The 2008 Foley Poem

# America

June 9–16, 2008

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

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## Iraq's Humanitarian Crisis

**The Refugees**
*J. Kevin Appleby*

**The Plight of Christians**
*Pierre de Charentenay*

# Of Many Things

THEY WERE THE HEROES of my youth. The French called them *les hommes engagés*. U.S. historians styled them "action intellectuals." Both terms referred to men and women of learning who employed their knowledge to change society. The church, too, had its own "organic intellectuals," thinkers who conducted their scholarship in solidarity with the poor.

The best-known European *homme engagé* was the Algerian-born Albert Camus, famous for his existentialist novels, *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, but whose strongest books, *The Plague* and *The Rebel*, were works of social commitment. His last novel, *The Fall*, evoked a world weighted down with sin, where the intellectual was a voice crying in the wilderness. In Italy, there was the Christian Marxist Ignacio Silone, whose novels, like *Bread and Wine* and *Fontamara*, projected a pure gospel free of the encrustations of church history and dedicated to service of the poor. His *Story of a Humble Christian* celebrated Celestine V, the hermit pope who resigned the papacy and was assassinated for it.

The author David Halberstam numbered American action intellectuals, like McGeorge Bundy, the Harvard dean turned Kennedy national security adviser, among "the best and the brightest." They came from the academy and, initially at least, put their learning to work in the service of society.

Lacking not only the breadth of European intellectuals but also their attachment to ordinary people, American action intellectuals were in want of the faculty of self-examination that helped many Europeans acknowledge their own failings even as they denounced the follies in the society around them. In contrast, the Americans tended to become establishment figures wholly lost in the games of power politics.

The church was not without its own activist thinkers. Msgr. Ivan Illich, for example, was a man of ideas on a mission to save Latin America's poor. The late Denis Goulet almost single-handedly founded the study of the ethics of development. Another, Gustavo Gutiérrez, adopted the term "organic intellectual" to express links between theologizing and the option for the poor.

Unhappily the U.S. church today lacks intellectuals of the same breadth of interest and depth of dedication to the poor. Intellectuals have either been tamed by the media or dismissed by the academy, in favor of overspecialized academic achievers. Within universities the social activists who remain have been segregated in their own institutions, outside the mainline academic departments. Occasionally, however, some thinkers genuinely committed to the poor and to the church do survive on campus. One is Daniel Groody, C.S.C., at the University of Notre Dame; another is David Hollenbach, S.J., of Boston College (disclosure: both are friends of mine).

In *A Promised Land, A Perilous Journey, Theological Perspectives on Migration* (Notre Dame), Groody and Giocchino Campese, a Scalabrini priest, have brought together experts from many fields to explore the experience and the meaning of Latin American migration to the United States. In an eye-opening essay, for example, Jacqueline Hagan reports on the exceptional role that faith and religious ritual play in the lives of migrants, who have their own prayers, patrons and even pilgrimage sites. This summer, in line with his committed research, Groody will do field work with border patrols and refugee agencies on the Slovak-Ukrainian border and on the Italian-Albanian and Spanish-Moroccan maritime frontiers.

In *Refugee Rights: Ethics, Advocacy and Africa* (Georgetown Univ. Press), David Hollenbach, S.J., and more than a dozen other scholars probe an issue he first took up in these pages ("There Is More Than One Way to Die," 1/15/07), namely, the absence of effective legal protections for people who have been forcibly displaced, whether refugees who have fled their home countries or internally dispersed persons who have had to flee their homes but remain within the borders of their native lands. Ministry to refugees and migrants (see articles in this issue) is at the growing edge of the church's service to the world today. Groody and Hollenbach demonstrate that in some centers of American Catholic learning, the tradition of the intellectual in service of the poor remains alive.

***Drew Christiansen, S.J.***


# America

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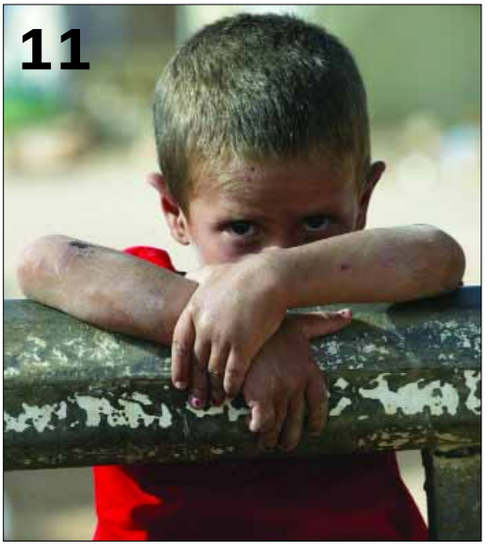
*Cover art* Mourners attend a memorial Mass for Chaldean Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of Mosul, Iraq, at a church in Baghdad on March 18. CNS photo/Thaier al-Sudani, Reuters.




## Articles





This week @ America Connects

Michael F. Suarez, S.J., talks about his Foley Award-winning poem on our podcast. Plus, a slideshow of Olafur Eliasson's art work, and a history of "The Jesuits of Baghdad" from our archives. All at americamagazine.org.

# An Immodest Proposal

While the Democratic and Republican national conventions are still two months away, the parties' presidential nominees are clearly established. Senator Barack Obama, the likely Democratic nominee, and Senator John McCain, the presumptive Republican nominee, provide a striking contrast in age and background. Still, each in his own way has been something of an outsider to the conventional campaign strategies of their parties. Before the presidential campaign begins in earnest, these two unconventional candidates might consider an unconventional proposal: that they meet together to define the agenda for the presidential debates that will take place during the campaign.

Could the candidates agree that the critical issue concerning the war in Iraq is what would constitute victory there and so allow the withdrawal of U.S. troops? In debating the future of U.S. economic policy, could the candidates agree that a principal issue is whether the Bush tax cuts have contributed to our present economic recession or have mitigated the negative effects of the recession? While debating the future course of U.S. foreign policy, could the candidates agree that a central issue is whether the United States has the right balance of military and diplomatic resources for an effective foreign policy?

In the heat of a presidential campaign, the attention of the media and the public can be too easily distracted by stories that may be personally embarrassing to the candidates but have little long-term consequence for the nation. For the candidates to agree on issues of national importance could rescue the forthcoming campaign from such short-term sensationalism.

# A Nation of Liars

James Frey is back. The erstwhile bad boy of the memoirist set, who famously declared himself the next Hemingway in 2003, has returned from literary disgrace and an exile banging out screenplays in Hollywood with his first novel—or second, depending on who's counting. Frey, who sold four million copies of his memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*, by recounting a harrowing descent into alcoholism and drug addiction and his plucky return to sobriety, was at one point the featured author of Oprah Winfrey's book club. But as enterprising journalists discovered in 2006, Frey was a better novelist than a writer of memoir: much of Frey's supposed true-life tale turned out to be fiction. Lawsuits and a public humiliation at the hands of Oprah soon followed, and Frey disappeared from view for two years.

Frey is not the only author to be caught playing the fabulist: everyone from Augusten Burroughs to Truman Capote to David Sedaris has been suspected in recent years of embellishing supposed non-fiction tales. A more recent example is the author of *Love and Consequences*, who wrote a memoir about growing up in gang-haunted South Central L.A. but was discovered to be a young white woman raised in an affluent Los Angeles suburb. Why the sudden onslaught of falsehoods? Memoirs sell much better than novels because Americans remain intrigued by the possibility a tale might not be too good to be true. That such stories inevitably turn out to be just that perhaps reflects a more disturbing side of our national obsession with telling it all.

# Barriers or Bridges?

The Great Wall of China, Hadrian's Wall, the Berlin Wall, the Iron Curtain, the Korean Demilitarized Zone. Now we have the 670-mile-long concrete fence between Mexico and the United States, the ever-expanding, 436-mile-long West Bank Barrier intended to protect Israelis from Palestinian terrorists, and the three-mile-long, 12-foot-high concrete barrier dividing neighborhoods in Baghdad.

The theory is that good walls keep bad neighbors apart. Walls are a necessary, temporary measure, the easy solution. But is the construction of walls compatible with diplomatic, economic and legal efforts to create a more unified and peaceful world? The quick solution is often not the best solution, and surely not the long-term solution.

"Good fences make good neighbors," says the farmer in Robert Frost's poem "Mending Wall." But by the end of the poem, the poet is no longer so sure. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall,/ That wants it down."

Many forces today want walls torn down: Doctors Without Borders, Reporters Without Borders, Teachers, Words, Mothers, Engineers, Sociologists, Basketball and even Clowns (no kidding!) Without Borders. These last offer laughter to relieve the suffering of children in areas of crisis.

Perhaps the Internet, which crosses fences, will help us to recapture the vision of the beautiful blue earth from outer space. Divisions remain, caused by water, mountains and deserts. Supposedly, the only human-created divider visible from space with the naked eye is the Great Wall of China. But that is an urban myth. Even that massive construction is now only a tourist attraction, no longer a wall to keep out or keep in.

## Editorial

# The Duty to Protect

FOR MANY DAYS NOW, British, French and American ships loaded with relief supplies have been sitting off Myanmar's coast, waiting for permission to enter that country's ports. The aid is urgently needed. Almost a month after Cyclone Nargis left at least 134,000 people dead or missing in Myanmar, the United Nations estimated that almost 60 percent of the two million people affected by the catastrophe had yet to receive assistance. The primary culprit for the delay is Myanmar's intransigent military, which appears to be more concerned with preserving control over the population than with saving the lives of their fellow countrymen. U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon at last extracted a promise from Myanmar's government on May 23 to allow more humanitarian aid into the country, yet relief agencies and Western nations are skeptical that the junta will follow through with all the necessary visas and bureaucratic assistance.

France's foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner, a former head of Doctors Without Borders, has said that the U.N. Security Council may need to invoke the "responsibility to protect" as a justification for an armed intervention that will force delivery of humanitarian aid. Mr. Kouchner is correct in his assessment that Myanmar presents an important test case for the world's commitment to the duty to protect, the principle that the international community has a right to intervene when a government either fails to protect its people or has itself violated their rights.

In his recent address to the United Nations, Pope Benedict XVI argued that in such situations the international community has a moral obligation to intervene. "Every State has the primary duty to protect its own population from grave and sustained violations of human rights, as well as from the consequences of humanitarian crises, whether natural or man-made," the pope said. When "states are unable to guarantee such protection," the international community should intervene, and such interventions "should never be interpreted as an unwarranted imposition or a limitation of sovereignty. On the contrary, it is indifference or failure to intervene that do the real damage," the pope asserted.

The catastrophe in Myanmar appears to be a clear-cut example of a case in which the failures of a government unable or unwilling to protect its own population require action by the international community. The international community must first exhaust every possible nonmilitary option for a resolution of the crisis. The mediation of other Southeast Asian nations as well as of U.N. Secretary General Ban seems to offer an avenue for humanitarian rescue not available through direct negotiation with the West, which would still be the major source of aid. While slow, such mediation may satisfy the principle of proportionality. Although the human toll may still be high, it will be smaller than if there is resort to armed intervention. Yet with the monsoon season rapidly approaching, time is not on the side of the suffering people of Myanmar. If a limited armed intervention is needed, it should be a multilateral effort, and its principal purpose must be humanitarian. The scale, duration and intensity of the intervention must be no greater than what is required for the successful delivery and distribution of aid.

It is clear that the most appropriate body to authorize any such interventions is the United Nations, which makes all the more urgent the pope's call to strengthen the U.N. system. Adequate funding of the organization, coupled with appropriate accountability, would be a good start. But the duty to protect requires the international community to rethink the very idea of security and to understand that preventing and alleviating humanitarian crises, primarily through nonmilitary means, is an absolute requirement for international peace in the 21st century. Effective future interventions, therefore, will require a reformed U.N. Security Council committed to incorporating duty to protect principles into its decision-making, as well as a standing international constabulary force that can effectively implement its resolutions and augment the organization's beleaguered peacekeeping capacities.

**MOST IMPORTANT, THE WORLD'S MORAL COMMITMENT** to fulfill its responsibility to protect will need to be strengthened. The international community's embrace of this principle will require nation states to expend their treasure and even their blood on behalf of the world's oppressed, and to confront the possibility that the moral imperative to act in the face of human suffering may override their provincial interests. As failed states multiply and complex humanitarian emergencies become more frequent, only more difficult choices lie ahead.

## Meeting the Food Crisis

**An Indian shopkeeper waits for customers in the eastern Indian city of Kolkata. Over a billion Asians may sink back into extreme poverty without extra aid to counter soaring food prices, the region's development bank warned on May 26 as a battle brewed over who would fund its spending. The call for cash to secure food supplies for Asia—home to two-thirds of the world's poor—was accompanied by debate on whether developing countries or rapidly expanding nations like China and India should foot the bill.**

Greater support for the world's small farmers would enable them to produce more food in a sustainable manner and help address chronic hunger and malnutrition around the globe, the Vatican's permanent observer to the United Nations said during a meeting of the world body's Commission on Sustainable Development.

