progress of Peoples'

BY PETER HENRIOT

BRAZIL EXPERIENCED an economic boom in the late 1960s. With its gross national product growing handsomely at a rate of 7 percent to 8 percent, Brazil was praised by many development economists as an example of diversified, investment-led prosperity. But while the industries of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo produced remarkable riches, the favelas, or crowded slums, in these same cities showed miseries disturbingly unimproved. The rewards of economic growth were not shared by the masses of Brazilians. The Brazilian military dictator of the day is alleged to have said, "Brazil has taken off...and left the Brazilians behind!"

The sad truth of his observation has come home to me recently because of two personal experiences. The first is the practical day-to-day fact of living in a developing African country, where economic growth rates are accelerating but social growth rates are not. Although the annual G.N.P. in Zambia in 2007 grew by 6 percent or 7 percent, the indicators of poverty show little or no improvement. What economists like to call "shared growth" is not a fact in this mineral-rich country—just as it was not in Brazil decades earlier.

The second reason for recalling the dictator's observation is that last year was the 40th anniversary of a great papal teaching on development, *The Progress of Peoples* (*Populorum Progressio*). In 1967 Pope Paul VI wrote the encyclical, which offers a challenging perspective on what true development would require on a globe increasingly divided into first, second and third worlds.

Why celebrate a 40-year-old document? Because of what it said, what it did and what it continues to do. The letter provided directions for its own time; it challenges our time; and it offers hopes for the future—three themes that at times cross over each other's neat, respective boundaries.

PHOTO: REUTERS/ARKO DATTA

An Indian laborer drinks water at an aluminum reprocessing unit in Dharavi, Mumbai. Laborers at such units earn around $87 a month.

Directions in the Past

The Progress of Peoples influenced the church and wider society as a fresh and radical approach to addressing the "joys and hopes, sorrows and anxieties of the women and men of our age, especially the poor and those in any way afflicted." Coming just two years after the close of the Second Vatican Council and its monumental constitution "The Church in the Modern World," the encyclical letter provided an agenda and a path for the church to follow as it strove to be faithful to the council's social message. The church would need structure to promote social justice, for example. The encyclical put one in place by endorsing the establishment of the Vatican's Justice and Peace Commission, now a pontifical council (No. 5). From it have emerged the thousands of national, diocesan and local justice and peace groups around the world that have become vital in promoting integral evangelization.

If the church was to be heard, it had to speak out clearly on the burning social issues of the day, even if in doing so it sounded radical. Two good examples of such clarity and radicality can be found: first, in Paul VI's discussion of the extreme

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capitalist economic ethic and what today we call neoliberalism; second, in his explanation of the social teaching on private property and ownership of land.

Regarding capitalism, the pope used very strong words in condemning a system that "considers profit as the key motive for economic progress, competition as the supreme law of economics, and private ownership of the means of production an absolute right that has no limits and carries no corresponding social obligation" (No. 26). He reminded his readers, "This unchecked liberalism leads to dictatorship rightly denounced by Pius XI as producing 'the international imperialism of money'" (No. 26). He questioned a "fundamental principle of liberalism, as the rule for commercial exchange," in challenging prices set in free trade markets that produce unfair results (No. 58).

One of the letter's most radical teachings—regarding private property (No. 23)—earned the document real trouble in some countries; the military dictatorship in Brazil purportedly banned it. Here Paul VI applied the message about the social responsibilities of landowners and the duty of the government to promote the common good in order to establish grounds for justifying the expropriation of landed estates that "are extensive, unused or poorly used, or because they bring hardships to peoples or are detrimental to the interests of the country" and the wider common good (No. 24).

I recalled this teaching as I reflected on the start of the process of land reform in Zimbabwe (a process which, admittedly, has gone somewhat astray in terms of overall social justice) and on the challenge of land reform in such countries as South Africa, Namibia and possibly Zambia. Inasmuch as the encyclical addresses requirements of domestic and international economic and social justice, capitalist economies and land reform, Paul VI's teaching was influential at the Medellín Conference, which met the following year to chart directions for the church's mission in Latin America, a mission that even today influences the worldwide church.

Challenges to the Present

Forty years after *The Progress of Peoples* was published, we still must pay attention to the challenges it poses. Foremost among these are our contemporary understanding of development and our quest for peace.

But before touching on both, let me acknowledge two other contemporary challenges, not dealt with in the letter. Environmental issues were not high on the Vatican agenda in the 1960s, nor on the agendas of many others. In the following decade the World Council of Churches would introduce the "integrity of creation" to run as a parallel theme with justice and peace. Also notably overlooked was the role of gender/the role of women, which is crucial for integral development. In the late 1960s, however, the Catholic Church was theologically and institutionally weak and reluctant to face gender issues. Despite some improvement, we still have a long way to go.

Nonetheless, the encyclical letter makes clear what true development requires, a perspective needed today as the process of globalization rushes ahead. Central to Pope Paul's perspective is his holistic understanding of development, defined as "for each and all the transition from less human conditions to those which are more human" (No. 20). His definition predated by more than 20 years the "human development index" of the United Nations Development Program. Today the index is the standard measure of what is happening to people, in contrast to what is happening to the economy. It addresses the kind of contradictory situations that existed in Brazil and Zambia.

The *Progress of Peoples* sums up the aspirations of women and men who live now in misery as "to seek to do more, know more and have more in order to be more" (No. 6). Development, then, encompasses much more than economic growth; Pope Paul writes, "In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every person and of the whole person" (No. 4).

