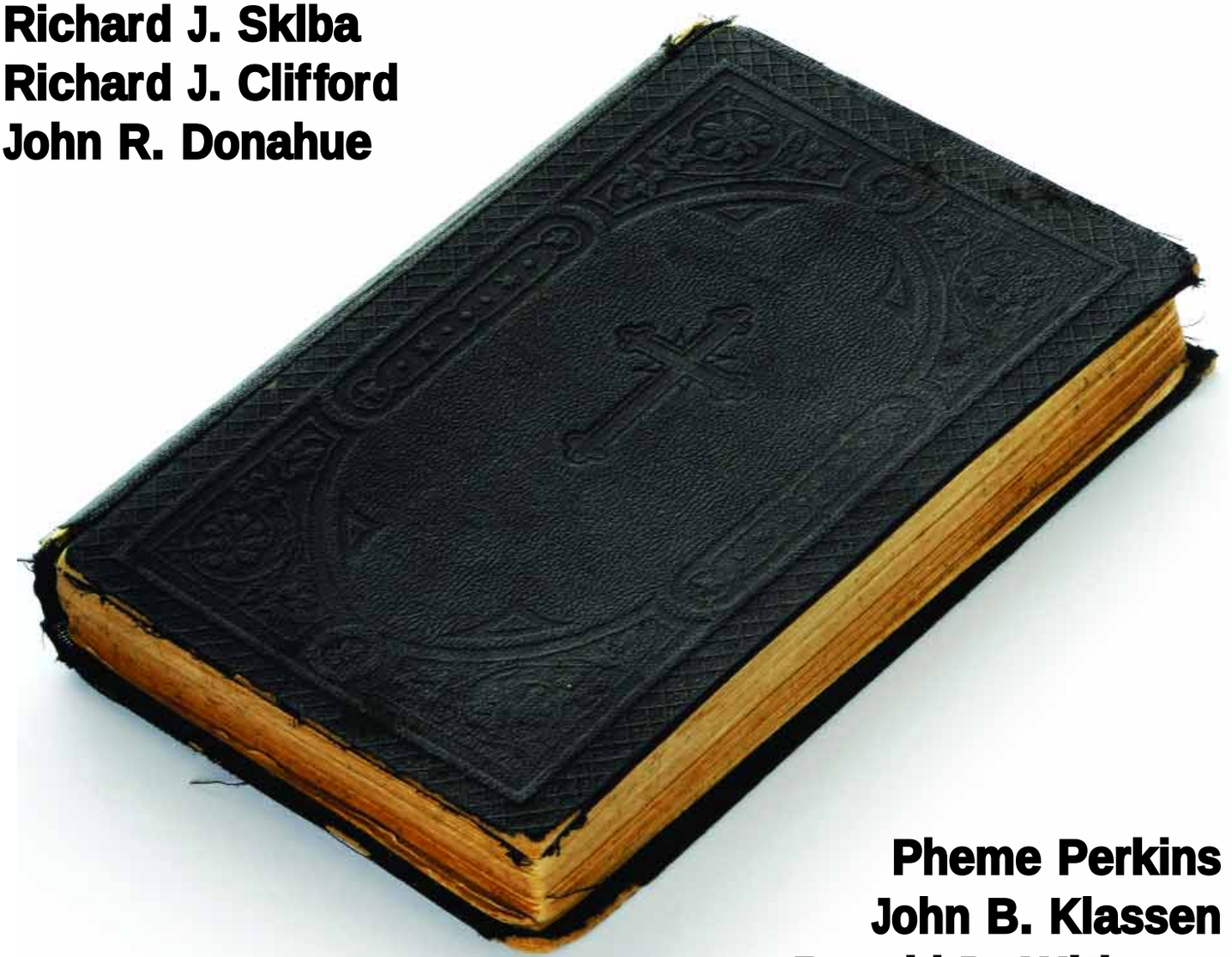
America

1909 America's CENTURY 2009

Sept. 29, 2008 THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY $2.75

The Synod on the Word

Richard J. Sklba
Richard J. Clifford
John R. Donahue



Pheme Perkins
John B. Klassen
Ronald D. Witherup

PHOTO: STATEN ISLAND BOTANICAL GARDEN

Of Many Things

SAILORS' SNUG HARBOR was a residence for retired merchant seamen located on the north shore of Staten Island along the Kill Van Kull, the narrow strait separating the island from New Jersey. Established in 1833 through a bequest by Robert Richard Randall, a wealthy New York merchant who died in 1801, the Harbor was the site of one of the most distinguished sets of Greek revival buildings in the country. When Snug Harbor was built, Richmond Terrace, the waterside avenue along the north shore, was a tree-lined boulevard populated with more Greek revival mansions, the summer residences of wealthy New Yorkers.