Speaking to the commission May 16, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the Vatican's permanent observer at the United Nations, urged investment that reduces food prices and expands the global production and distribution of food, especially in Africa. He also called for agricultural policies that "rediscover the path of reason and reality" so that the needs of food production and the need to be stewards of the earth are balanced. The archbishop also urged the commission to undertake greater efforts to ease the impact of environmental change and financial pressures that affect food production.

## Interreligious Dialogue Group Calls for Tolerance

Muslim, Jewish and Christian leaders holding an interreligious dialogue meeting in Qatar said all religions and all schools must teach tolerance for religious diversity and respect for human life. At the end of the meeting, participants issued a declaration saying they had discussed not only the values and ideals of their faiths, but also "some of the difficult and tragic issues which disfigure our world and create violence and injustice in so many contexts."

The statement reported, "In particular, we examined the ethical dimensions of issues such as suicide, abortion, euthanasia, human trafficking, sale of organs, violence in the media and desecration of religious symbols."

The gathering, the sixth annual Doha Conference on Interfaith Dialogue, was held in mid-May and included participation by Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The theme of the gathering was "Religious Values: Perspectives on Peace and Respect for Life."

## Hong Kong Cardinal Hopeful About Games

Cardinal Joseph Zen Ze-kiun of Hong Kong said he hopes the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing will be a success and will help encourage progress on human rights in China. "I think the Olympics are important and represent a value that cannot be compromised by other things. For this reason, [Pope Benedict XVI] has also expressed his hope that they will be successful," Cardinal Zen told Vatican Radio in mid-May. The cardinal said the gathering of athletes from all over the world in peaceful competition was something worth protecting.

"Naturally, one should take advantage of this occasion to encourage the Beijing government to make progress on human rights, too—starting with the granting of greater freedom to those involved in communication—as it promised when it asked to host the Olympics," he said.

China's recent crackdown in Tibet has led some human rights activists to suggest a possible boycott of the Olympics. Cardinal Zen spoke to Vatican Radio during a visit to northern Italy, where he led a prayer service in Milan for the church in China.

## Sendler Dies, Honored for Heroism in World War II

Polish church leaders paid tribute to Irena Sendler, a Catholic social worker who saved approximately 2,500 Jewish children from being killed by the Nazis during the Holocaust. Sendler,

98, died in Warsaw on May 12. "Everyone who survived the war is very much aware that her kind of heroism could be born only in someone with a very great heart," said Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, former secretary general of the Polish bishops' conference. "Irena Sendler was one of those people able to resist the greatest evil that rampaged through the world in the past century. It's a pity her greatness was not noticed by the international institutions even after her actions were brought to light."

Sendler was awarded the Righteous Among the Nations honor by Israel's Yad Vashem memorial in 1965 and Poland's highest honor, the White Eagle, in 2003 for smuggling children from Warsaw's Jewish ghetto to safe homes, orphanages and Catholic convents in Poland.

## Bomb Damages Catholic School in Gaza

A bomb placed by unknown assailants damaged the entrance of a Catholic school in Gaza May 16. Msgr. Manuel Musallam of Gaza's Holy Family Catholic Church said there were no injuries in the early-morning explosion that could be heard in the surrounding neighborhood. Monsignor Musallam reported that it was a small explosion and damaged only the front gate of the Zahwa Rosary School, where both Christian and Muslim students study. Two nuns were in their convent adjacent to the school when the explosion occurred. "The sisters were very terrified in the morning," said Monsignor Musallam. Last June, unknown assailants ransacked the school and convent. That attack took place during a week of heavy fighting between the rival Palestinian forces of the Islamist Hamas and secular Fatah parties.

## Pope Addresses German Catholics on Faith

**Young people sing during a session of the Katholikentag, the biennial German Catholic Church assembly, in Osnabrück, Germany, May 21.**

Having faith in God does not limit one's life and possibilities, but rather opens a person to others and helps him or her face the future with courage, Pope Benedict XVI said in a message to German Catholics released May 22 at the Vatican. Many people today "fear that faith can limit their lives, that they could be caught in a web of commandments and church teachings" and would no longer be free to explore and experiment, the pope said.

The message was read at the opening of the Katholikentag, the biennial German Catholic Church gathering, which met this year in Osnabrück on May 21-25. The pope made the comparison that many people today are like the young brother in the Gospel parable of the prodigal son; they feel they have to leave "the father" in order to experience life. But fullness of life comes only when one is in a relationship with God, the creator of all life, the pope said. "A life without God does not become freer and broader. Man is destined for infinity; nothing other than that can be sufficient for him," he said.

## Chaldeans Criticize Death Penalty for Assassin

Chaldean Catholic leaders in Iraq have criticized a death sentence for the man convicted of killing Chaldean Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of Mosul, Iraq. "Violence must not call for more violence. We are in favor of justice but not of capital punishment," Chaldean Archbishop Louis Sako of Kirkuk, Iraq, told the Rome-based missionary news agency AsiaNews.

An Iraqi government spokesman said Ahmed was an Al Qaeda leader who was involved in a number of "terror crimes against the people of Iraq." Chaldean Auxiliary Bishop Shlemon Warduni of Baghdad told the Italian Catholic agency SIR May 19 that Archbishop Rahho "would not have accepted such a sentence. Christian principles uphold that a death sentence is not permissible against anyone."

The Iraqi government announced May 18 that an Iraqi criminal court had sentenced Ahmed Ali Ahmed to death for killing Archbishop Rahho. The date of the execution has not yet been made public.

## Jesuit School President Heads Campaign Board

Joseph Parkes, S.J., president of Cristo Rey New York High School in East Harlem, was named chairman of the New York City Campaign Finance Board on May 8 by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg.

The five-member board is an independent, nonpartisan city agency charged with administering the city's campaign finance program, publishing a voter guide on city candidates and issues, and overseeing debates during election cycles.

"Father Parkes has demonstrated exactly the kind of pragmatic, evenhanded, intelligent and independent leadership that the C.F.B. needs and deserves," the mayor said in a statement. Father Parkes has served on the boad since last year.

Father Parkes is the second Jesuit to serve as chairman of the C.F.B. Joseph A. O'Hare, S.J., was named founding chairman by Mayor Edward I. Koch in 1988, a position he held for 15 years.

## Schools Should Train Communicators in Ethics

It makes little sense for the Catholic Church to complain about ethical failures in the media if it is not educating future communicators in ethics, Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli, president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, told communication specialists in a Rome meeting. The archbishop said he wanted to know how Catholic universities are preparing students to work in the media and how his office could support them in their work. The council invited 90 professors and staff members from 58 departments of communications at Catholic universities and institutes in 44 countries to a meeting on May 22-24 to share their curricula, experiences and concerns. "The council needs to know, to understand what is happening in forming professionals in the field," he said. Archbishop Celli reported that he extended the invitations and posed questions, but planned to spend most of the meeting listening.

## Lawmakers Override Veto of Farm Bill

Not long after President George W. Bush vetoed the farm bill May 21, the House overrode his veto and enacted the bill into law.

Known officially as the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008, the law is the principal piece of federal farm legislation, although the farm provisions of the law are now overshadowed by food stamps and other nutrition provisions. Farm and rural provisions account for less than one-fourth of the $300 billion law, while nutrition programs, including food stamps, account for two-thirds. The rest of the legislation includes such items as conservation and renewable energy programs, including biofuels production.

Rural life advocates, including the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, lost their bid in Congress to reduce sharply the crop subsidies given to farmers. The group contends that the lion's share of the subsidies goes to the wealthiest farmers.

From CNS and other sources.

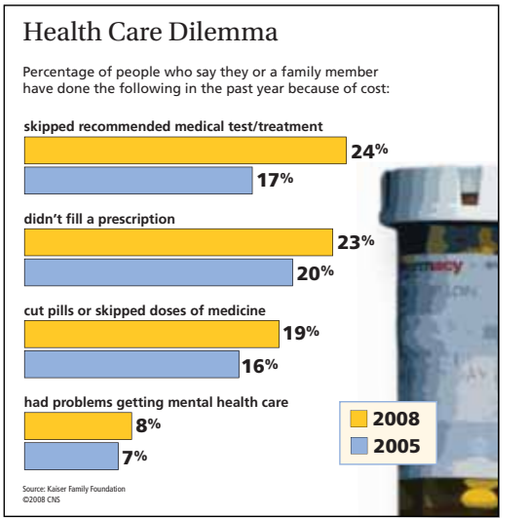
## Bishops to Vote on Missal Translation

The U.S. bishops will take up the English translation of the Roman Missal at their June 12-14 general meeting in Orlando, Fla. The section of the missal translation under consideration this spring involves the proper prayers—the opening collect, the prayer over the offerings and the prayer after Communion—for Masses during Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter as well as the Sundays of Ordinary Time and the solemnities and holy days of obligation.

The nearly 700-page section is the second of 12 units into which the Roman Missal has been divided for translation purposes. The first unit—the Order of Mass, involving the main constant parts of the Mass, including the penitential rite, gloria, creed, eucharistic prayers, and other prayers and responses used daily—was approved by the bishops in June 2006 in Los Angeles.

The Committee on Divine Worship of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops plans to present several units to the bishops for approval at the bishops' general meetings in November 2008, June and November 2009 and November 2010.

## C.H.A. Head Draws 'Ugly Picture' of Health Care




Adding up the economic toll on the nation caused by the health care crisis, the head of the Catholic Health Association urged the United States to "act in its own best interest and in the interest of its people" to solve the problem.

Sister Carol Keehan, a member of the Daughters of Charity who is president and chief executive officer of the C.H.A., presented what she called "a very ugly picture of what many people in our country are having to cope with." With the United States spending 16 percent of its gross domestic product on health care and other developed countries spending a median of 8.5 percent, United States businesses face "a serious competitive disadvantage," she said. U.S. firms also pay twice as much for health insurance as their foreign competitors, she added, citing a study by the New America Foundation. But that does not result in better health care or reduced mortality in the United States, Sister Carol said.

Sister Keehan spoke on "Health Care Reform That Is Worthy of the American People" May 16 at the City Club of Cleveland. The club's prestigious Friday Forum has hosted many prominent speakers and airs on a radio network in more than 40 states from Maine to Alaska.

# Destruction in Myanmar

## 'The government's response created a most unnatural disaster.'

A DEADLY CYCLONE brought vast destruction to the Irrawaddy Delta in Myanmar (also known as Burma) on May 2. Myanmar officials estimate 134,000 people are dead and missing as of this writing, but international estimates put the number at 200,000.

A partner of Catholic Relief Services/Caritas Internationalis described the situation: "To my eyes, that have seen the Asia tsunami and the Kashmir earthquake, it was overwhelming. As our boat moved along, a body of a small boy drifted by. People have no drinking water or food or shelter. There were many refugees, living in roofless churches and monasteries. Help has not reached them. We are doing what we can."

C.R.S./Caritas and local church partners are reaching tens of thousands in some of the most remote villages. But with another 2.4 million people displaced and left destitute by the storm, there is concern that the death toll will surge in the coming weeks, surpassing even the count of 280,000 dead in the 2004 Asian tsunami. The similarities to the 2004 tsunami end there. While that storm took hundreds of thousands of lives overnight, an effective emergency relief effort prevented further loss of life in the weeks that followed. Within hours of the tsunami, for example, Admiral Thomas B. Fargo of the U.S. Pacific Command ordered a U.S. headquarters deployed to the region for a massive relief effort. During peak operations, 21 countries sent military assets to assist civilian relief efforts in Indonesia, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand, including 102 ships, 104 helicopters, 92 planes and 30 medical, engineering or logistics teams. These provided nearly a half-million gallons of water, 2,125 tons of food and 3,000 tons of supplies.

According to Richard Love, a professor at the National Defense University (and, full disclosure, my husband), "Effective emergency response requires quickly and accurately assessing needs, identifying and moving the capacities to meet those needs, planning to best coordinate civil and state responses, and leadership." Having helped create the emergency response plans used during the tsunami, he notes, "the problem with most approaches to disaster response is the underlying assumption that outside assistance should augment local and state response efforts. In cases from Katrina to Myanmar this assumption is false. What happens when there is not an effective local or state response to augment?"

This is not an idle question. For many of the world's most vulnerable, sovereign control is either absent or predatory. Nearly one-third of the world's population, two billion out of the more than six billion people on the planet, live in failed or failing states. Over two billion people live in 43 countries where the state deprives them of basic human rights and freedoms. The worst of these states are predatory, killing their own people.