It is important to highlight the pope's perspective, because we still hear acceptance, even praise, for development approaches that focus on economics but lack a social face. If the poor are mentioned at all, they are put at the bottom end of a trickle, following a model that builds up the prosperity of a few while the survival of the many depends on improvements slowly trickling down to them. That model was recently recommended for Zambia.

In our era, marked by terrorism, we can profit from the letter's wisdom on building lasting peace, captured in the subtitle to the concluding section:

"Development is the new name for peace." This section challenges those who ignore the causes of conflict and concentrate only on the responses to it. "Excessive economic, social and cultural inequalities among people arouse tensions and conflicts," writes Paul, "and are a danger to peace" (No. 76). The pope sees waging war on misery and struggling against injustice as central to preventing war and conflict.

A look at the conflicts ravaging countries across Africa confirms the correctness of this observation. Whether we note tragedies in the Horn of Africa or the chaotic battles of Congo, Sierra Leone or Chad, we can see how poverty and injustice breed war; then war causes greater poverty and injustice. "Peace cannot be limited to the mere absence of war, the result of an ever precarious balance of forces," writes Paul VI. "No, peace is something that is built up day after day, in the pursuit of an order intended by God, which implies a more perfect form of justice among humans" (No. 76).

What does all this mean as we face the threat of terrorism? A closer look at *The Progress of Peoples*, particularly those parts linking peace and development, would broaden the agenda of possible solutions.

Hope for the Future

What strikes me in rereading *The Progress of Peoples* is the optimistic tone with which Paul concludes his letter. It is a bit surprising. Paul has often been pictured as a rather melancholic figure. His letter details the suffering of the world's poor, for whom real development is only a mirage. Paul condemns the woeful "underdevelopment" of those in the rich countries who ignore such suffering, while chasing after more and more for themselves. He considers it avarice (the exclusive pursuit of possessions), a vice that is for nations and individual persons "the most evident form of moral underdevelopment" (No. 19). For this reason, the pope strongly asserts: "The world is sick" (No. 66); its sickness shows in a lack of sisterhood and brotherhood among individuals and peoples.

Given the analysis, it is encouraging that the letter ends on an optimistic note, expressing confidence that, for all its problems, the world is moving closer to the Creator and the Creator's good plans. The

letter states: "Humanity is advancing along the path of history like the waves of a rising tide encroaching gradually on the shore" (No. 17). Paul sees the international cooperation of groups like the United Nations as a response to the vocation "to bring not some people but all peoples to treat each other as sisters and brothers" (No. 78).

For those who see such a hope as purely utopian, Paul writes: "It may be that these persons are not realistic enough, and that they have not perceived the dynamism of a world which desires to live more fraternally—a world which, in spite of its ignorance, its mistakes and even its sins, its relapse into barbarism and its wanderings far from the road of salvation, is, even unaware, taking slow but sure steps towards its Creator" (No. 79).

This expression of optimism is found not only in *The Progress of Peoples* but in Paul's subsequent writings. He returns to the "dynamism" in a world moving toward greater justice in his 1971 *Call to Action* (*Octogesima Adveniens*), describing a "hope that springs also from the fact that the Christian knows that other women and men are at work, to undertake actions of justice and peace working for the same ends. For beneath an outward appearance of indifference, in the heart of every person there is the will to live in sisterhood and brotherhood and a thirst for justice and peace, which is to be expanded" (No. 48). Such optimism is but one of many reasons *The Progress of Peoples* deserves to be celebrated, imitated in other church writings and implemented in the mission of the church to promote integral, sustainable development.

These directions, challenges and hopes from a 40-year-old document mean much to me, serving in a country with enormous problems and immense potential. It is surely one of the greatest of the documents of the church's social teaching. There are rumors that a new social encyclical will soon be issued by Pope Benedict XVI, putting together such issues and themes as human rights, poverty, the environment and solidarity. I pray that Benedict's document will offer as much direction, challenge and hope as did Paul's *The Progress of Peoples.* A

From the archives, the editors on *Populorum Progressio*, at americamagazine.org.

No Evidence?

The Resurrection

History & Myth

By Geza Vermes

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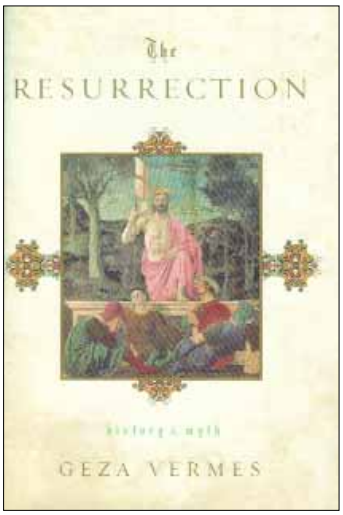
The Resurrection is a twin to Geza Vermes's *The Nativity* (reviewed in **America**, 11/5/2007) in size, scope, methodology and results. In this book Vermes, an expert in ancient Jewish texts and history, again takes on the role of the historical detective and seeks to discern the factual realities behind the New Testament passages pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus. Just as he found little solid historical evidence behind the infancy narratives, so he contends that the evidence for what the church's tradition has taught about the resurrection is thin, to say the least.

Vermes taught for many years at Oxford University and is especially well known for his English translation of the Dead Sea scrolls. A former Catholic priest who reverted to Judaism, he has taken a special interest in the figure of Jesus and in a series of books has tried steadfastly to interpret Jesus within the framework of first-century Palestinian Judaism. Throughout this multi-volume project, his goal has been to bring Jesus back to Judaism and so release him from the church's interpretative tradition.