As a boy I visited the Harbor a few months before it closed. The farm animals that had grazed its 83 acres had been sold off, and the snugs, as the seamen were called, were preparing to depart for North Carolina, where costs were cheaper and the weather milder. What caught our boyish sense for yucky curiosities were the spittoons, a fixture of the snugs' recreation room but by then unknown in most private homes. In addition, a model ship museum and especially a collection of ships in bottles astonished us. To this day, the secret craft of building a ship in a bottle continues to fascinate me.

The Harbor lay boarded up for nearly two decades until local preservationists began raising funds to save the buildings. For 14 years my mother volunteered there, helping with bake sales, collecting admission and event tickets, and taking in the culture. There were local and national art shows, concerts and craft workshops. For a couple of seasons, the Big Apple Circus set up its tents there. Eventually, it grew as a cultural center with a museum, art galleries, a theater and artists' ateliers. Starting in 1977, the Staten Island Botanical Garden began to establish a series of thematic gardens there, the most intriguing of which is the New York Chinese Scholar's Garden.

Modeled on a 14th-century garden outside Suzhou, China, it replicates the kind of ex-urban retreats Chinese mandarins (scholar-bureaucrats) created for themselves during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties. An artful blend of architecture, plants, water and stone, the walled garden teases and pleases the imagination at every turn. There are vistas and inviting, half-hidden *aperçus*. Unpaned windows of every design frame charming views. There are porches and towers, bridges and pathways paved in changing designs made of oblong, white and black river pebbles. There is a stream, three ponds, a waterfall and a canal. In addition, there is natural stone, sometimes with the appearance of contemporary sculpture and at other times clearly part of a Chinese aesthetic intended to bring mountain landscapes inside the garden and to contrast the solidity of the stone with the fluidity of the water.

The curators provide guide boards—in English and Chinese—on the plant life, water and stone, calligraphy and architecture, so visitors can do several walkabouts with a different focus each time. I must confess that as a Westerner, I have sometimes found Chinese aesthetics, and especially its symbolism, strained; but after a couple of guided walks through the garden, I find myself taken in. The Scholar's Garden is a miniature world-within-a-world in which a harried urbanite is wrapped in tranquility and a religious Westerner easily learns the spiritual comforts of Eastern aesthetics.

Drew Christiansen, S. J.

America

Published by Jesuits of the United States

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Drew Christiansen, S.J.

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106 West 56th Street
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Ph: 212-581-4640; Fax: 212-399-3596.
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Cover photo Shutterstock/Milos Luzanin

Articles

This week @ America Connects

Drew Christiansen, S.J., previews the Synod on the Word of God on our podcast, and the editors pose questions for the first presidential debate. Plus, from the archives, the editors on *Dei Verbum*. All at americamagazine.org.

Reading Paul

One of the less dramatic, though no less necessary, issues the upcoming Synod of Bishops is likely to address is how to make the second Sunday reading intelligible to the congregation. As Pheme Perkins explains in this issue, even some well-instructed lectors do not seem to know what to make of the Pauline and other epistles that parishioners hear read on Sundays and feasts. Some exegetes favor reading longer passages to provide greater context. But longer readings by themselves will be no help without more knowledge of the early church and its theology.

Informed biblical preaching by the homilist on the epistles and Acts of the Apostles at intervals, or at the beginning and end of a given sequence of readings, might increase biblical literacy among the faithful. From time to time, a series of homilies on a particular letter or on a theological question or theme, rather than on the Gospel reading, would also contribute to greater understanding. Failing that, brief introductions, as found in many missals, could provide a minimalist solution. Of course, there is also the option given to bishops' conferences to omit one of the readings before the Gospel but that would undercut the Second Vatican Council's goal of acquainting people with more of Scripture.