This is the case in Myanmar. The initial storm was horrific, but the military government's response created a most unnatural disaster, putting their own political power concerns ahead of the survival of the people.

Myanmar has been ruled by a brutal military junta since 1962. The ruling regime, called (in Orwellian fashion) the State Peace and Development Council, is one of the worst abusers of human rights in the world, according to human rights N.G.O.'s and the U.S. Department of State. The military routinely pillages settlements, rapes women, forcibly conscripts child soldiers, abducts people into slave labor and trades in drugs. They also practice ethnic cleansing, destroying the villages of minorities who either oppose the government or stand in the way of state infrastructure development projects. Dissenters are subject to prison or death. Last fall, the country's Buddhist monks led pro-democracy protests that were brutally put down in what has been dubbed, alluding to the color of the monks' robes, the Saffron Revolution. The Karen minority group, whose members are predominantly Christian, is the worst affected. The U.S. Committee for Refugees calls them "one of the most ignored groups in one of the most difficult humanitarian emergencies." The military target the Karen, forcing them to flee and trying to break down their resistance by denying them access to food and funds.

The junta fears growing opposition, so it resists any foreign influence, including the distribution of emergency relief aid. After weeks of negotiations with the United Nations and foreign governments and nongovernmental organizations, the regime has slowly permitted a trickle of aid. During the critical first days and weeks, the entry and movement of aid, doctors and international relief experts were blocked, along with shipments of vehicles, communications and other equipment. The military has been diverting relief aid from the victims to its own forces; even the Myanmar government is now trying to stop this. Allegations are circulating around the N.G.O. community that the military is denying relief aid to the Karen and other minority groups on the Delta in hopes of exterminating them, using the poor response to the cyclone as a cover and an aid to their policies of ethnic cleansing. If true, these allegations may comprise crimes against humanity that entail a responsibility to protect, as the French government has been arguing in the United Nations.

Archbishop Charles Bo of Yangon puts it well: "Many thousands look towards the Church for assistance in Myanmar.... Thousands of homeless and starving people knock at our door. Help us to help those people.... Myanmar should not once again be forgotten by the world."

***Maryann Cusimano Love***

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PHOTO: REUTERS/MOHANNED FAISAL

The plight of five million displaced Iraqis

# Lost Nation

– BY J. KEVIN APPLEBY –

ONE OF THE LEAST REPORTED STORIES of the Iraq war is the story of the humanitarian crisis it has spawned. While the media have covered the military debates, the fighting, the lives of soldiers and the politics surrounding the war, they have left largely untold the stories of close to five million displaced Iraqis. The total includes the more than two million Iraqi refugees who have fled to nearby countries, mostly Syria and Jordan, and the 2.7 million noncombatants still within Iraq who have been driven from their homes. Most were trying to escape the generalized violence of war, but many others have expe-

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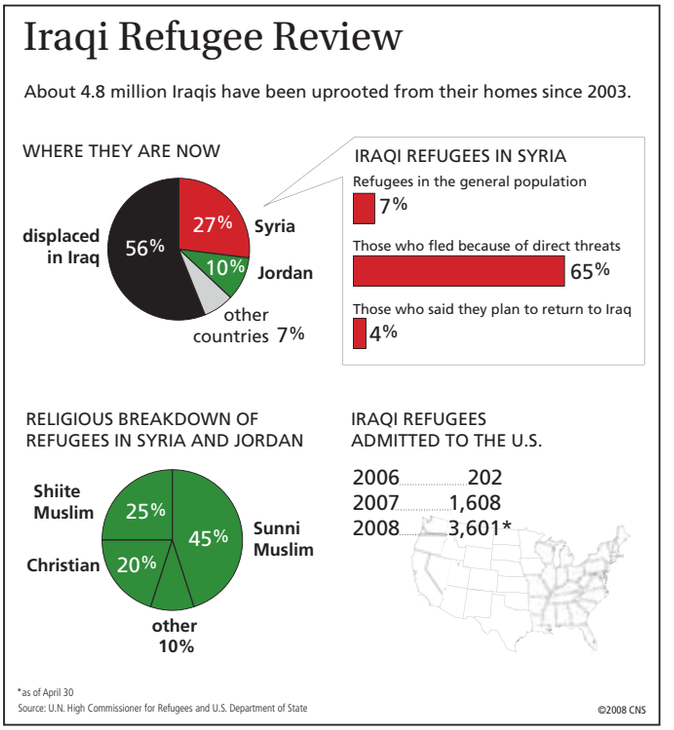
rienced direct persecution or threats to themselves or a close family member.

According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, 77 percent of the Iraqi refugees surveyed in Syria have endured aerial bombardments, 80 percent have witnessed a shooting, 68 percent have been harassed by militias, and 75 percent knew someone close to them who had been killed. Individual accounts of persecution are harrowing. Twenty-three percent have been kidnapped, 22 percent have been beaten by insurgents, and 16 percent have been tortured. Former employees of the U.S. military in Iraq, who worked as interpreters, drivers or cooks, have fled because of fear of imminent death or because of the murder of a family member. Religious and ethnic minorities also have endured persecution.




Despite such traumatic experiences, many Iraqis hope to return to their homes one day, though right now the prospects for a safe return are not bright. Integration into Syria, Jordan or another host country is problematic. Resettlement to another country, like the United States, has not been offered to sufficient numbers of Iraqis to protect even the most vulnerable.

## A Lethargic International Response

The United States and the global community have been slow to grasp the magnitude of Iraqi displacement and to respond to it adequately. The United States says other countries should do more to alleviate the suffering, while other nations say that the United States and Iraq should show more leadership. The facts demonstrate that neither the United States nor the rest of the world has done enough to address the situation, which deteriorates each day.

In the fiscal year 2008 emergency-spending bill, for example, the Bush administration has requested only $240 million to assist displaced Iraqis, out of a $196 billion total for the Iraq war. Of the two million Iraqi refugees outside Iraq, fewer than 5,000 have been resettled in the United States. That was not the plan. By the end of December 2007, the United States had welcomed only 2,647 of the 12,000 people it promised to resettle in this budget cycle. Last fiscal year, the United States resettled only 1,608 refugees out of a pledged 7,000. Clearly our government must do more.

The rest of the world also can do more. According to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Iraq ranks almost at the bottom—second-lowest—in terms of the money allotted per person. Of the $261 million requested by the United Nations for Iraqi refugees for 2008, seven countries (other than the United States) contributed a total of $10.2 million. Many of the Persian Gulf states have contributed nothing to the effort, explaining that they will not commit funds until Iraq itself gives more help to its own people.

Jordan and Syria are showing the strain of hosting Iraqi refugees, asserting that their governments have already spent $1 billion each on the effort. Initially these two countries kept their borders open to the inflow, but they have shut them periodically and at times denied entry to Iraqis. The arrival of new refugees has overwhelmed the educational and health care systems of both countries.

Even in the host countries, Iraqi refugees and their families remain at risk. Families that fled with money and resources have spent what they brought and are finding it difficult to purchase food and shelter. Men do not venture out to find work for fear of deportation; they leave work to the children, who ought to be in school. Care for mental health problems or cancer, which is prevalent among the refugee population, is becoming less and less accessible.

Some groups are particularly vulnerable. With their husbands either dead or in another country searching for work, women with children are at risk. Orphaned children especially are endangered by human traffickers and smugglers.

## Targeting Religious Minorities

Particularly vulnerable among the Iraqi refugees are religious minorities, predominantly Christians. Before the war, between 800,000 and one million Christians—Chaldean Catholics, Assyrians and Armenians—lived in Iraq. Roughly half of the Christian population have fled their

homes to other parts of Iraq or neighboring countries. According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, one-quarter of those who are registered as refugees from Iraq are Christians.

The stories of Christian persecution are chilling. Many Christians in Iraq have been forced to choose between conversion to Islam or death, while converts to Christianity have been killed or tortured. A delegation from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, visiting the Middle East in 2007, heard about one convert to Christianity who was "crucified" on a tree by insurgents. The delegation was also told that any Iraqi who made the sign of the cross in public would receive death threats.

The recent kidnapping and death of Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of Mosul has only added to the fear experienced by Iraqi Christians, particularly Chaldean Catholics. The killing of such a high-profile victim sends a signal that no Christian is safe in Iraq. The Holy See continues to urge protection for religious minorities within Iraq.

Legislation passed by Congress in January 2008 gives religious minorities a special priority for resettlement in the United States. Yet because of the length of time required for processing and the number of slots available, only a small number of Christian Iraqis have been resettled. Of course, resettlement to a third country is not a long-term solution to the plight of religious minorities in Iraq. These ancient communities deserve to remain in their homeland and to maintain their religious identity.

### Catholic Groups Take Action

The Catholic Church, both internationally and in the United States, has responded to the needs of Iraqis displaced within their own country and regionally. Inside Iraq, Caritas Internationalis is one of a few nongovernmental agencies working with the displaced and other vulnerable Iraqis. In neighboring countries, Catholic Relief Services and the International Catholic Migration Commission assist refugees and help them with the paperwork required for resettlement to third countries. Several religious orders, including the Jesuits and Dominican sisters, and members of the Maronite Church serve vulnerable groups, including women and children at risk. In the United States, the Migration and Refugee Services of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops works with local dioceses to help resettle Iraqi refugees.

On the advocacy front, the U.S. bishops have been outspoken in their efforts to win more relief aid and an increased resettlement number for Iraqis. Bishops of the U.S.C.C.B. Committee on Migration have traveled to the region to observe the conditions of Iraqi refugees and have reported their findings to Congress and the Bush administration. The bishops' Office of Migration and Refugee Services recently produced a report on unaccompanied Iraqi refugee children and other vulnerable groups (both reports can be accessed at http://www.usccb.org/mrs/tripreport.shtml). And recently the U.S. Catholic Coalition for the Protection of Displaced Iraqis, which consists of several U.S. Catholic agencies and religious orders, was formed to coordinate Catholic advocacy in the United States.

### A Search for Lasting Solutions

The truth about displaced Iraqis can no longer be minimized or ignored. Host countries feel the pinch, while the displaced and refugees themselves, having spent what little savings they had, need increased assistance. With no possibility of a safe return to Iraq anytime soon and with little prospect for resettlement to third countries, displaced Iraqis are facing a grave situation that could soon reach crisis proportions.

As the leader of the coalition forces in Iraq and as the world's lone superpower, the United States must step up its efforts to avert an impending crisis. Without U.S. leadership, other nations are unlikely to increase their support. We must provide more assistance, offer more resettlement options and conduct diplomacy to ensure that the essential needs of the lost people of Iraq are met. Success in the Iraq war must no longer be measured only in military terms, but also by how our nation responds to the human misery it has helped to create. A

# The Forgotten

## *Is there a future for Christianity in Iraq?*

BY PIERRE DE CHARENTENAY

THE CHALDEAN ARCHBISHOP OF MOSUL, Paulos Faraj Rahho, was kidnapped on Feb. 29 following a celebration at the Church of the Holy Spirit in Mosul. His driver and two deacons were shot and killed in the course of the kidnapping. Archbishop Rahho was found dead several days later. This was the most recent in a series of kidnappings and killings of priests and religious in Iraq—20 of them in just five years. Not all the kidnappings have ended in murder. In January 2005, Basile Georges Casmoussa, the Syrian archbishop of Mosul, was kidnapped but freed two days later, after a ransom of $1 million was paid.

Christians are a popular target for kidnappers. They are a small minority scattered in many places and are largely defenseless. Because they are not Muslims, they are often considered to be allies of the American troops. Also, kidnappings of Christians are useful propaganda, because they are extensively covered in the Western press. The size of the ransom demanded can vary: a Christian layman is "worth" about $100,000, a priest $500,000. A bishop is worth more than $1 million.

In response to the violence, Christians have fled by the thousands to northern Iraq or neighboring countries. Half of the Christians who were living in Iraq in 2000 have left their homes. There are about 200,000 Christians in Kurdistan, of whom 90,000 are refugees; 180,000 others have fled to Syria, Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon. The Catholic philosophy and theology faculties in Baghdad have moved to Erbil, and the Mosul seminary has closed.

### What We Saw and Heard

In February 2008, a delegation from Pax Christi, the international Catholic organization for peace, traveled to northern Iraq, visiting 26 different communities, mostly in Kurdistan, but also in Karmah, Qaraqosh and Kirkuk. The aim of the trip was to express solidarity between the Christians in Europe and the Christians in Iraq.