The thesis of this book is that the idea of resurrection lay on the periphery of Jesus' own preaching, and was based on his central idea of the kingdom of God. Paul, however, turned resurrection into the centerpiece of his mystical and theological vision, which was soon to become identical with the essence of the Christan message. According to Vermes, not even a credulous nonbeliever is likely to be persuaded by the various New Testament reports pertaining to Jesus' resurrection. He maintains that none of them satisfies the minimum requirements of a legal or scientific inquiry.

Vermes notes that bodily resurrection was a Jewish idea. It entails the corporeal revival of the dead, the reunification of the spiritual soul and the material body of a deceased person. In the Judaism of Jesus' time the idea of resurrection was promoted especially by the Pharisees and was placed in the context of eschatology and the final judgment. The Christian church claims that Jesus' resurrection constitutes the "first fruits" in the hope of believers for their own resurrection.



In the first part of *The Resurrection*, the author surveys attitudes toward life after death in the Jewish world before Jesus. He traces the development of afterlife expectations from the shadowy existence of the dead in Sheol in pre-exilic times, through metaphorical uses of resurrection terminology by Ezekiel, to clear statements about resurrection and/or immortality in Daniel, 2 Maccabees and the Wisdom of Solomon. He gives particular attention to the role of martyrdom in Maccabean times in this development, on the grounds that God must reward after death such faithful and heroic behavior. On the whole, Vermes's treatment of the Jewish evidence is comprehensive and balanced. However, he tends toward minimalist interpretations, especially in treating the Dead Sea scrolls, where some of his own translations point in the direction of a lively hope for blissful existence after death, and some even suggest bodily resurrection. And he ignores three Jewish writings (Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*) that deal extensively with life after death and are contemporary with the New Testament writings. Minimalist also is his conclusion that the notion of bodily resurrection propagated by the Pharisees was alien to first-century Hellenistic Jews and was unfamiliar in most layers of Palestinian Jewry.

The second part is a critical assessment of the New Testament evidence pertaining to resurrection and eternal life. Vermes argues that resurrection did not play a major role in Jesus' own teaching (despite Mk 12:18-27), that the passion-resurrection predictions attributed to Jesus are filled with oddities, and that the resuscitation accounts in the Gospels and Acts are based largely on Old Testament stories about Elijah and Elisha and are highly symbolic.

Vermes maintains that the New Testament accounts about Jesus' empty tomb and the risen Jesus' appearances are so full of uncertainties and discrepancies that they cannot provide a firm historical foundation for belief in Jesus' bodily resurrection. Rather, he attributes the early Christians' belief in Jesus' resurrection to their convictions about Jesus' ongoing spiritual presence active within them. In other words, Jesus lives on "in the hearts of men." It was through Paul, Vermes insists, that resurrection became the kernel of the Christian message.

As in his other books on Jesus, Vermes is an engaging and challenging guide through the ancient Jewish and early Christian texts. From *Jesus the Jew* (1973) to this book, he has located Jesus within the boundaries of first-century Judaism and tried to show that Christians have made a tragic mistake in taking Jesus out of Judaism. His insistence on reading the New Testament as a historian means that he shows little interest in the literary and theological dimensions of the texts. Moreover, he is quite selective in choosing which texts to read and how to read them. His dismissal of the Book of Revelation, for example, ignores the fact that the book is from beginning to end about the risen

The Reviewers

Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., is professor of New Testament at Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, Mass.

Kristin Shrader-Frechette teaches both philosophy and biological sciences at the University of Notre Dame. The latest of her 16 books is *Taking Action, Saving Lives: Our Duties to Protect Environmental and Public Health* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2007).

Peter Heinegg is a professor of English at Union College, Schenectady, N.Y.

Christ and resurrection.

Vermes follows a longstanding tendency in Jewish interpretations of Jesus when he points the finger at Paul as the one who got the early Christian movement off track regarding Jesus and resurrection. He ignores, however, the pre-Pauline hymns preserved in Phil 2:6-11 (Christ the Servant) and Col 1:15-20 (Christ the Wisdom of God) that celebrate the resurrection of Jesus as the great turning point in the paschal mystery. These hymns and the pre-Pauline credal statements scattered throughout the Pauline letters (e.g., 1 Cor 15:3-5) indicate that in the 25 years between Jesus' death and the composition of Paul's letters the resurrection had already become the kernel of Christian faith. The description of this period as an "explosion" rather than a "development" is quite appropriate.

Jesus may well live "in the hearts of men." But the New Testament says much more than that. Indeed, belief in Jesus' resurrection is foundational to the New Testament from start to finish. For a fuller, sounder and more orthodox treatment of the material that Vermes covers, I recommend N. T. Wright's *The Resurrection of the Son of God.* **Daniel J. Harrington**

Earth Ethics

A Moral Climate

The Ethics of Global Warming

By Michael S. Northcott
Orbis Books. 224p $20 (paperback)
ISBN 9781570757112

Why did terrorists attack the United States? The Kentucky farmer and writer Wendell Berry believes they were responding to U.S. corporate economic institutions that harm the poor and accept deadly pollution and global climate change as mere costs of doing business.

Michael S. Northcott, a priest of the Scottish Episcopal Church and a divinity school professor at the University of Edinburgh, echoes many of Berry's prophetic warnings. He calls Christians to confess the climate change they are forcing on the poor and to assume political responsibility for it.