The second reading represents an important part of our liturgical heritage; texts presented there amount to more than half the New Testament. Without some serious reconsideration, the proclamation of the second reading is at risk. Like the washing of the priest's hands after the preparation of the gifts, it could become a vestigial rite from another time that no longer speaks to Christians today.

Worsening Health Coverage

Poverty in the United States increased in 2007, according to the Census Bureau's annual report released on Aug. 26. A Catholic Charities USA spokesperson has said that of the 800,000 more people living in poverty, half a million are children (see **Am**. 9/15). But it is not poverty alone that has made life more difficult for many Americans. The census report also notes that health coverage for working Americans has declined. At the turn of the present century, almost 65 percent of the public was covered by employer-based insurance. But even prior to the 2008 economic downturn, that percentage had dropped to below 60 percent.

The health coverage situation would be still worse if it were not for the fact that from 2006 to 2007 the number of people who receive Medicare grew by one million. Military health coverage also increased significantly during the same period. But the biggest jump of all was in Medicaid, which increased by 1.3 million users. Ron Pollack, executive director of the nonprofit health advocacy group Families USA, has pointed out the irony in the Bush administration's attempt to cut back Medicaid. President Bush made two attempts to veto legislation intended to expand the Children's Health Insurance Program, and yet Medicaid's biggest increase was for children. The number of children covered either by the latter or by the Children's Health Insurance Program grew from 20.1 million to 20.9 million. The next president will need to tackle affordable health care as among the most pressing of domestic priorities. Health care reform is long overdue, with too many Americans looking to hospital emergency rooms as their only resource for health care.

A Neighbor in Need

The widespread poverty in Haiti has for too long stood as a stark reminder of the failure of Western powers to rescue a neighbor in need. The poorest country in the Western hemisphere, Haiti now faces almost unimaginable hardships as hurricanes have ravaged the country's crops and left tens of thousands of people displaced. The United States has offered $10 million in emergency assistance and has sent a naval ship equipped with planes and helicopters to help deliver relief to hard-to-reach areas. This is a commendable response, but Haiti will require much more help from its Western neighbors, and the United States in particular, if it is to recover from these natural disasters and emerge from the decades-long grip of poverty.

What is needed is a long-term financial commitment from Washington and other Western powers to the Haitian cause, something akin to a Marshall Plan for Haiti. Imagine leaders from the United States, Mexico and maybe even Venezuela putting aside their differences in a common mission to eradicate hunger and disease in this corner of the Caribbean. Money alone will not transform a country as politically unstable as Haiti; yet a grand humanitarian endeavor led by the United States would send a strong signal that this country is as committed to the war on poverty as it is to the so-called war on terror. Haiti is only a short flight from Florida, but for reasons of language, and perhaps race, it has too often been treated as if it were much farther away. The island upon which Columbus first set foot in the "new world" deserves more of our attention and assistance.

Editorial

The Word and Mission

THE UPCOMING SYNOD OF BISHOPS on the Word of God includes in its working document, the *instrumentum laboris* (*IL*), a phrase that will present a powerful challenge to the bishops and theologians gathered in Rome in October: "The Word of God should lead to love of neighbor." As participants discuss the general notion of "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church," they will have before them two important questions. First, how does God's Word shape the life of the individual and the community? Equally important, how does God's Word shape the mission of the individual and the community?

We hope that at this synod, mission will become a larger principle that will animate the whole discussion, as well as the apostolic exhortation that will most likely be issued sometime after the synod by Pope Benedict XVI. A careful reading of the working document reveals that in several places it lays the foundation for how the Word of God can lead to a serious commitment to mission.

The text rightly refers back to a key document of the Second Vatican Council, the "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," which emphasized that the Word of God is read in the events and signs of the times through which God manifests himself in history. The church has a duty to pay attention to these signs and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel. The working paper refers to movements and new communities of lay and religious life, as well as to particular churches in Africa and Latin America, where study and reflection on the Bible have come to the fore, as examples of communities that demonstrate that the encounter with the Word is not limited to hearing. Instead, a true appreciation of the Word of God leads to commitment by individuals and communities to the poorest of the poor, who are a sign of the Lord's presence in our midst.