In one village, we met a man who had been kidnapped for a week and given back to his family the very morning of our arrival in return for a ransom of $60,000. His kidnappers had demanded that he convert to Islam, but he refused. His Christian identity is much more than his personal faith. He is a member of a Christian community, a Christian family and a Christian culture. In his case conversion would have been a betrayal of his religious beliefs and would have caused a complete separation from the social system he has known his entire life. In large numbers, such conversions would destroy whole communities. Because of this, the kidnappings have a political purpose: the eventual expulsion of all Christians from southern and central Iraq.

In spite of the difficulties and the violence, we were received very warmly, with processions and songs. It was like a Palm Sunday welcome. We traveled about 1,200 miles through the plains and the mountains. After being welcomed at the entrance to each community, we would go to the church to pray briefly together, explain why we were there and listen to their stories. Everywhere we went, the people asked us to be their voice among the Christians in the West and to tell their stories when we returned home.

Time and again, the townspeople would return to three basic themes:

*We are forgotten by everybody.* The Christians in the villages, whether permanent residents or refugees, feel isolated and forgotten. They are seen as just a small part of a larger problem, a cog in a huge political, military machine no one really controls. While Kurdistan has welcomed the refugees from southern Iraq and has provided food and shelter, the situation is still precarious.

*We were forced to leave.* Many Christians have left Baghdad and the surrounding regions because they feared for their lives and livelihood. They also abandoned Mosul, which was especially difficult for them, given the area's historical significance for Christians. Mosul, now governed by Islamic law, is a very dangerous place, and there are many stories of kidnappings and murders. At least 20 different terrorist groups have been battling for control of the city, while the U.S. military attempts to bring some security. The violence was so great that sometimes the Christians had to flee quickly, unable to take any of their possessions.

When the Christian refugees arrived in Kurdistan, some were returning to a land from which they had been forced a generation earlier by Saddam Hussein. Yet it is now a very different place. The refugees cannot find work and have to survive on food coupons. There is no industrial base, and land they owned before they were forced from Kurdistan in

**PIERRE DE CHARENTENAY, S.J.,** editor in chief of Études, visited Iraq in February as a member of a Pax Christi delegation.

Mourners hold pictures of Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of Mosul during his funeral on March 14.

PHOTO: CNS/REUTERS

the 1970s is now occupied by Muslims, who refuse to give it back.

*We are worried about the complete disappearance of Christians from Iraq.* The refugees despair of the future, a future that seems totally closed, without any possibility of return to their homes in the south. Many hope to leave Iraq entirely and are awaiting visas to enter Western countries. So far only Sweden and Norway have welcomed them. Other countries, including the United States and many in the European Union, have effectively closed their borders. One further ominous sign is that the desire to leave is most strongly felt by the young people, so there may be little future for the Christians in Iraq. Yet what choice do they have? They can return to the south where violence and oppression await them, or they can remain in the north where there is no future. The Turkish invasion of northern Iraq in March reminded all refugees that their situation is very precarious. They are caught between the hope of stability in this region and the refusal of Turkey to accept a free and strong Iraqi Kurdistan just across the border.

## Signs of Promise

The Christian refugees have received aid and support from two places. First, the church has been a powerful friend. The Chaldean and Syrian bishops and priests who decided to stay have been great signs of hope for the laypeople. And despite the violence and persecution, the church remains present and active as far as it can be. The Jesuits were expelled from the country in 1969, mostly because they were Americans, but Dominicans (belonging to the French province) still have a strong presence in Baghdad and Mosul, though they are now fewer in number. Even in the face of an uncertain future, churches are being built in many places; and a new seminary is being constructed in Qaraqosh. These are promising signs.

Further support has come from Kurdistan, where Christians have found refuge and peace. Sarkis Aghajan, a Christian who is Kurdistan's minister of finance, has played an important role in the building of 10,000 homes in some 150 villages, dozens of churches and the seminary in Qaraqosh. This has been a huge effort, one that is essential if there is to be any reasonable chance of survival.

## A Way Forward?

Amid this chaos many have proposed a solution: a federal Iraq divided into three autonomous regions: Shiite, Sunni and Kurd. But those who put forward this idea, some of whom are prominent Christians, completely forget the

Christians who also live in Iraq. Aghajan wants Christians to settle around the Nineveh Plain and the mountains of northwest Kurdistan in an autonomous region. The City of Ankawa, near Erbil, the capital of Kurdistan, has received hundreds of Christian families from the south, its population growing from 25,000 to 35,000 since the start of the war. For Aghajan, the presence of Christians in the Kurdish region is positive; it gives a good image to Kurdistan, and the Christians are hardworking and competent. But the refugees do not agree on the proposal for a special region. Some of them want the region as a refuge, but others reject the idea, especially people like Archbishop Sako of Kirkuk, because it might be seen as a surrender of their claims to their lands in the south. It is clear that any future discussion of a federal state for Iraq should include respect for the rights of Christians to control their lands and their destiny.

### Why Focus on Christians?

Why should we focus on the plight of Christians when so many others are also suffering? This group is small, some may say, hardly 3 percent of the population of Iraq. Why are they so important? There are three reasons:

First, they are not just victims of a war, but also victims of religious persecution. At stake are the human rights of an entire religious minority.

Second, the Iraqi Christians are a sign of pluralism. As long as they are in Iraq, there is a chance that different religious faiths will be able to live together.

Third, they are part of the cultural and religious history of the region: Iraqi Christians have been there for centuries, a living sign of an ancient culture in the birthplace of the Bible.

Iraqi Christians are faced with a crucial dilemma. As a community they know that they should stay. This is the desire of many community leaders, including bishops like Archbishop Sako. But individually, they are ready to leave in order to save their futures and sometimes their lives. Who can blame them?

If Christians do decide to leave, they should be welcomed in foreign countries, especially the United States and Europe. They should receive help to settle. Students should be given visas allowing them to study. If they decide to stay in Iraq, we in the West should lend vigorous assistance.

The question put to us by the plight of Christians in Iraq is bigger than whether to help a relatively small number of individuals with humanitarian aid and other support. At stake is the very survival of one of the oldest Christian communities in the world. Iraqi Christians should know that Christians everywhere will come to their aid. A

From the archives, "The Jesuits of Baghdad: 1932-1969," at americamagazine.org/pages.

# A Theologian in Town Hall

*How a small-town mayor implemented Catholic social teaching*

BY GEORGIA MASTERS KEIGHTLEY


PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/BRIDGET MCPHERSON

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, I unexpectedly found myself serving as the elected mayor of a small, economically depressed town in rural Nebraska. Previously I had been a tenured theology professor at a Catholic women's college in the East. I had returned to my Nebraska hometown the summer after completing a sabbatical leave to finish up some family business. Once there, the idea of being able to do full-time research and writing on the role of the laity in the church grew irresistible, and I decided to resign my teaching position and stay.

My hometown was no longer the thriving farming and ranching community it had been when I was growing up. While the farms and ranches had grown much larger, there were far fewer families operating them. The arrival of a Wal-Mart 20 miles away had the usual dampening effect on local business. I was dismayed to discover that all the social ills of the big city could be found here in small-town America as well: widespread drug and alcohol abuse, limited educational opportunities, few new jobs and high unemployment. Social services were stressed, and not a few residents experienced grinding poverty. Later, during my door-to-door campaigning, I came across two homes that "borrowed" electricity from their neighbors, thanks to a very long orange extension cord.

After many lengthy conversations and strategy sessions with friends about what might be done to stem the town's decline, I agreed, at their urging and with some reluctance, to run for mayor. But this decision was, I must confess, also prompted by a set of interests and concerns I had as a teacher and lay theologian. Let me explain.

Throughout my career, I had regularly taught courses in Catholic social ethics and was gratified to find students altruistic and enthusiastic about the idea that society could be transformed by their decisions and actions. Yet the more I taught these courses, the more I wanted to know how to translate this body of teaching into practical, everyday decisions and actions. What could educated Catholic professionals do to make the social, economic and political networks of their communities more fair and just, more supportive of the common good? How does one live out a preferential option for the poor in one's professional life? How does the principle of solidarity apply to one's daily use of money?

While I could remind students of the Gospel charge to do hands-on charity and service, such actions do not really address the structural causes of injustice, which, as Paul VI taught, must be a primary focus of the Catholic witness in our time. The pope described the need for Catholics to

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bring to conversion "the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs." The question was how.

Clearly Catholic social teaching supplies the vision and goal. Yet it was evident that "macro" notions regarding radical, systemic change, like those in the church's social teaching, must be tested and borne out through application and experience; this could only be done locally and through an ongoing, educative practice.

I came away with a clearer grasp of what lay Catholics can do to renew society and its institutions.

### What the Mayor Learned

Once elected mayor, I had regular opportunities to turn Catholic social theory into practice. By the time I completed my term, I had learned some things about relating the church's social ethic to the circumstances of the local community.

First, I learned that service as an elected official or as an appointee to a board or committee is a rich opportunity for Christian witness. Here one can directly affect the way taxes are raised and spent and create opportunities for employment, education and job training; one can work to ensure that affordable housing is provided and that building codes, safety and health standards are enforced. Above all I came to see such service as a vital way the baptized can heed the call of the Second Vatican Council to seek "the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will." In this way, too, U.S. Catholics can practice what our bishops have come to call "faithful citizenship."

But my time as mayor also gave me insight into some of the individual things that must be attended to if our collective institutions are to be humanized. And while most of what I learned was hardly revolutionary, my experience proved that St. Thérèse, the Little Flower, had it absolutely right: it is in the practice of love in the small details that we really begin to redirect the world to God's purposes.

For those seeking ideas about how to pursue the work of social justice locally, I recommend looking to four important aspects of community life. I provide below a brief illustration for each. I also offer a set of questions that can help identify where inequalities may persist and where, for some, justice is denied.

***1. Bring services to the people; do not make people come to the services.***

As mayor I discovered that state and federal government provided a number of services and help to the working poor and the destitute. This assistance, however, was often inaccessible for reasons of time and place. For those who earned their living by holding down several part-time jobs, it was a serious burden, if not impossible, to take a day off to go to the social services offices to fill out forms and meet with counselors. I learned about the inordinate amount of time people spent just waiting in government offices.

In Nebraska, the distance of rural towns from the available services presented another obstacle. For people in my town, getting help frequently required a drive of 70-plus miles. Given the lack of public transportation, individuals needed a car and money for gas or else a ride with someone else. It was obvious that to meet the needs of their clients better, agencies should schedule evening and weekend hours and/or periodically arrange to set up meetings with clients in their home towns.

In what ways could services to the disadvantaged of your community be better delivered? What can be done to deliver them more expeditiously? Are there new needs for public services that currently go unmet? Are there groups whose needs are presently underserved?

***2. Remove the obstacles that prevent people from participating in social systems.***

My city was responsible for hiring lifeguards for the summer swim season. Because of the dearth of employment opportunities, high school students from all over the area were eager to get these minimum-wage jobs. New hires had to complete a lifesaving and guard training program that was held periodically in a nearby town and that required a nominal fee. But for students from low-income families, getting to the class and paying the modest fee were barriers. The city decided to offer need-based scholarships and to arrange students' transportation to the classes on the senior citizens' bus. While the city could not discriminate in hiring, it could at least level the playing field for all who were seeking the summer jobs.

What are some of the obstacles (like lack of affordable day care, cheap transportation, low wages, need for updated job skills) that hinder people from taking a more active role in your local economy? Do all community members have equal access to the political process? Are there barriers to voting? Are certain groups excluded from the area's cultural attractions and other services (like parks, libraries, clinics and hospitals)? What action needs to be taken to eliminate such barriers?

***3. Exercise a preferential option for the poor and disad-***

***vantaged by representing their perspectives in the development and implementation of local policies and programs.***
The church's social documents rarely state the obvious truth: in order to adopt a Catholic social point of view, one must first learn to listen to the poor and come to understand how people on the margins see themselves and their lives. An all too common sin of public officials, service providers and well-meaning community activists is to assume that they know how the poor think. Time and again I learned that this was not the case.

One of my efforts as mayor was to be as accessible to the people as I could. It was important to them to be listened to, that someone in authority heard their views. As I listened, I discovered that while many did not expect me to remove the inequalities and roadblocks they faced, they did want me to see and understand their problems. Above all, they expected me to bring this understanding to any decisions about policies and programs that I might make. In short, I was expected to be their advocate and voice at all of those public hearings and meetings where for good reasons—not for lack of interest, as many supposed—they themselves could not be physically present.

How can Catholics in your community make a preferential option for the poor in the coming elections? What candidates support the church's social justice agenda? Are there ballot initiatives that discriminate against certain groups within the community? Are there legislative issues directly affecting the working poor and immigrants that Catholic citizens should urge elected officials to support?