The first three chapters of *A Moral Climate* provide an overview of climate science, argue that climate change is immoral and show "the empire of oil" as one cause. Chapters 4 through 7 promote solutions: following the "gift economy" of Alaska's Inupiat people; developing a sense of progress that is not based on economic development; pursuing energy conservation; and reducing auto use. In Chapter 8 the author attacks agricultural sources of greenhouse gases and recommends abandoning industrially produced food. And in Chapter 9 he asks Christians to reform global capitalism through means such as the fair-trade movement.

Crafting his story so that it reveals the spiritual, economic and technocratic roots of climate change, Northcott shows how over-consumption, colonialism, greed, pollution and deregulated trade have created this crisis. A timely study, *A Moral Climate* includes findings from the 2007 assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Northcott especially deserves praise for asking Christians to exercise prophetic witness, "the paradigmatic form of resistance" to the abuses that cause climate change. He asks us to become contemporary Jeremiahs, to tell the rich and powerful that they have the blood of the poor on their clothes, the blood of climate-change victims. He also shows how fuel-intensive, corporate agriculture thwarts the eucharistic nature of food and contributes to climate change.

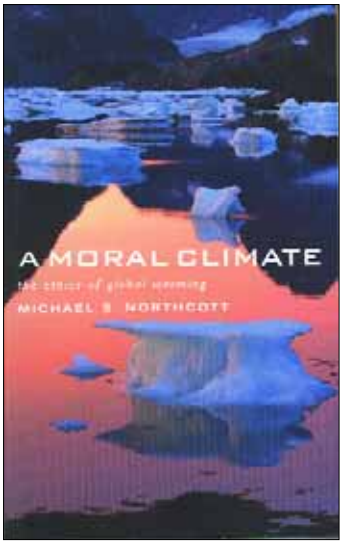
The book is rich in insights. Northcott shows, for instance, why a common claim—that the United States is responsible for 25 percent of greenhouse gases—is a gross underestimate. This claim counts only carbon-equivalent gases from power plants but fails to include effects of animal husbandry—which supplies the massive U.S. beef market and contributes up to 10 percent of global greenhouse gases. It also fails to include fossil fuels used because, as the author explains, the average American food item is chemical- and energy-intensive and travels 1,500 miles to grocery stores.

Despite such strengths, Northcott's book has weaknesses, including falling into what M.I.T. professor Kenneth Kenniston called "the fallacy of romantic regression." Praising the lifestyles of peoples like the Inupiat of Alaska, Northcott offers no full, realistic, contemporary lifestyles for addressing climate change. His romantic regression runs two risks: tying religion to primitive lifestyles, and discouraging Christians who cannot meet unrealistic ethical standards.

"*He* is *on a leash.*"

CARTOON BY PAT BYRNES

Northcott's romanticism also extends to his science. He sometimes embraces discredited views, like the Gaia hypothesis: that Earth is a living organism, able to correct harms and to return to a state of equilibrium. Also, he sometimes gets his facts wrong, in part because he relies on false generalizations. He rejects cost-benefit analysis, for example, on the grounds that it requires exchange values to "override any other goods." Cost-benefit analysis, however, requires no such overrides. This is a decision of its users.



Similar errors occur in Northcott's treatment of philosophy. He claims, for example, that the prominent deontological ethicist, John Rawls, is a utilitarian, and that Kant, Mill and Hume reject any deep moral structure in the biophysical ordering of life on earth.

Mark Twain once warned that for those whose only tool is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Since Northcott's only tool is theology, he seems to think everything, including science and philosophy, should look like theology. As a result he criticizes science for not including theology and criticizes philosophy for relying on reason instead of the Bible.

In trying to reduce philosophy (which relies only on reason) to theology (which relies on faith and revealed truths), Northcott forgets there are many methods of ethical inquiry besides theology. By accepting only theological methods of ethics, he also excludes nonbelievers from being ethical and leads to extremism. Without God-given reason—to act as a check on faith-based fanaticism, terrorism, fundamentalism, inconsistency or other aberrations—theology could be used to justify many horrors.

In criticizing scientists, Northcott claims that today's moral climate is flawed partly because of "[Isaac] Newton's failure to describe correctly the relational character of space and time in its original dependence on the being of God as Creator." Yet if scientists did theology within science, they would violate scientific method, produce less reliable empirical conclusions and encourage the politicization of science.

Unfortunately, Northcott's wide hammer attempts to smash philosophy and science, two disciplines that he needs to make his case for climate action. He cannot consistently reject science yet accept it to combat climate change. Likewise, he cannot reject all nontheological ethics, yet expect both believers and nonbelievers to accept his climate-change arguments.

Despite its many insights, Northcott's book is less readable and less organized than the best ethical analyses of climate change (by philosophers like Peter Singer and Stephen Gardner). He sometimes falls into arcane academic prose, and he provides an overview neither for the book nor for each chapter. Also addressing the science-ethics interface, Brown University's Kenneth R. Miller, a Catholic and a biologist, wrote a brilliant book about why believers should support evolution. Northcott's book is good, but it does not reach Miller's level of excellence.