As noted in a previous editorial (7/7), two topics in *IL* deserve closer attention: the importance of preaching and the value of the practice of *lectio divina* for enriching spiritual lives. Both should also lead to discussion of mission. The working document affirms that preaching should not only be faithful to the biblical text, but also provide the faithful "assistance in interpreting the events of their personal lives and historical happenings in the light of faith" (No. 37). Preachers should include pastoral considerations as they suggest applications of the text, in order to help the faithful to carry out their mission of "building the Kingdom" (No. 57). Similarly, *lectio divina* is not simply for the inner spiritual enrichment of the individual or the community. Pope John Paul II affirmed that through this practice the living Word "questions, directs and shapes our lives." The Word of God becomes the source of conversion, justice, hope, fellowship and peace. Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, "transforms the lives of those who approach him in faith" (No. 24).

The document also speaks positively of "a liberationist approach to the Bible" (No. 58), rejoicing to see the Bible in the hands of people of lowly condition. It points to the many insights that the poor can bring to the interpretation and actualization of the Word of God. *IL* then repeats a question routinely asked in Bible study groups as they reflect on Scripture passages, a question the synod will also face: "How do we go from our everyday lives to the Bible text and from the Bible text to our everyday lives?" Finally, quoting Pope Benedict's encyclical "Saved by Hope," the working document affirms that "the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known—it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing" (No. 39).

REFLECTIONS ON THE LETTER OF JAMES could add to these elements and give impetus to the synod with its strong statement on the transforming function of the Word of God for the mission of the church. We read in James that we must be not only hearers of the Word, but doers of the Word (1:19-27), and that faith that does not lead to works is dead (2:14-17).

Participants and observers alike might hope that the synod will clarify how the Word of God nourishes, strengthens and maintains the life of the Christian community. We may also hope its members give the church and the world a strong and inspiring reflection on the ability of the Word of God to press us to go further, into the realm of mission and "building the Kingdom." The vision of Vatican II's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" remains true today, and the Word of God must continue to shed light on "the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men and women of our time."

Bishop Calls for End to Immigration Raids

If federal immigration officials cannot create more "humane" conditions when making enforcement raids against undocumented immigrants, then "these enforcement raids should be abandoned," said Bishop John C. Wester of Salt Lake City, chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Migration. The raids, conducted by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement division of the Department of Homeland Security, "reveal, sadly, the failure of a seriously flawed immigration system," Bishop Wester said Sept. 10. "The humanitarian costs of these raids are immeasurable and unacceptable in a civilized society," he added. "Our current policies do little to solve the problem of illegal immigration to this country—they simply appear to do so, often at the cost of family integrity and human dignity." Bishop Wester noted that after Congress failed to pass a comprehensive immigration bill last year, Homeland Security started conducting mass raids, mostly at workplaces.

Faith-Based Investors Raise New Concerns

Members of a coalition of faith-based investors said Sept. 10 they had warned of a potential mortgage crisis 15 years ago, long before it became headline news. Now they question why more was not done to avert the crisis and have issued a whole new set of warnings on other issues that they say put not only individual investors at risk but communities as well. During a teleconference, members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility in New York highlighted practices they said are "just below the radar" that need to be addressed, including the use of sweatshop workers for major U.S. brands and retailers, continued pollution of the nation's waterways from factory-farm waste, and human trafficking. The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility is a 38-year-old international coalition of 275 faith-based institutional investors. Among them are religious communities, pension funds, health care corporations and dioceses.

"Time and time again, the prophetic voice of faith has allowed our members to anticipate emerging areas of corporate responsibility in investment policy as well as in social, economic and environmental policy," said Laura Berry, the center's executive director.