***4. Keep the information flowing, and find ways to keep people connected.***
It is amazing that in this age of instant communication, perhaps the most difficult challenge I faced had to do with information: getting into the information loop and connecting others to it and then, once in, keeping abreast of the data flow. Very early I found that because we were a small jurisdiction, located far from the state capital, decisions affecting our town were regularly made without the benefit of our input. We were either overlooked, or pertinent information was late in getting out to us.

But if being left out of the information loop was a problem, it was also a mistake to presume that everyone was in touch and connected to the same information sources. Keeping in contact with the townspeople required multiple strategies. Many people living on fixed incomes did not subscribe to the local newspaper, and the nearest television station had no interest in giving our town coverage because it is 70 miles away. Since only a minority of households had computers, online bulletin boards were of limited use. A typical and effective way to get people's attention was to post notices on the windows of local businesses and on the

bulletin board at the post office and the bank. I also spent many hours in the restaurants and bars talking to people, which proved a valuable way of taking the pulse of the citizenry.

Sometimes information was so sketchy or distilled that it was meaningless. This was true of the program descriptions prepared for the innumerable brochures and pamphlets handed out by service providers and government agencies. There were some troubling instances when information was deliberately withheld. This was the case with a company with whom the city had an exclusive contract to provide cable television service. While the contract required that an inexpensive package be offered to low-income residents, the company did not include this special rate in their published price schedules.

Is everyone in your community connected to the major information sources? Is Internet access readily available to your population? Is important information provided in a clear, easily digestible form? Do low-income members of the community know how to get legal aid assistance? What formal opportunities are there for different groups within the community to interact?

**TO BE HONEST, I WAS RELIEVED** when my mayoral duties came to an end. To do such work takes vast amounts of time, humility, patience, a thick skin and a good sense of humor. Despite the challenges, I came away with a clearer grasp of what lay Catholics can do to renew society and its institutions. But the dearth of attention parishes give to promoting and then preparing laypeople for such indispensable work has been a continuing disappointment. How often does one hear homilies treating the great themes of Catholic social ethics: the dignity of work, the obligation to care for creation, the rights and duties associated with life in community? When and where are laypeople educated in the practical ways of using their learning, professional expertise and gifts of the Spirit to root out the conditions that give rise to hunger, homelessness and discrimination?

Pastors' lack of attention to the laity's work of faithful citizenship is unfortunate. As I learned, transforming community is not impossible; what seem to be intractable problems need not be so if they can be addressed at their origins and in their local permutations. My hope is that what I have recounted here will encourage others to take a good look at their own communities. I hope that once they have educated themselves in the principles of the church's social tradition, they will join with their fellow Catholics to apply themselves to breaking the structures of sin that burden and oppress so many of their neighbors. Such an effort is a right response to the Gospel's call to love and solidarity. It is in serving the common good that lay Catholics serve the coming of God's kingdom. A

**Poetry**

# The Foley Poets: An Encomium

**BY JAMES S. TORRENS**

ART BY STEFANIE AUGUSTINE

ONCE MORE THE Foley poetry contest has run its course. Entries came streaming in, not just from faraway places—Austria, India, Australia, Ireland, Kenya—but from American towns quite unfamiliar, such as Dripping Springs, Tex. These contemplations, memories and musings arrived as a welcome change of pace while **America**'s poetry editor was cribbed in a jury box for most of Lent.

A striking number of submissions came from women religious. Piety does not automatically make for fine poetry, but when artistry enhances life experience it certainly can. Rose Marie Quilter, R.S.C.J., speaks of the Incarnation as one of God's games, specifically Hide and Seek. She writes: "One fine day, the Holy One,/ (incorrigibly scheming)/ leapt into our own clay." Marie Vianney Bilgrien, S.S.N.D, in the rooms of Saint Ignatius in Rome, is surprised by a marker: "The bust is at the height of Ignatius of Loyola." Five foot two herself, she finds her eyes even with his. You don't have to be tall to be a saint! Sister Rafael Tilton, O.S.F., pictures the Radon Mines in Montana, "raining uranium," as a basilisk portending doom to the whole county around.

William Matthews, a New York City poet recently deceased, once wrote "a short but comprehensive summary" of all the subjects for lyric poetry. It starts: "I went out into the woods today and it made me feel, you know, sort of religious." The Foley poems that are set in the natural world hold their own gamely against this urban sarcasm. I enjoyed, for example, these opening lines of "Mother Earth," by Christina Ward:

*The soil is my flesh,*
*The trees and plants are my hair.*
*The rocks are my bones,*
*My breath is the air.*

In many of the poems received, what stands out may be simply a phrase or a line. Robbie Robinson writes from his confinement: "Prison is like a dream eater." Katelynn Campbell claims, in "Books," "If I can't read/ I will scream" and quips, "Maybe I'll be/ a librarian." Jeffrey Starbuck muses, "There is a secret Wind which/ breathes us all." Francis McGarry, in his "Litany of the Catechumens," includes the "balding bureaucrat/ who eats laxatives for a snack." And the Rev. Richard Rento, in "Oceans of Life," comes up with a wonderful phrase for our restlessness: "that fluid mass of determined agitation."

How can a poem go wrong that opens and concludes thus: "My Beautiful Old Mysterious God" ("You," by Carol Donohue)? Another gem is in Emily Loretta Robinson's "Encomium": "There is so much music/ In the air of New Orleans/ You can hold up a trumpet/ And it will play itself." A few poems proposed a humorous or distinctive list—"The Junk Drawer," by Shelia Kinneer Pook, Michael Kubiak's account of all that has slipped through his pockets and Sandra Murray's spirited survey of the vegetables alive in her garden.

Kenneth Koch, in *Wishes, Lies and Dreams*, his genial book about how to get children writing poetry, mentions "I wish" as the earliest and most elementary category to stimulate them. Here is an adult "I wish" by Marianne Jones of Thunder Bay, Ontario:

*i wish i was floating in a painting by Chagall*
*my hair weightless as clouds,*
*waving my white angel feet at the trees below*

The Foley poetry contest this year, for the first time in its history, has a Jesuit as the winner. His poem earned that distinction; the judges, however subject to fallibility, found it simply the best. The three runners up will appear in later issues of **America**.

An audio interview with the poet Michael F. Suarez, S.J., at americamagazine.org/podcast.

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The editors of **America** are pleased to present
the winner of the 2008 Foley Poetry Award,
given in honor of William T. Foley, M.D.

# Going...

*"Sometimes I think that Jesus must have been on the train."*

—Lost Property auctioneer

Who left them and how did they walk down
the long platform at Reading or at Slough?
Did they abandon their trusty wheelchairs
or throw down their crutches and take the stairs
unaided for the first time in years, then hop
into a waiting van and say, "Let's shop
for dancing shoes at McMurray's
on the way?" Did they arrive and hurry
up the nursing-home drive shouting, "I'm out of here!
Pack up my stuff and buy everyone a beer
on me?" Travel is a marvel, I know,
but how could they up and out on their own
without braces or canes, not noticing they walked
without walkers, leaving passengers to talk
of miracles or fraud, and why didn't they
telephone to get their trophies and say
"I've got to explain," and "Who was that nice conductor
who came to my aid and helped me off the floor
and said 'Walk and fall no more,' and were
there any witnesses so I can be sure
of this business? Mind you, I don't mean to complain,
though while I'm on the line I'll mention the train
was more than forty-five minutes late."
It's hard to win when the world knows you'll fail—
Did even one return to thank British Rail?

***Michael F. Suarez***

**MICHAEL F. SUAREZ, S.J.**, teaches English at Fordham University and Campion Hall, Oxford.

# Walking Through the Rainbow

## Olafur Eliasson's mist and mirrors

BY LEO J. O'DONOVAN

When Olafur Eliasson installed his work "The Weather Project" in the Turbine Hall of London's Tate Modern in winter 2003, more than two million people thronged to see it: a giant golden orb hung at the end of the 500-foot-long hall. Actually it was a semicircular steel frame 50 feet in diameter with 200 yellow sodium lights, but its shape was doubled to a full yellow aureole by 300 mirrored ceiling panels overhead. Many among the enthralled public lay on the floor and basked in the light, as a soft mist resembling a London fog was pumped into the hall. Sometimes the viewers themselves formed patterns that could be seen in the ceiling.

Now the Danish-Icelandic artist is having his largest survey to date and his first major show in the United States: "Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson." The exhibition originated at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art under the direction of Madeleine Grynsztejn. The New York show—displayed exuberantly as a single exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art and at P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center—is curated by Klaus Biesenbach and Roxana Marcoci. Currently Eliasson's works offer some of the most contemplative and enjoyable spaces in New York City.

At the Museum of Modern Art through June 30, the show goes to the Dallas Museum of Art (Nov. 9, 2008, to March 15, 2009); the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago (April to September 2009); and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia (dates to be determined).

The New York curators have also mounted a smaller exhibition, "Geometry of Motion 1920s/1970s," that recalls some of Eliasson's artistic forebears. In the 1920s, for example, László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946) was making subtly balanced geometric abstractions that expanded the palette of Russian Constructivism. An abstract film by Hans Richter (d. 1976) has an uncanny affinity with Eliasson's "Remagine" at P.S. 1. In the 1970s, Gordon Matta-Clark's architectural projects, in which he opened wells of light into abandoned buildings, presaged some of Eliasson's more elaborate engineering

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"TAKE YOUR TIME"

pieces. Robert Irwin's "light and space" work was perhaps most influential. His "Untitled" (1968), for example, has spotlights illuminating a slightly convex, pearly white disk to form overlapping circular shadows of white and gray on a white background.

Olafur Eliasson draws on these and other movements, such as kinetic, op and conceptual art, but in his own distinctive way makes the mundane magical. With materials ranging from light, water, moss and earth to steel, mirrors, strobe lights and fluorescent panels, Eliasson creates immersive environments that one experiences bodily as well as visually. (The live reindeer moss hanging fragrantly on a wall at the Modern will age naturally and change color throughout the exhibition.)

"Legibility" is also critical for Eliasson—however dazzling a piece may be, viewers usually realize how it is made. "Olafur's work," writes Madeleine Grynsztejn, "is first about a 'Wow!'" and then about 'Ah hah!'" It is grounded radically in temporality, for both aesthetic and social reasons. The artist wants visitors to be able to step out of the generalized time of a commodity culture and into themselves.

The new work installed in the central gallery of P.S. 1 in Long Island City, Queens, N.Y., "Take Your Time" (also the name of the exhibition), is a huge circular mirror mounted to the ceiling at a 6 degree angle; it makes one complete rotation every two minutes (pg. 25). As a viewer, you want first to find yourself in it, follow its soft motion, and locate other viewers both in it and beside you. A shared experience of space and time occurs, a charged calm at once disorienting and embracing.

The interaction of people with people, as well as with the artwork, is close to the artist's central concern. Influenced by the phenomenology of philosophers Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Luc Nancy, Eliasson emphasizes the activity of the perceiving subject in community with other subjects. One stands within his installations, feels them and often hears them, as well as seeing them. It is an art that requires participation by subjects in common—your shadow mixes with other shadows, your reflection is neighbor to other reflections, the rainbow you walk through is like mine but cannot be exactly the same. And it is an art that invites free engagement over the course of time.

"Ventilator" (1997) is Eliasson at his most playful. An electric fan hangs alone from the ceiling, propelled in great unpredictable arcs through a space that it seems to be constantly creating for itself anew. If you are lucky, you will see it on an uncrowded day, when delighted children chase the fan in circles or leap unsuccessfully to catch it. (See if you don't have the same urge.)

In "I Only See Things When They Move" (2004), a bright light shines through rotating panels of color-effect filter glass and casts a constantly shifting rainbow of colors onto the walls of the square gallery; visitors' shadows add dark drama to the scene (pg. 26). The work "360 Degree Room for All Colours" (2002) evokes 19th-century panoramas, but with an encircling wall of light that pulses through a range of whites, shocking

pinks and lavender; pale greens and blues, gold and white again (pg. 27). As the colors sweep through their spectrum, you become aware of their afterimages—yellow, for example, evoking its contrary purple—and the fact that the artist's program (which takes 30 minutes in its entirety) is arranged so that the colors never cancel one another.

Some of Eliasson's work deals with darkness and the night. In "Your Strange Certainty Still Kept" (1996), five faucets drop a light curtain of water from the ceiling of a black room. Water drops, illuminated by strobe lights, appear frozen in midair, recalling a night sky and distant stars. In "1 M3 Light" (1999), a dark room is filled with fog, one cubic meter of which is defined by the beams of 24 spotlights. (If you step into the space, you won't cast a shadow.) Loveliest of all, in "Beauty" (1993) a soft mist falls from the ceiling of another dark room, and a spotlight shining obliquely through it creates an indoor rainbow. During my visit it was a sweep of muted browns and maroons, but mesmerizing nonetheless. The colors dance in the mist and the artist encourages you to walk through them; you don't get very wet. (In an interview with the German magazine Der Spiegel, Eliasson wryly observed: "My art isn't very market friendly. Who buys rainbows?")