Kristin Shrader-Frechette

A Dead Tongue's Many Lives

Ad Infinitum

A Biography of Latin

By Nicholas Ostler

Walker & Company. 400p $27.95

ISBN 9780802715159

Primum omnium (first of all) *monita quaedam* (a few words of warning): this book is not for the completely Latinless reader. (Though almost all the Latin tags and texts are translated, many sections will baffle or bore anyone without at least a few faded memories of *amo*, *amas*, *amat*.) While popularly packaged—with a subtitle echoing Jack Miles's fine survey of the Hebrew Bible, *God: A Biography* (1995)—*Ad Infinitum* goes into a lot more technical detail than might be expected, with topics like Etruscan borrowings in Latin or the usefulness of Latin kinship terms when speaking of "avunculocal, amitalocal, virilocal or uxorilocal residence after marriage." *Caveat tiro* (Beginner, beware).

Nicholas Ostler is a formidable-sounding character. He has degrees from Oxford in Greek, Latin, philosophy and economics, plus a Ph.D. in linguistics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and (his publisher says) a working knowledge of 26 languages. Appropriately enough, he is the chairman of the Foundation for Endangered Languages (www.ogmios.org), and he wrote the well-regarded *Empires of the Word: A Language History of the World* (2005). As if to confirm his *Romanitas*, he lives in the erstwhile Roman town of Aquae Sulis, now known as Bath, England.

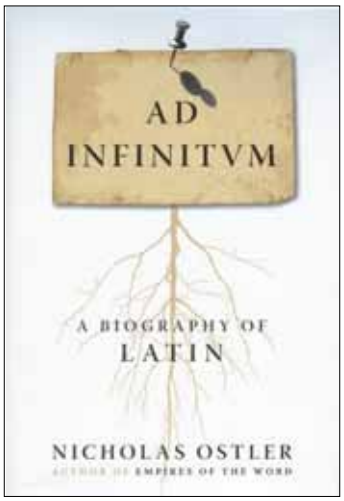
Ostler's 400-page history of Latin is a remarkable piece of compression. It severely downplays literature, citing only a handful of lines from Virgil, Horace, Ovid, et al., and barely attempts to convey a sense of what the language is, or was, like. For example, he does not address its celebrated laconic, lapidary, oracular qualities. Instead he stresses the geopolitical (cf. Max Weinreich's dictum, "A language is a dialect with an army and a navy"), the sociological (how Latin united diverse populations) and the ideological (Latin as the language of religion, philosophy, science, etc.) sides of the picture. Oh well, *non omnia possumus omnes*—we can't all do everything.

To shape this sprawling 2,500-year story, Ostler chooses the neatly ambiguous theme of boundless sway. *Videlicet*, here comes a list: the Romans loved to intone the phrase *orbis terrarum* (what Prospero would call "the great globe itself"); and the Roman Empire at its greatest extent (under Trajan, say), or the Catholic Church before the Reformation and the ravages of modernity, programmatically stressed a "universal" perspective. Yet this *ad infinitum* viewpoint, with the city of Rome at the center and the far-flung frontiers linked by Latin as "the great sacrament of the Latin language" (in the bold phrase coined by Lorenzo Valla, ca. 1440), was also generally indifferent to the worlds beyond its horizon.

But then, since turnabout is fair play, not long after the Renaissance had recovered the "timeless" treasures of Latin classical antiquity, a host of European explorers, scientists, artists and thinkers of every description, working in languages other than Latin and with little or no thought of Rome, began to uncover the true infinity of the world, in ways never imagined before. Eventually Latin would be relegated, as it is now, to a few ivory-towerish preserves: botany, biological terminology, classical studies and, of course, official Vatican documents.

If, as the second-century North African grammarian Terentianus Maurus said, *habent sua fata libelli* (books have their destiny), then a fortiori so do languages; and Ostler has done an impressive job tracing the complex destiny of Latin. He quotes lively samples of inscriptions, poems, periodic sentences, formulas, phrase-books, ostraca, theological arguments, and so on, ranging from the three mysterious lines (sixth- or early fifth-century B.C.) of a love potion (?) to the perhaps inevitable motto (chosen in 2000) of the European Union, *In varietate concordia*.

Ostler reviews the epochal encounters between Latin and Greek culture (with the resultant Roman inferiority complex), Christianity (which gave Latin a spectacular new lease on life), Muslim scholarship in Spain, the invention of printing, the New World (whence Latin America), and so on, up until the final stage of decline beginning in the 18th century. He explains the emergence of the Romance languages, although happily he soft-pedals morphology and related gritty subjects.



But if Latin has a biography, doesn't that imply a death—or some sort of end? Ostler tells us that the American Carmelite Reginald Foster, one of the planet's premier Latinists, claims there are only some 20 other people who can speak Latin as well as he (his courses at the Pontifical Gregorian University were legendary) and, worse yet, only two or three of them are under 60.

Well, Latin will never disappear (there are still three Latin mottoes on the dollar bill), but in a pleasant twist the current hot spot for Latin is a place where Romans never set foot, in a region they vaguely labeled *Ultima Thule*, Finland. Ever since 1990 Finnish government radio has been producing *Nuntii Latini*, both spoken and written news reports in Latin. (Scandinavians like Carolus Linnaeus, whose languages do not travel well, have always been partial to Latin.) Two books in the Harry Potter series, along with old favorites like Winnie the Pooh and the Asterix cartoon tales, are available in Latin translation. And, to vault from the ridiculous to the sublime, the so-called Tridentine Mass is making a comeback. Every little bit helps—including this richly informative book by Nicholas Ostler. *Insignem ei gratiam debemus*. (We owe him a notable debt of gratitude.)