'Growing Hostility' to Rights of Conscience

Proposed regulations protecting the conscience rights of individuals and health care institutions are especially needed in light of the "growing hostility on the part of some professional organizations and advocacy groups" to those rights, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops said in public comments to the Department of Health and Human Services. The comments came in a six-page letter Sept. 12 to Brenda Destro in the H.H.S. Office of Public Health and Service from Anthony R. Picarello, U.S.C.C.B. general counsel, and Michael F. Moses, associate general counsel. Expressing "strong support for the proposed rule," the U.S.C.C.B. letter noted that an earlier leaked version of the H.H.S. proposal had prompted "negative public reaction...by pro-abortion groups and some editorial writers." It said, "The adverse reaction demonstrates, at best, a deplorable lack of understanding about the federal legislative rights of conscience on which the proposed regulations are based, at worst outright hostility to those statutory rights."

Catholics Worldwide Reach Out to Haiti

U.S. military personnel unload emergency supplies from a U.S. Navy ship in Gonaives, Haiti.

Catholic relief agencies and parishes worldwide are responding to the devastation in Haiti, which has been battered by four severe hurricanes. Caritas Internationalis, the umbrella organization for 162 national Catholic charity organizations, is seeking $4.3 million in donations for relief aid to the poorest country in the Americas. "The series of natural disasters affecting Haiti comes at a critical time, as the vast majority of the population is already struggling with rising living costs," said Patrick Nicholson, a Caritas spokesman in Vatican City. "Caritas has already begun helping the worst-affected people despite it being difficult to reach cut-off communities." Officials with the U.S. bishops' development and aid agency, Catholic Relief Services, said they are mobilizing workers in Haiti, where more than a million residents have been displaced by the storms.

Pope at Lourdes: Mary Leads to Christ

Pope Benedict XVI prepares to anoint a nun with holy oil during a Mass for the sick at the Marian sanctuaries of Lourdes, France.

Pope Benedict XVI celebrated Mass for 150,000 international pilgrims at the Marian sanctuaries of Lourdes and told them that humble prayer to Mary was a true path to Christ. The pope said Mary had appeared at Lourdes to invite everyone who suffers, physically or spiritually, to "raise their eyes toward the cross of Jesus" and recognize a love that is stronger than death or sin. "The power of love is stronger than the evil that threatens us," he said Sept. 14. The pope traveled to Lourdes, a town in the French Pyrenees, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Mary's appearances to St. Bernadette Soubirous, a 14-year-old peasant girl. After days of rain and cool weather, sunshine broke through the clouds over the pilgrims who filled a grassy field near the sanctuaries. They applauded as the pontiff processed to an altar covered with a sail-shaped canopy. In his sermon, the pope placed himself among the pilgrim population, saying he, too, had come to pray at the feet of Mary, "eager to learn from her alongside little Bernadette."

Symposium Examines Pius XII and World War II

Pope Pius XII has been demonized and his legacy of helping Jews during World War II has been poisoned by inaccurate and incomplete historical accounts, said the Jewish founder and president of Pave the Way Foundation. "We have to change history" and tell the world the truth about this wartime pope "who saved so many lives," Gary Krupp, foundation president, told Catholic News Service. He spoke at the start of a Sept. 15-17 symposium that studied the papacy of Pope Pius XII and unveiled new evidence of the pope's hidden acts aimed at saving Jews from the Nazis. The symposium, sponsored by the U.S.-based foundation, featured Catholic and Jewish speakers and video footage of interviews with people who were saved from the Holocaust through the church's intervention. Krupp said scholars and historians "have failed, they've simply failed" over the last 45 years to retrieve and present firsthand accounts from eyewitnesses.

Honored Sociologist of Religion Dies

Dean Hoge, who in the 34 years since he first joined the faculty of The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., became one of the country's experts in the sociology of religion, died Sept. 13 at age 71 after a long struggle with cancer. Though not himself a Catholic, Hoge was a leading scholar of the American Catholic Church.

A memorial service was scheduled for Sept. 27 at the Takoma Park Presbyterian Church in Takoma Park, Md., a Washington suburb. Hoge was a professor in the department of sociology at Catholic University from 1974 until his recent retirement. From 1999 until 2004, he was director of the university's Life Cycle Institute. He wrote over 20 books on American religious life and was also a frequent and valued contributor to **America**.

From CNS and other sources. CNS photos.