Eliasson's art is fundamentally experimental. At P.S. 1, "Model Room" (2003), made of mixed media models and maquettes, suggests how the artist and his collaborators, some 40 of them, study various materials and forms. From his many trips to Iceland over the years, gridded photographic suites of glaciers, rivers, islands, caves and horizons reveal not only his love for that stark landscape but also the inspiration it has provided him through its bare display of continuity and change.

One of the many laudatory reviews of the exhibition was headlined "Stand Still; A Spectacle Will Happen." But Eliasson has consciously set his course against the spectacular, the art of excess scale and dramatic effect. He sees the museum not as a place of passive entertainment but as a forum for reflective common experience that can free its visitors from conformity and convention. ("My real subject is people," he told Der Spiegel.) This is why he tries to present works that cause us to wonder how they are made. "It is crucial," he wrote in 2001, "that experience is presented undisguised to the spectator.... Otherwise, our most generous ability to see ourselves seeing, to evaluate and criticize ourselves and our relation to space, has failed, and thus so has the museum's socializing potential."

Eliasson was born in 1967 to Icelandic parents living in Copenhagen. After they separated, he lived with his mother in Denmark and visited his artist father in Iceland. He studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, earned a degree and opened a studio in Berlin. For 15 years his work has been exhibited internationally, showing at the Modern in New York in 2001 and representing Denmark at the Venice Biennale in 2003.

Still in mid-career, Eliasson is completing plans for a public art project that will be New York's largest since Christo and Jeanne-Claude's "The Gates" in 2005 in Central Park. Beginning in late June, four enormous waterfalls will pour into the waters around the city, ranging in height from 60 to 131 feet. They are to remain in place for three months. One will be at the Brooklyn Bridge. Eliasson wants to draw attention to New York's water, and boat tours have been organized; but he hopes visitors will come on foot as well, to marvel at the great harbor that first gave the city life. Enchantment lies ahead.

*Note: A fully illustrated catalogue is available:* Take Your Time: Olafur Eliasson, *edited by Madeleine Grynsztejn (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2007).* A

***Page 25:*** *Olafur Eliasson, "Take Your Time," 2008. Photograph by Matthew Septimus. Courtesy of MoMA and P.S. 1.*

***Page 26:*** *Olafur Eliasson, "I Only See Things When They Move," 2004. Photo by Fabian Bergfield, photoTECTONICS. Courtesy the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York.*

***Page 27:*** *Olafur Eliasson, "360 Degree Room for All Colours," 2002. Private collection; Courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York.*

A slideshow of Olafur Eliasson's work, at americamagazine.org /slideshows.

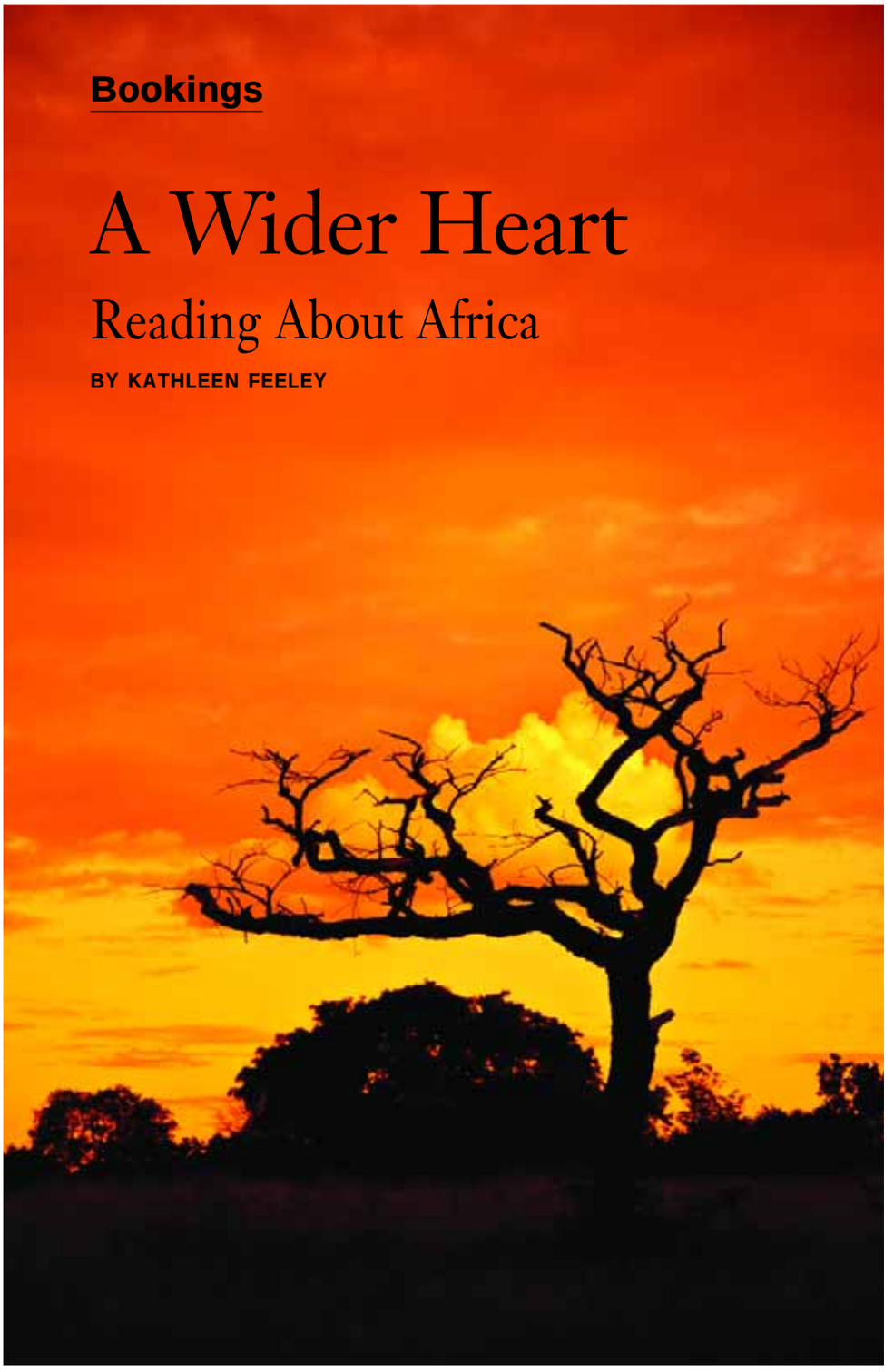
"I ONLY SEE THINGS WHEN THEY MOVE"

"360 DEGREE ROOM FOR ALL COLOURS"

# A Wider Heart

## Reading About Africa

BY KATHLEEN FEELEY



*The world stands out on either side*
*No wider than the heart is wide.*

—"Renascence"
Edna St. Vincent Millay

RECENTLY, A FRIEND of mine, a professional woman, sent me an e-mail message that she was going to Spain for vacation. Knowing that Spain was almost contiguous to Africa, she checked a map to see if Ghana was near enough to make a detour for a quick visit. She found that it wasn't.

Africa is *terra incognita* for many, if not most, Americans. It was for me when I came to Africa, almost five years ago, to teach at the newly established Catholic University College of Ghana. Since then, I have been learning about some of the countries on this continent, the second largest in the world. Initially, I studied the map of Africa and tried to learn the countries' locations. Then I discovered "a more excellent way." I read novels and memoirs set in different countries, and people in their particular settings came alive in my imagination. I began to "learn" Africa, and I found that learning leads to love. My heart was becoming wider.

So I suggest that if you are a member of a book club or community book group, you encourage your group to choose "The Year of Africa" as the theme for next year. Perhaps my reading experiences would be helpful to your group in choosing books to read and discuss. Even if you don't belong to a book group, read on.

*Purple Hibiscus*, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adiichie (Harper Perennial), opens with a few words that show the young author's debt to Nigeria's famed Chinua Achebe: "Things started to fall apart at home...." The voice is that of a 15-year-old Nigerian girl, torn between allegiance to her father, a God-figure whose authoritarian rule of the family is cruel and heartless, and her father's sister, a liberated, joyous Catholic woman whose life demonstrates true Christianity. Both were strongly influenced by Catholic missionaries, but the influence produced totally different results. The Nigerian scene comes alive: village life and customs; animist religion; corruption; the Nigerian church; civil strife. A coming-of-age novel, it excels in the characterization of the four key women.

Algeria is the setting of *Letters From the Desert*, by Carlo Carretto (Orbis Books). A spiritual classic, it describes life in the Algerian desert, which Carretto embraced when he left his native Italy to join the Little Brothers of Jesus. The letters tell a little about how to live in the desert; they tell much about how the desert encourages contemplation; and they offer insights on the basic harmony between nature and human nature. The language is clear and evocative. Such metaphors as "[w]e are the wire; God is the electric current. Our only power is to let the current pass through us" are arresting and powerful. Caretto left the desert

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PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/ SHUTTERVISION

after 10 years, bringing desert spirituality back to Italy.

*Acts of Faith*, by the Pulitzer Prize-winner Philip Caputo (Vintage), is a fascinating novel. Strong on characterization, with an intricate plot, it paints a vivid picture of the setting, which is primarily southern Sudan but with some scenes in northern Sudan and neighboring Kenya. I learned much and came to understand the cause of the 21-year civil war in the country; the novel presents both sides of the conflict, along with romance, intrigue and sudden death. The author writes from a solid background of experience in Africa.

One sees the same country from another angle in *God Grew Tired of Us* (National Geographic), a memoir by one of the "lost boys" of Sudan. John Bul Dau tells his story, from fleeing his village in Darfur to his arrival and resettlement in the United States. He and thousands of other boys trekked across the width of Sudan to reach the camps set up by the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations. The trials and terrors of their flight make bitter reading, and one wonders how they could have survived all the deprivations. The resilience of youth and the determination of the human spirit to survive shine through in countless ways.

Although not as recent as other books mentioned, *The Poisonwood Bible* (Harper Perennial) is a classic study of a wrong-headed missionary effort in the Belgian Congo, along with an equally wrong-headed interference by the United States in the politics of the country. Barbara Kingsolver's literary prowess makes this novel a literary feast, as she tells the story in the unique voice of each of the benighted missionary's four daughters, and frames the story with reminiscences by his wife. One views a missionary family in a small village against the backdrop of Congo's changing political scene, and the missionary establishment's reaction to it. The political and religious experiences of the family decisively influence the adult lives of the three daughters who survive.

*Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust* (Hay House), is the memoir of a survivor of the war between the Hutu and the Tutsi. Immaculée Ilibagiza, a Tutsi, tells of the massacre of her family and her neighbors, and recounts her finding a hiding place in the small bathroom at a Christian pastor's

home. Into this cramped space seven other women came to hide with her. A harrowing tale, it is at the same time a tale of redemption, as her captivity turns her to God in the most contemplative way. She learns to pray, to forgive and to seek out the mission God has for her in the world. After reading the book, I came to a deeper understanding of the brutality of ethnic cleansing, and a new realization of the power of God's grace to instill forgiveness of the enemy.

The small, little-known country of Botswana comes to life through the extraordinary tales of Alexander McCall Smith, beginning with *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* (Anchor Books). The first of a series, this novel introduces the character of Precious Ramotswe, who dubbed herself a lady detective and set up her agency by selling the legacy her father had left her—a big herd of cattle. Her fiancé, Mr. J. L. B. Matakoni, becomes her husband as the series develops. He owns and manages a car repair shop; his lazy apprentices provide some of the humor. In his interaction with Mma Ramotswe, one learns much about the mores of Botswana. In their adventures, they lead the reader over the country's terrain. The reader becomes fully engaged while following the problems this detective confronts. A refreshing read, the book shows the simple and profound philosophy of life that underlies the decisions of the detective, her enterprising secretary and her faithful mechanic.

If you do not belong to a book group, and cannot read all these books, choose *This Our Exile*, by James Martin, S.J. (Orbis Books). It is a spiritual memoir of the two years that Martin, then a Jesuit scholastic, spent in Nairobi, Kenya, working with refugees. Do you recognize the title? I had to run through a few prayers until I reached the phrase, in the Hail, Holy Queen. The book describes the many problems of expatriates in a foreign country, the plight of the refugees and their methods of coping with life, and the ambience of Nairobi and its slum area, Kibera, the largest slum in the world. The narrative is laced with humor, and readers will find themselves laughing aloud. Martin captures the rhythm of the English that the refugees—and indeed many in Africa—speak, with its ongoing present tense: "I am having my work finished soon."