Peter Heinegg

Classifieds

Bound Volumes

AMERICA PRESS INC. is compiling a set of bound volumes of **America** for a digital scanning project. We are currently in need of Vol. 1 and Vols. 13-71. **America** will provide a digital copy of the scanned material in return for the volumes. Contact Tim Reidy at reidy@americamagazine.org or (212) 515-0111.

Positions

COORDINATOR OF YOUTH MINISTRY to develop and direct shared high school/junior high programs for two active parishes in the Cleveland area. Applicant should be committed to the eight goals of comprehensive youth ministry, possess pastoral and organizational skills, a background in theology and catechesis, and previous youth ministry experience. $40,000 to $50,000 with benefits. Job description is available at www.divinewordkirtland.org. Résumé can be submitted by April 30, 2008, to: Rev. George Smiga, St. Noel Church, 35200 Chardon Road, Willoughby Hills, OH 44094.

REGIONAL MINISTER of Christian Formation for Small Parishes. The Catholic Diocese of Richmond seeks a Minister of Christian Formation for the Appalachian area of the diocese. The selected individual will support the local volunteer catechetical leaders in the 18 small parishes of Region 10 through consultation, resourcing and implementing the diocesan catechetical norms, and Pathways, the diocesan catechist certification process. The regional minister will also promote adult faith formation in the region and oversee the Region 10 resource library. The selected individual will have a master's degree in religious education, theology or pastoral ministry and have at least three years' experience as a catechetical leader, preferably with small and/or rural parishes. For a position description and additional information regarding this position, contact Dennis Beeman, (804) 359-5661, ext. 113; dbeeman@richmonddiocese.org.

SAINT CHARLES BORROMEO SEMINARY seeks a full-time CHURCH HISTORY PROFESSOR. Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary is a free-standing seminary with college, pre-theology and theology programs. We are currently seeking to hire a full-time church history instructor who has earned at least a licentiate from a pontifical university. For an application, interested parties should submit their C.V. to: Rev. David Diamond, Vice Rector, Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary, 100 East Wynnewood Road, Wynnewood, PA 19096; e-mail: vicerectorscs@adphila.org.

ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA, Catholic Student Center, Des Moines, Iowa, is seeking full-time DIRECTOR OF MUSIC AND LITURGY to serve on our campus ministry team. St. Catherine is a faith community of students and nonstudents, with a strong tradition dedicated to prayerful liturgical celebrations. Applicant should have education and experience in Catholic liturgical theology. We seek a candidate with a background in music, music ministry and choral direction with organizational skills, strong spirituality and willingness to work in a collaborative setting on campus ministry team. Requirements: Practicing Catholic, bachelor's degree in religious studies, liturgy or equivalent. Knowledge and experience with Catholic liturgy and music and good communication and organizational skills. Preferred: Master's degree in liturgy; practicing musician, either piano or guitar; experience in campus ministry. Send letter of interest, résumé and names and addresses of three references to: Search Committee, St. Catherine of Siena, 1150 28th St., Des Moines, IA 50311. Applications accepted until the position is filled.

ST. LEONHARD'S INTERNATIONAL ENGLISH-SPEAKING ROMAN CATHOLIC PARISH, Frankfurt, and St. Mary's Parish of English-Speaking Catholics, Liederbach am Taunus, Germany, in accordance with the Diocese of Limburg, seeks a PASTOR to lead our diverse communities starting in mid-2008. Combined membership across the metropolitan area is about 1,000 parishioners from several dozen nationalities; in addition, St. Leonhard's, located in Frankfurt's historic city center, provides a spiritual home to Catholic tourists and business

travelers. Both parishes boast teams of volunteers to assist at Mass as lay ministers or organize outside activities, such as retreats and social events. The preferred candidate will be experienced and blessed with an open attitude, as happy providing spiritual counsel to individuals and guidance to groups as he is celebrating Sunday and holy day Masses. Parish Web sites are www.stleonhards.org and www.st-marys.de. For further information, please contact Tom Lavell and Corby Sturges at email@stleonhards.org.

TEACHING OPPORTUNITY. St. Patrick's Seminary and University, in Menlo Park, Calif., a school of theology preparing the next generation of priestly leadership for the Catholic Church in the western states and the Pacific rim, has one full-time faculty position open beginning in the 2008-9 academic year. Applicants should be comfortable with Roman Catholic identity and tradition and eager to influence the future quality of priestly ministry. In addition to teaching, these positions include formational advising and, for ordained faculty, spiritual direction and liturgical/sacramental ministry. Professionals in the following area are invited to apply: systematic theology with an emphasis in sacraments and liturgy. This position includes responsibility for seminary liturgical planning and coordination as the Director of Liturgy. Applicants should hold the doctoral degree, with Roman degrees preferred. Salary and rank will be negotiated commensurate with education and experience. Please send résumé to: Rev. Gerald Brown, S.S., St. Patrick's Seminary and University, 320 Middlefield Rd., Menlo Park, CA 94025.

YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT MINISTER. Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Wilmington, N.C., seeks a faith-filled candidate to serve our parish. The parish is staffed by the religious order of the Oblates of St. Francis deSales. The candidate is directly responsible for continuing to create a prayerful and dynamic environment for youth grades 6-12 to enhance the overall parish mission. The position will also develop and coordinate a young adults ministry. Qualifications: Catholic in good standing, B.A. or M.A. with theological course work, youth minister certificate, experience in youth ministry and a working knowledge of Renewing the Vision: A Framework for Catholic Youth Ministry. Experience with whole community catechesis and/or lifelong learning desirable. Salary and benefits commensurate with education and experience. Interested and qualified candidates apply to: Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, c/o Y.M. Search Committee, 6650 Carolina Beach Road, Wilmington, NC 28412.