Cautious Optimism Over Deal in Zimbabwe

The power-sharing deal signed by Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe and the opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai is a "most welcome development," a church official said. The deal, by which Mugabe and the opposition will wield equal power in a unity government aimed at ending the southern African country's political and economic crisis, "provides a structure for service delivery that we desperately need," said the Rev. Frederick Chiromba, secretary general of the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference, in a Sept. 16 telephone interview. "It also puts a structure in place to begin the constitution-making process that the bishops have called for," said Father Chiromba, who watched the Sept. 15 signing of the agreement at Harare's convention center.

Forced Conversions of Christians in Orissa

Suresh Nayak, a Catholic from the Kandhamal district of the state of Orissa in India, cannot overcome the experience of being forced, under threat of death, to convert to Hinduism. "We lost everything, but the humiliating ceremony to disown our Christian faith still haunts me," Nayak said at a refugee camp in Cuttack, about 20 miles from Bhubaneswar, Orissa's capital. Thousands of Christians in the region have been subjected to conversion ceremonies under threat of violence and death, said the Rev. Mrutyunjay Digal, secretary to the archbishop of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar. In many places Christians are required to burn Bibles and join in torching churches or the houses of other Christians to prove they have forsaken Christianity. Church activists have confirmed that 28 Christians, most of them Catholics, have been killed by Hindu mobs in Kandhamal after a prominent Hindu leader was murdered Aug. 23. Maoists have claimed responsibility for the killings, but Hindu radical groups continue to blame Christians.

Thoughts From a Spiritual Toolkit

‘What a wonderful device an apostolic lens might be.’

THERE ARE GALES of laughter in the community room of the Jesuit retreat house. One of the senior team members there is a keen photographer. He has just been out for a long walk on the hills in search of photo opportunities. Specifically, he has been trying to catch some good shots of the local bird population. A colleague asks him how the project is going. He is only too eager to enlighten us all and adds, with a convincing air of technological savoir-faire, that he has been able to get some spectacular results using his “apostolic lens.” We dissolve in merriment at this Freudian slip. Perhaps that is what comes of trying to live the principle of turning contemplation into action. My Jesuit friend has managed to discover the secrets of his apostolate in the depths of his digital camera.

He does not need to clarify the fact that, of course, he means his telescopic lens. But it sets me thinking what a wonderful device such an “apostolic lens” might be, what an indispensable spiritual tool. An everyday example comes to mind. My very small granddaughter is the contented occupant of a stroller that reminds me a lot of the apostolic lens. It is so designed that when the baby is very young, she lies in the pram facing the person who is caring for her. This means that she can gaze at her parent and allow the parent’s gaze to fall constantly upon her. When she is a bit older and becomes more of a toddler, the pram can be turned into a baby carriage, and now she rides the other way round, facing out into the world, eager to absorb all the new impressions that are beaming in on her.

The apostolic lens would be a bit like that. Held one way, it would draw our gaze to God. With a quiet heart we could contemplate the source of our being and draw peace and love from simply being consciously held in God’s presence, as a baby gazes at its mother and drinks in peace and love at her breast, never questioning the security of the strong arms that hold her. Held the other way, it would draw our gaze to the world around us, challenging us continually with the question: In this situation, how do I apply the love of God and the values and attitudes of Jesus of Nazareth? How do I live and move in this world in a way that reflects the mind and heart of God?

We need both directions. We never stop being babes in arms as far as God is concerned, and we are helpless unless and until we draw on God’s love that is always gazing down upon us, waiting to be engaged. Yet our call to discipleship also asks of us that we grow up and turn our sights beyond ourselves, committing ourselves to address the needs of the world around us. Perhaps my Jesuit friend’s slip of the tongue has something important to tell us about this delicate balance between contemplation and action.

While the apostolic lens would be a marvelous gadget to have in our spiritual toolkit, a more ambiguous implement is the mythical device we might call the “retrospectroscope.” The retrospectroscope is constantly pointing backwards. It rebukes us with the knowledge that we could have achieved very much better results, been so much happier, healthier, wiser. “If only we had known then what we know now.” The retrospectoscope is always taking photographs of objects that have disappeared. It can become addictive. We can get hooked on focusing on everything that might have been: “If only....” The result can be that we fail to see what actually lies in front of us and around us. We lose the present to the past. The gift of hindsight is a gift wrapped in thorns. It can help us make better choices in the future. But it can easily lock us into a past that is no longer helpful. It needs to be used with care, and with gentleness and hope. Jesus was constantly reminding people to face forward, to follow him and to allow him to take them beyond the shackles and illusions of the past.