Reading about the situations of people in African countries proves both informative and enlightening; it also widens the reader's heart. One can love only what one knows. In the books cited above, each country comes alive—individual and real and connected to the reader. No longer, then, will one speak of Africa as if it were a single country.

I hope that in your book club discussions of these moving and provocative books, you will find a new world opening up. The problems of Africa, well documented in the news media, will now be put in balance by what you have learned about the culture of the various countries, and the values of the ordinary people who have come to life for you. Perhaps the end of your book club's "Year of Africa" will find you and your fellow readers ready to take on another area of the world, so that the horizons of your hearts will continue to widen. A

# A Desperate Reality

## A Grave in Gaza

### An Omar Yussef Mystery

By Matt Beynon Rees

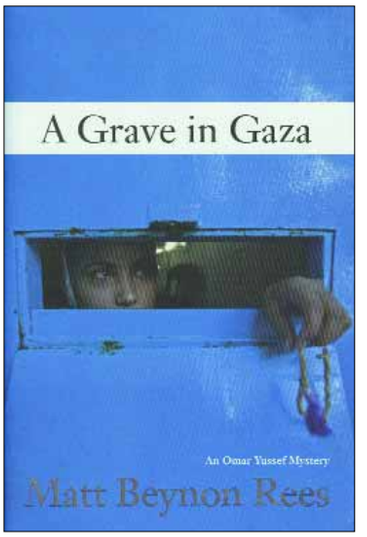
*Soho Crime. 368p $24*
*ISBN 9781569474723*

Omar Yussef Sirhan, Palestine's cantankerous but lovable detective, is back, determined as ever to investigate and rectify the injustices he encounters. The star of Matt Beynon Rees's mystery series first appeared in Bethlehem, where he reckoned with Palestinian gunmen ruling the streets of his beloved hometown. Now the foppish, middle-aged, former history teacher is in the Gaza Strip, unraveling a network of criminality that extends from the arms-smuggling tunnels of the Rafah refugee camp to the gaudy mansions of corrupt government officials in Gaza City.

A veteran journalist and former Jerusalem bureau chief for Time, Rees recently left full-time reporting for what he considers the more revealing genre of mystery fiction, compelled by a desire to report deeper truths. *The Collaborator of Bethlehem*, the first book in his mystery series, received rave reviews for its intimate and vivid portrait of Palestinian life and was nominated for the 2007 Quill Award. Rees's second mystery is equally striking. Inaccessible Gaza, often dismissed as a desperate trap of poverty and violence, comes to life in this head-spinning tale of intrigue and deception.

After his former boss is killed by a bomb, Omar Yussef becomes the principal of a U.N. school in Bethlehem, where he teaches. He and Magnus Wallender, a Swede working for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, go to Gaza to inspect its U.N. schools. Upon arrival, they discover that Preventive Security, the Palestinian secret police, have arrested Eyad Masharawi, an education professor at al-Azhar University and part-time teacher at a U.N. school, and accused him of collaborating with the C.I.A. His wife, Salwa, is convinced her husband is in jail for publicly criticizing the university's sale of degrees to members of Preventive Security.

With the help of James Cree, a U.N. security officer, Omar Yussef and Wallender set out to procure Masharawi's release. But their mission is quickly derailed. The Saladin Brigade, Gaza's most powerful gang, kidnaps Wallender. After a U.N. vehicle is bombed, the agency pulls its foreign staff from Gaza, leaving Omar Yussef alone to obtain the release of his colleagues.




Gaza, sealed off from the rest of the world, is a place of intricate lawlessness, at war with itself. Military Intelligence and Preventive Security, the government's main security forces, are vying for power and will use any means necessary—like torture, extrajudicial executions—to prove they control the anarchic Palestinian territory. Complicating their deadly rivalry is the factionalized, arms-smuggling Saladin Brigade. They too want to be players in Gaza's paltry power game. Against the advice of his old friend Khamis Zeydan, Bethlehem's alcoholic police chief and a former P.L.O. militant, Omar Yussef navigates and manipulates these hazardous divisions to untangle eventually the links between Eyad's imprisonment, Wallender's abduction, a stolen missile and a desecrated grave.

*A Grave in Gaza* is not a tale of tidy parlor-room murders. Killings are numerous and gruesome, based on real events in the Gaza Strip. The kidnapping of the BBC journalist Alan Johnston, who was captured in Gaza last spring amid the Fatah/Hamas civil war, inspired Wallender's abduction. Omar Yussef's task is to encounter "this dirty world and retain his decency, even his life." In Gaza, the "dirt" is literally everywhere (a sandstorm rages throughout his investigation). It is in the crowded refugee camp, where the toxic combination of poverty and violence has convinced the young that death is a relief, and in the cruel pragmatism of government officials who argue that respect for law and human rights will come after the "wicked occupation" has ended. Amid this cynicism and despair, Omar Yussef retains his humanity and rejects Palestinian victimhood as a justification for the territory's lawlessness.

Rees has been likened to the American mystery writer Dashiel Hammitt. The comparison pleases the Welsh-born author, who hopes to do for the Palestinian Territories what Ham-mitt did for San Francisco—make it a place that interests us. Gaza clearly matters to Omar Yussef, who realizes that this strip of land—rather than Bethlehem—represents "the desperate reality of the Palestinian people." With him we choke on Gaza's dust, savor the scent of its *foule* and listen to the confessions of men who behave criminally for reasons we can understand. "I'm not a monster, Abu Ramiz. I'm a politician," confides the president of al-Azhar University, whose deadly double dealings are motivated by both greed and a desire to preserve the Israeli/Palestinian peace talks.

Years of interviewing Palestinians has enriched Rees's story with authentic and luminous dialogue. As in any good detective tale, confessions abound, but more than the particulars of a crime are revealed. To the fiercely honest Omar Yussef, Gazans confide their fear of death, their frustrations with the present and their doubts about self-governance. This Palestinian commentary, notably missing in American mainstream coverage of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, elevates Rees's story from entertaining thriller to significant literature.

But Gaza is no San Francisco, a city allowed to flourish or fail on its own mer-

## The Reviewers

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its. A "zoo," a "concentration camp in the desert," is how some Palestinians describe the 360-square kilometer Strip that Israel has kept hermetically sealed since Hamas seized power in June 2007. During the past year this "zoo" has endured a U.S.-fomented civil war (see David Rose's exposé in Vanity Fair, April 2008), dire power and water shortages, and a recent Israeli invasion—launched in retaliation for months of Hamas rocket fire—that killed 106 Palestinians in a week. Half the victims were noncombatants.

Amid these spectacular violations of human rights, Omar Yussef's investigation of Palestinian criminality seems poignantly noble and myopic. He is like the prisoner who insists his fellow inmates sweep their cells and wash their hands before receiving starvation rations. While such hygiene is vital, justice, in the case of Gaza, would be better served if the prison were dismantled.

***Claire Schaeffer-Duffy***

# Affording Old Age

## The Longevity Revolution

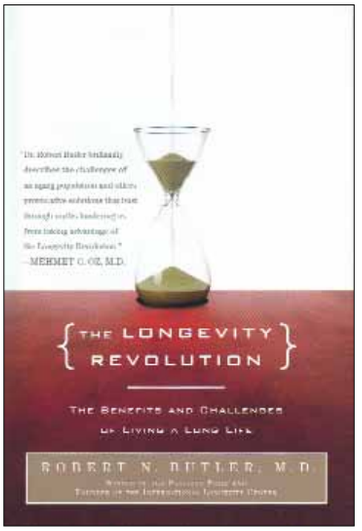
### The Benefits and Challenges of Living a Long Life

By Dr. Robert N. Butler, M.D.
*PublicAffairs. 608p $30*
*ISBN 9781586485535*

Robert Butler is the nation's pioneer in directing attention to the promises and issues raised by aging and the increasing number of older persons in America and the world. Personally, he has been a mentor during the formative stages of my career in academic medicine and geriatrics, and a wonderful example of someone who gives encouragement, direction and shrewd advice while allowing one the opportunity to grow and develop. His new book, *The Longevity Revolution*, is an impressive synthesis of what is known about aging and the prospects for the future, where throughout much of the world the largest increases in population are occurring in those well over 65. *The Longevity Revolution* is more than a book

about aging: it is a book that takes seriously themes of human solidarity, the dignity of individual lives and the challenges to care across the life span to create opportunities not just for survival but for human flourishing for young and old.

Butler's experience and knowledge are in ample evidence in this book. The first director of the National Institute of Aging, he also developed and directed the nation's first Depart-ment of Geriatrics, at Mt. Sinai Medical Center in New York, and, in his prolific work in advocacy and public policy development, coined the term "ageism" in 1968. In 1976, Butler received the Pulitzer Prize for his book *Why Survive? Being Old in America*.




Most impressive and compelling about Butler's latest book is its urgent message about caring for all persons and recognizing the dignity and value of all individuals. Behind this message are solid statistics and arguments that an aging population need not be diseased, feeble or parasitic on younger individuals. Indeed, Butler challenges many of the assumptions and downright untruths that keep politicians and policy planners in a state of panic about aging. He urges looking constructively at genuine opportunities instead of fixating on potential perils.

The term ageism means the attitude that growing old is synonymous with decline. It carries with it concomitant conceptions that an aging population is burdensome, problematic, a drain on the nation's resources, and that individual older people are greedy, demented, feeble and somehow disgusting. Butler argues against this attitude forcefully and with an encyclopedic knowledge of a vast amount of sociological, ethical, medical and basic science research about the potential and promise both for individuals and a society with increased longevity. And he performs an important service in providing valuable facts about Social Security, Medicare and other economic issues that allow reality and reason to counter the fear and inertia that characterize public policy debates regarding aging.

Also invaluable, and part of the attraction of his book, is Butler's global perspective on aging. The growth of an aging population is not limited to the United States, Western Europe and Japan. This is a worldwide phenomenon, even in a world where lives are threatened by H.I.V./ AIDS, a growing disparity in access to resources of food and water, and the ever-present scourges of war and violence. Butler argues that attention to an aging population requires a comprehensive perspective on issues of justice, distribution of resources and basic rights of freedom from coercion and exploitation. Indeed, for all those who have a concern about human rights, there must also be attention to the aging of the population worldwide and the potential of increased longevity to provide better lives for all persons.

Butler is thoroughly realistic about the problems of Alzheimer's disease and other dementia-related illnesses and provides a brief but comprehensive introduction to aging as a biological process, theories as to why we age and the potential for increasing longevity. He is critical of those who peddle ill-conceived and unsubstantiated formulas for life-span extension and recognizes that responsible efforts to increase longevity need to be distinguished from quackery and pseudo-scientific fads. His synthesis of information about Alzheimer's and his call for a massive effort to find improved treatments and a cure are a critical component of this book and should be required reading. Likewise, I personally welcome, as one of the pitifully few academically trained geriatricians in the United States, Butler's attention to the low level of funding, interest and support for the development, training and encouragement of this medical specialty. Why is care for the elderly in the United States so uneven and sometimes lacking in basic knowledge? Because aging does not receive the attention it desperately needs in the medical school curriculum, in post-graduate training of young physicians or in reimbursement for the care of older persons.

*The Longevity Revolution*, if read by public leaders, could influence positively public policy not just about older persons, but about everyone. It is a wonderful burst of reason where so many seem to prefer to lament that the sky is falling because of an aging population. Is this book perfect? No. It has some repetitions and I don't always agree with Dr. Butler's point of view, especially on the subjects of population and reproductive planning and the potential for embryonic stem cell research. What I do admire in this book, and have always admired in Dr. Butler, is his respect for different opinions and his willingness to highlight the importance of spiritual growth as part of the need for all humans as they grow and age. Although filled with facts, figures, policy recommendations and scientific theories, the book is very much worth the effort to read.

Living in a world where aging is a global phenomenon, you would be well advised to read this volume. In fact, buy two copies and send one to your representative in Congress. ***Myles N. Sheehan***

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# Letters

## Corrections and Clarifications

Thank you for publishing the article "Human Bondage" (4/14), of which I am a co-author. I have received many positive responses to it. Because of an editorial error, however, which reversed my meaning, I need to correct and clarify an important point. Once victims of human trafficking are identified as such by U.S. authorities, they do become eligible to seek legitimate employment. This right to work is the benefit they universally cherish and want to implement most quickly.

*Mary Ellen Dougherty, S.S.N.D.*
*U.S.C.C.B. Migration and Refugee Services*
*Washington, D.C.*

I must request some correction of the statement attributed to me in my essay "Jewish Views of Other Faiths" (5/19). I never wrote that the Talmud is not authoritative in Jewish law. The best corrective would be the following: "The Babylonian Talmud, while authoritative in law, liturgy and theology, is far from the final word since the Talmud is an inchoate mass of various opinions, a work and a religion in the process of development. The final crystallization of laws, liturgy and theology came much later, especially in the massive law codes and in the final editions of the prayer books."