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BETHANY RETREAT HOUSE, East Chicago, Ind., offers private and individually directed silent retreats, including Ignatian 30 days, year-round in a prayerful home setting. Contact Joyce Diltz, P.H.J.C.: (219) 398-5047; bethanyrh@sbcglobal.net; www.bethanyretreathouse.org.

BETHANY SPIRITUALITY CENTER, N.Y., announces the following retreats: "Aging with Grace," with Barbara Metz, S.N.D., and John Burchill, O.P., April 20-25; "Justice Through the Window of God's Word," with Mark Hallinan, S.J., June 5-8; "Forgiving Love: In the Word, In the World," with Janice Farnham, R.J.M., and Rosemary Mangan, R.J.M., June 8-14; "Twelve Steps to Inner Freedom; Humility Revisited" (J. Chittister's book), with Carolyn Gorny-Kopkowski, O.S.B., June 16-22; Directed Retreat, July 1-9, 12-20 and 23-31. Please visit www.bethanyspiritualitycenter.org or call (845) 460-3061.

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Through Their Eyes

If he could see things from the perspective of the Middle East, Gerard F. Powers ("Our Moral Duty in Iraq," 2/18), might conclude that we have a moral obligation to leave Iraq now.

In the view from afar, we're not the solution for Iraq, but part of the problem. Consider that while we see our military as young persons of noble resolve, the Mideast sees uniforms, guns, tanks and planes as evidence of an occupying power.

The Mideast has a hatred, born of experience, of military occupations, such as that of the Israelis in the Palestinian Territories.

We should also never underestimate the deep patriotism of the Iraqis. Despite doomsday scenarios, Iraq has never had a civil war. Sunnis and Shiites have coexisted. If we left Iraq tomorrow, they could transcend their differences and build a viable Iraqi nation.

(Rev.) George P. Carlin
Harper, Tex.

Passive Participation

While Thomas A. Shannon claims to shun "physical reductionism, a form of materialism" ("At the End of Life," 2/18), he ignores the viewpoint of a patient as subject, leaving him or her in effect a mere object. Even his remark that the limit of what can be done "for such a patient...is to maintain the biological signs of life" speaks only to externals, to what registers to an objectifying, sympathy-free observer.

There is something scandalous in the way the crucial factor of subjective consciousness is so commonly ignored even in ostensibly Catholic treatments of the problem of "unplugging." It is the ruthlessly materialist culture of capitalism, of course, that makes full personhood contingent on the capability of manifesting itself in external action, preferably productive action. It is one of the strengths of Catholic thinking that prayer, silent contemplation and even the "passive" act of listening to music are full-fledged actions, quite as worthy as any external action to qualify a person for first-class human status.

Joseph Masheck
New York, N.Y.

Our Move

Thank you for your editorial "Cuba Sí, Castro No!" (3/10). A good first step toward improved relations with Cuba would be closing and returning our military base at Guantánamo Bay. That would remove our presence militarily from the island and also be a gesture of goodwill to the entire Caribbean area. In this day and age, it is hard to imagine we need such a base only 90 miles from our border. It would also resolve the many issues surrounding the imprisonment without any civil rights of all the current Gitmo inmates.

(Deacon) Mike Evans
Anderson, Calif.

Modern Times

Maurice Timothy Reidy's article, "An Ordinary Mystic" (2/11), describing some

of the works of the artist Alfonse Borysewicz, provided me with good Lenten fare. As Reidy says, "while parishes have experimented with modern music, architecture, even dance, they seem less willing to embrace modern visual art."

This article is the first I have read that presents Catholic faith with contemporary artistic sensibilities. "An Ordinary Mystic" helps me to do just that. Should I be in Brooklyn, I will include a visit to the private chapel of the Oratory Church of St. Boniface.

Ellen Roach, C.S.J.
Westminster, Colo.

Diversity in Unity

"Lessons From an Extraordinary Era," by Roger Haight, S.J. (3/17) was an exciting reading experience. The diverse theological applications he presents offer a way into the many and varied contexts of our church. As a priest in a diocese of both rural and urban parishes, I am often struck by how much social research that reaches the popular reader is quantitative. The larger quantity of the population is in the cities. Often what are characterized as universal trends are, in fact, urban trends. Haight's sampling of theology provides options for theological application in both urban and rural contexts.

As we all know, we have many groups in our church: lay, clergy, religious, groups and movements, societies and associations. Some are more theological in nature; others are driven more by devotional or even practical interests. Haight's article offers theological insights that could speak to this diversity both for such groups themselves and for an understanding that holds all this diversity in unity.

(Rev.) Simon Falk
Murrumburrah, N.S.W., Australia

Lost Treasure

Thank you for the reflection on William F. Buckley Jr. ("Erudite and Exuberant," Current Comment, 3/17). When I was in high school, I became acquainted with Buckley on his PBS program "Firing Line." When I was a teenager, he really helped me to start thinking about politics and the wider world. By the time I was out of college, I was much more liberal in my outlook, but I continued to enjoy hearing what Buckley brought to the conversation.

Regardless of how much one may have agreed or disagreed, one cannot help remembering Buckley fondly. He was a treasure who will truly be missed.

Charles Kinnaird
Birmingham, Ala.