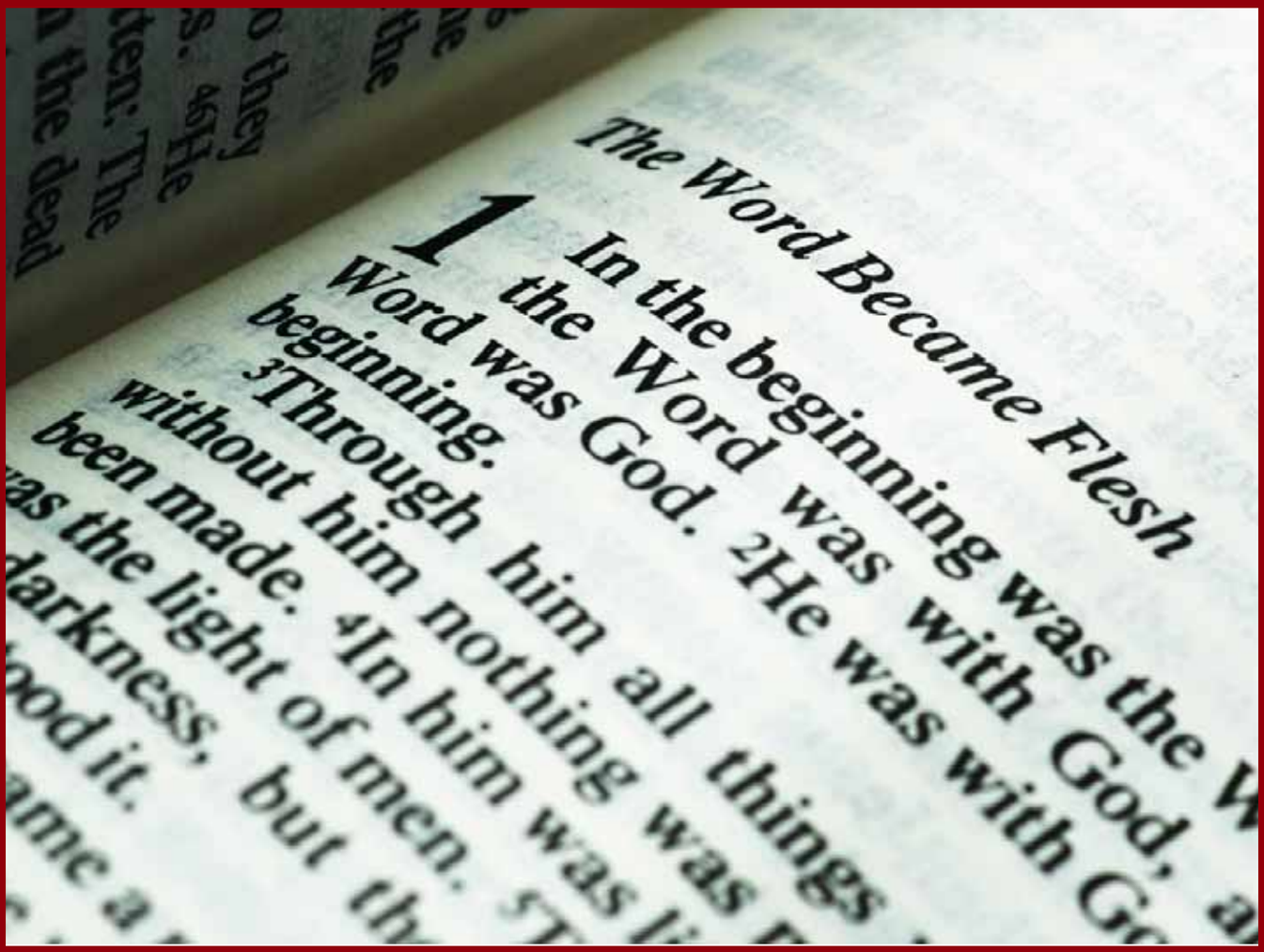
Perhaps the least helpful tool for our spiritual journey is the notion that God is some kind of satellite navigational aid on the dashboard of our life’s vehicle. If we listen hard enough, we sometimes think, we will hear the divine signals coming through: keep right, take the next exit; take a left in half a mile. But it is not so easy! I was once driving through a sprawling city, and just crossing a wide river, when the navigation system suddenly insisted that I should “take an immediate right turn”—straight into the river!