Thank you for this important correction.

*Rabbi Gilbert S. Rosenthal*
*Executive Director*
*National Council of Synagogues*
*Needham, Mass.*

## A Picture Paints a Thousand Words

As I looked at the advertisement for military chaplains on the back cover of **America** (5/5), I had to wonder if your magazine was unwittingly presaging the future of priestly ministry.

If you look closely, you'll see a wedding band on the left hand of the chaplain pictured.

*Joseph J. McOscar*
*Greenwich, N.J.*

## Won't Get Fooled Again

I was truly amazed at how the media, **America** included ("Benedict in America," 5/12), has waxed so eloquent about the recent visit of the pope, citing his humility, his humanity and his pastoral image of the universal church. The real test is not what happens now, but when he returns to Rome and things get back to normal.

Translation: nothing will happen, because of the unwillingness and inability of the church to deal with the real issues, not the least of which is the question of human sexuality and how vital a role it plays in the lives of people, including priests. This is just one moral issue of which the church has made a muddle. As well-informed Catholics, we are neither fooled nor convinced.

*Joe Sevenliss*
*Corona, Calif.*

## Hindering Clarity

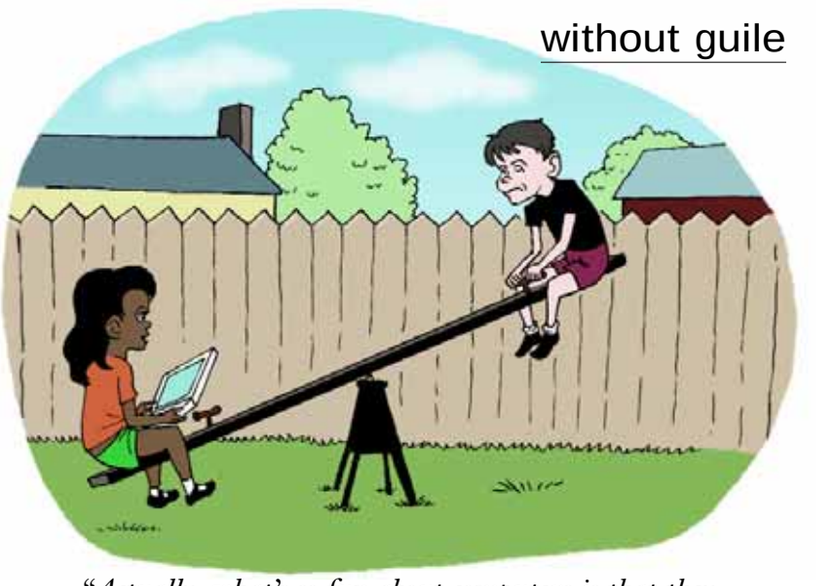
The wise and measured reflections of Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini ("Teaching the Faith in a Postmodern World," 5/12) are a healthy challenge to theology's engagement with the contemporary world, but I was surprised that his sketch of the postmodern mentality seemed less descriptive and clarifying than polemical and caricaturing. "Postmodernity" is one of those loaded words elastic enough to bear a wide range of associations, which is why it ought to be invoked with restraint.

In my teaching, I urge students to get beyond using political tags as reasons either to embrace or to dismiss certain approaches to discourse. I try to use the word "postmodern" in a neutral fashion, as simply a way to name the context in which we are presently trying to speak of God. Like any other, this context is fraught with ambiguity, and so it seems unhelpful to try to pin down the phenomenon of "postmodernity" with phrases like "distances itself from metaphysics," or "a revolt against an excessively rational mentality" or "an anti-Roman complex." No doubt such sentiments are alive and well in some quarters these days, but they do not define the present theological landscape.

Attempts at blanket definitions of what is postmodern do more to hinder clarity than to facilitate it.

*(Rev.) J. Michael Byron*
*St. Paul, Minn.*

**To send a letter to the editor** we recommend using the link that appears below articles on **America**'s Web site, www.americamagazine.org. Letters may also be sent to **America**'s editorial office (address on page 2) or by e-mail to: letters@americamagazine.org.




*"Actually, what's so fun about computers is that they allow me to make autonomous decisions and to express my growing sense of identity through my choices and preferences."*

CARTOON BY RICK PARKER

# Letters

### *Filioque* Redux

I was amazed by "Please Stand for the Creed" (Letters, 5/19), which called for "adding a few simple lines to the creed" to ensure doctrinal fidelity from politicians. This demonstrates a lack of understanding of both the hierarchy and the Nicene Creed. The last time anything was added, it was three little words about the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father "and the Son." That resulted in a perennial bone of contention among the faithful. Certainly respect for the historical statement of faith calls for something more than tacking on bulky doctrinal commentary just to show those pesky politicians.

*Charles Kinnaird*
*Birmingham, Ala.*

### Defining Democracy

I sympathize with much of "Israel at 60" (Current Comment, 5/26), which quite rightly reminds readers of the needs, plight and rights of Palestinians. But the statement that Israel is not a democracy in the Western sense is ill-conceived and misleading. It seems to presume that all Western democracies have never had any problems with minorities, unlike Israel. Say again?

The United States has never mistreated its Native American, African-American, or Latino citizens? The French, British and Germans are not currently having problems dealing with their Muslim and Arab populations? None have ever persecuted their minorities?

Israel may not be a better Western democracy than the United States, England, France or Germany, but to say it is not one of us is to miss entirely the point of what defines Western democracies.

*Eugene J. Fisher*
*Great Falls, Va.*

### Blarney?

Thomas G. Casey's "Ireland's Jewish Patron Saint" (5/26) is a lovely tribute to Ireland's "fifth province," where artistic and religious imagination join. Would that we in this country were able to manage this blend better! Not that we have been altogether bereft: consider writers like J. F. Powers and Flannery O'Connor, and theologians like William Lynch, S.J., and the Rev. David Tracy. But then, they're Irish-Americans, which perhaps explains a fair amount.

*Richard Cross*
*Bethesda, Md.*

### *Res Ipsa Loquitur*

While I have great respect for Msgr. Paul Turner, his "A New Roman Missal" (5/26) understates the impact the new liturgical translation is likely to have on those of us who are quite happy with the present Mass texts, especially the prayers and responses of the whole assembly. In fact, I believe one of the reasons for the long Vatican delay in promulgating the English translation of the Roman Missal is that they are hoping the passage of time will cool the passions of the so-called "liturgy wars."

How will church leaders effectively preclude the use of the 1975 sacramentary? They will, of course, require the use of the new missal as of a certain date; but short of some sort of book burning, individual priests will be tempted to continue using some of the older texts with which they have become so familiar. And what is to prevent the assembly from doing the same?

I remember well the consternation experienced in the late 1960s by so many older priests who had to make such a huge shift from Latin to English. But there were very good reasons for those changes. I'm afraid I am among the many who are unable to see the good reasons for the proposed new changes.

*Jack Feehily*
*Moore, Ok.*

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# A Loving and Caring God

**Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (A), June 15, 2008**

Readings: Ex 19:2-6; Ps 100:1-3, 5; Rom 5:6-11; Mt 9:36–10:8

*"We are his people: the sheep of his flock" (Ps 100:3)*

DO YOU TRUST GOD? Do you believe that God really loves and cares for you? These are central questions in the spiritual life of any Christian. They do not mean that we can expect to escape all suffering, win the lottery several times and become rich and famous, of course. The issue is more whether we trust God to be with us and for us, even in the midst of the darkest moments in our lives. Today's Scripture readings remind us that the God revealed in the Bible is always with and for us.

Today's passage from Exodus 19 sets the scene for God's self-manifestation to Moses on Mount Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments and the other stipulations in God's covenant with Israel. In what serves as the historical prologue to the Book of the Covenant in Exodus 19–24, God recalls his continuing care for Israel in liberating the people from slavery in Egypt, offers them a relationship in which they will be God's "special possession" and promises to make them "a kingdom of priests, a holy nation." The God of Mount Sinai loves and cares for his people.

Psalm 100 was composed as a call for Israel to worship God in the Jerusalem temple. It is permeated by a strong sense of God's loving care for his people as "the flock he tends." It affirms that the Lord is good, and that his kindness endures forever. The God worshiped at the Temple loves and cares for his people.

In today's reading from Matthew, Jesus as the Son of God manifests his heavenly Father's love and care. Jesus is moved with pity for his people. Because of the failures of their political and religious leaders, they have become "like sheep without a shepherd." While not ignoring the history of God's people, Jesus looks especially to the present and the future. The focus of his vision is the kingdom of God, to which he refers with an image of a harvest. He is especially aware of a need for more laborers to join him in proclaiming God's reign and in reconciling sinners to God. So he appoints 12 apostles to share and carry on his mission. Their appointment is the occasion for the Missionary Discourse in Matthew 10, the second great speech in this Gospel. In his ministry Jesus seeks to help others recognize that his heavenly Father loves and cares for his people.

In today's passage from Romans 5, Paul reflects on how Jesus in his life, death and resurrection made manifest God's love and care for humankind. According to Paul, the greatest proof of God's love and care for us was Jesus' willingness to die on behalf of sinful humankind and so make possible a new and better relationship with God. Paul's major interest in Jesus is directed to the effects of the paschal mystery. He insists that Jesus' death and resurrection have made available the benefits of justification, reconciliation and salvation to each and every person.

Do you trust God? Do you believe that God really loves and cares for you? Today's Scripture passages affirm that the God revealed on Mount Sinai, worshiped at the Jerusalem temple and incarnated in Jesus is the God who really loves and cares for us.

**DANIEL J. HARRINGTON, S.J.,** is professor of New Testament at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry (formerly Weston Jesuit School of Theology) in Chestnut Hill, Mass.

## Praying With Scripture

- How have you experienced God's love and care for you?
- Do you ever pray that God will send more laborers for the harvest? Might you be one of those laborers? How?
- What do you understand by "the people of God"? Who belongs to it? How and why?

ART BY TAD DUNNE

# Thinking Small and Big

**Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time (A), June 22, 2008**

Readings: Jer 20:10-13; Ps 69:8-10, 14, 17, 33-35; Rom 5:12-15; Mt 10:26-33

*"So do not be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows" (Mt 10:31)*

AS NEW TESTAMENT Christians we hope for right relationship with God, eternal life with God and the full coming of God's kingdom. The ground of our hope is Jesus, especially as the risen one. Nevertheless, in our everyday lives we sometimes may lose hope, perhaps not about ultimate realities but about our health and safety, about loved ones, about the future and so on. There is much to be afraid of in our world. Today's Scripture readings can help us sustain our hope by thinking on both a small and a large scale.

Sparrows, small birds that congregate in groups and make nests, were very common in the Holy Land in Jesus' time. Some people trapped and sold them. They

were very cheap, but so small they yielded very little meat. Nevertheless, poor people bought sparrows to eat and also to offer as sacrifices at the temple. The point of Jesus' saying about sparrows is that these birds were among the most insignificant creatures that people in Jesus' time and place could imagine.

Today's selection from Matthew 10 comes from near the end of Jesus' instruction to his disciples as he sends them forth to carry on his mission of preaching and healing. He was asking them to live simply and to expect opposition and rejection. Jesus holds up the image of the sparrow to reinforce the disciples' trust and hope in God.

After warning the apostles about the dangers facing them, Jesus reminds them that his loving Father, who exercises care for insignificant creatures like sparrows so that not one of them drops to the ground without God's knowledge, will surely care for them (and us). We are worth more than sparrows, and so we can trust God to love us and care for us. In this way the tiny sparrow becomes an image of hope. When we become confused, frustrated and fearful, we may find clarity and hope in this image: if God cares for sparrows, how much more does God care for us and want what is good for us.

If Jesus' image of the sparrow can help us to think small, then Paul's meditation on Adam and Christ in Romans 5 can help us to think big enough to place our hopes and fears in the broad framework of salvation history. Paul uses Adam as an image of fallen humankind, enslaved under the dominion of sin and death. He holds up Christ not only as the symbol of redeemed humankind but also as the one through whom we have been freed from sin and death and freed for life in the Spirit. Paul emphasizes that the gift of freedom given to us through Christ far surpasses Adam's transgression. As humans we all carry within us the figures of both Adam and Christ. While it is often easier to see Adam around us and in us in our everyday lives, the challenge of Christian life is to let the risen Christ shape our very self and let his life be our life. To do so, we need to think both small and big.

***Daniel J. Harrington***

## Praying With Scripture

- What frightens you most and causes you to lose hope at times?
- Do you have a special image (like the sparrow) that restores your confidence and hope?
- Where do you find Adam and where do you find Christ in your life and in the world around you?