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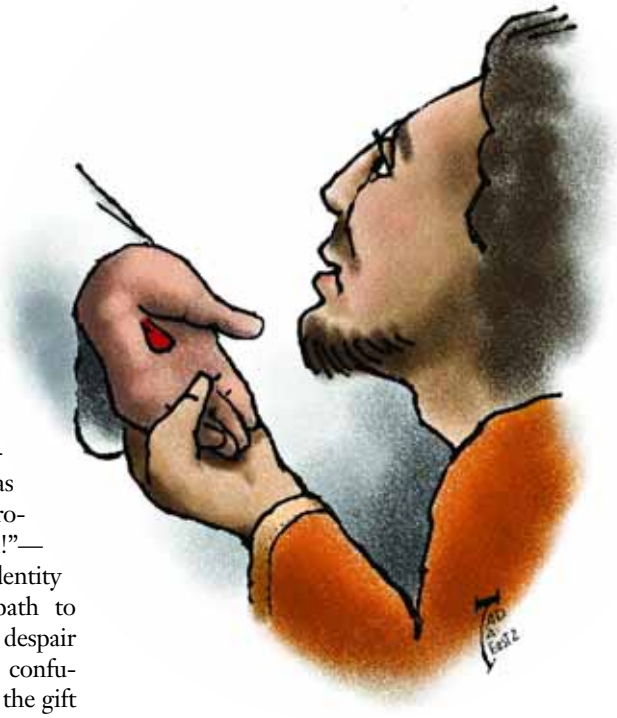
Coming to Believe

Second Sunday of Easter (A), March 30, 2008

Readings: Acts 2:42-47; Ps 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24; 1 Pt 1:3-9; Jn 20:19-31

"Do not be unbelieving but believe" (Jn 20:28)



ART BY TAD DUNNE

FIFTY DAYS MAKE UP the Easter season, a period that gives us an opportunity to reflect on the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection in our lives, on the difference that Easter faith makes for us. On the Sundays of the Easter season, instead of Old Testament passages as the first Scripture reading at Mass, we hear selections from the Acts of the Apostles, a story of the spread of early Christian faith from Jerusalem to Rome in the first century. The passages from 1 Peter, the second reading on these Sundays, concern the identity of early Christians in the midst of their trials and tribulations for the sake of their new faith. And the Gospel texts, which are mainly from John, pertain to our relationship with the risen Christ.

Today's Gospel passage from John 20 continues the Evangelist's account of the genesis of Easter faith among Jesus' closest followers. The story began last Sunday with the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb. Whereas Mary Magdalene thought that Jesus' body had been stolen, the beloved disciple suspected that Jesus may have been raised from the dead. But there was still much confusion and uncertainty about what had happened. The first appearance of the risen Jesus was to Mary Magdalene. Initially she thought that Jesus was the gardener, and only gradually and with Jesus' initiative did she come to recognize the risen Jesus.

In the second appearance, on Easter Sunday afternoon, the disciples in Jerusalem have no trouble recognizing the risen Jesus. He promises them peace, communicates the gift of the Holy Spirit and commissions them to carry on his mission from his heavenly Father. The third Jerusalem appearance takes place the Sunday after Easter. Here the skeptical Thomas demands empirical proof of Jesus' resurrection, and he receives it. When he comes to recognize the figure before him as Jesus raised from the dead, he proclaims him "my Lord and my God!"—the highest confession of Jesus' identity in the New Testament. The path to Easter faith in John 20 moves from despair with a glimmer of hope, through confusion and recognition, and through the gift of the Holy Spirit and the risen Jesus' commission to Thomas's profession of faith.

Praying With Scripture

- What changed Thomas from a doubter into a believer?
- Why is the faith of those who do not see but believe superior?
- Do the Easter event and your baptism shape your life? How?

Luke describes the difference Easter faith made in the lives of Jesus' first followers gathered in Jerusalem in his short (and probably idealized) summary in Acts of early Christian community life in the days after Easter. Their communal life consists of listening to the apostles and witnessing their "wonders and signs," pooling their material possessions, sharing meals and meeting together, praising God and winning many converts.

In his final remarks to his disciples on the Sunday after Easter, the risen Jesus differentiates between how Thomas came to believe ("because you have seen me") and a more ordinary yet even superior way ("Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed"). That is the way the early Christians addressed in 1 Peter (and we also) have come to believe in the risen Jesus. The letter known as 1 Peter was written to Gentile Christians in northern Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). They were a minority in that religious and cultural setting and needed to be instructed on their new identity as Christians and what difference their baptism might make in their lives.

Today's selection from the opening benediction in 1 Peter reflects on the identity of those who have come to believe in the risen Jesus without having seen him physically. Three images are prominent: new birth, inheritance and gold tested by fire. All of us know something about the process of birth. But in baptism believers experience a new, spiritual birth. Through God's mercy they have been granted a birth from above, and this birth has as its object and goal "a living hope." Because of this new birth in Christ, they have become God's children in a special way alongside Christ. And so Christians can share in the inheritance that comes through faith and baptism. This inheritance is not what we might get from parents or a rich aunt. It is imperishable (not subject to corruption or death), undefiled (it cannot be spoiled) and unfading (not subject to erosion or wear).

The cross remains part of coming to believe. And so Peter describes suffering as a test or discipline with the familiar biblical image of gold tested by fire. In order for gold to be purified and made stronger and to show forth its brilliance, it must be subjected to fire. Similarly, the faith Christians display amid persecution and other tests makes them more precious than gold.

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