God did not create robots that are programmed to follow instructions, but human beings who are invited to follow a person—the person of God revealed in human form. We have to make every choice ourselves, but not alone. The wisdom we need is within us, not some add-on gadget. Not so much a G.P.S. tracker as a compass. God never promised us an easy ride, with all decisions made for us by some divine Web site in the sky. But God promises to travel with us, every mile of the way, helping us to read the compass that lies deep within our hearts.

As fall approaches, it might be a good time to check out the contents of our spiritual toolkit. A bit of stock-taking could reveal those techniques and practices that are helping us move closer to God, to ourselves and to one another. On the other hand, we might find notions and attitudes lurking in the dusty corners that are worth jettisoning. The Gospel is about “making all things new.” What tools help us cooperate in that great vision, and how might we use them more effectively?

Margaret Silf

MARGARET SILF lives in Staffordshire, England. Her latest books are *Companions of Christ: Ignatian Spirituality for Everyday Living* and *The Gift of Prayer.*



The Word of God Today

From the fifth to the 26th of October, representative bishops from around the world will meet in Rome for the 12th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, the body proposed by the Second Vatican Council for ongoing discussion of challenges facing the church. This year's topic will address a yet uncompleted reform of the council: to make the Scriptures truly, "the church's book," known, prayed and studied by the whole church.

The formal topic of the meeting is "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church." In this issue, **America** *has asked six well-known church leaders and scholars to write about aspects of making the Bible central to Catholic life.*

We hope this special issue will whet the appetite of readers for the work of the synod and encourage them to explore still other dimensions of the theme, including the Word of God in culture and history, as well as in the faith of other Christian believers.

‘Nourished and Ruled By Sacred Scripture’

Reflections for the 2008 General Synod of Bishops

BY RICHARD J. SKLBA

Cultural anthropologists tell us that one of the characteristics of our postmodern age is a disregard for history. Catholicism itself, however, exists in a tradition that recognizes doctrinal development in history. Our best Catholic theologians will remind us that the church’s attention to the unfolding truths of revelation makes history radically important for us. Moreover, understanding Scripture as a witness to salvation history confirms for Catholics their understanding that the past builds toward the present, and the present is developed from the past. To understand the forthcoming Synod of Bishops on the Word of God, we must appreciate its continuity with the past.

Throughout the four years of its deliberations, the Second Vatican Council repeatedly confirmed the fundamental importance of the Scriptures for every dimension of the church’s life. A brief review of the more recent milestones of that journey into the Bible, demonstrating both continuity and development, provides a helpful background for the discussions that will take place in the synod this autumn in Rome.

Study of Scripture at the parish level is often compromised by preoccupations with catechetical needs or the programs of any given Sunday’s liturgy, as well as by the busyness of people’s lives throughout the week.

A Quick Look Back

At the heart of the liturgical reforms promulgated by the Second Vatican Council in 1963, for instance, was the admonition that “if the restoration, progress and adaptation of the sacred liturgy are to be achieved, it is necessary to promote that warm and living love for Scripture to which the venerable tradition of both Eastern and Western rites give testimony” (“Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” No. 24).

In 1965 the council fathers reminded pastors that “all the preaching of the church must be nourished and ruled by Sacred Scripture” (“Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” No. 21). Unfortunately, serious study of Scripture at the parish level is often compromised by a congregation’s preoccupations with catechetical needs or the practical programs of any given Sunday’s liturgy, as well as by the busyness of people’s lives throughout the week. An authentic homiletic use of Scripture clearly requires more than bland and tiresome exhortations that “God is love.”

In another context that same conciliar document insisted that Scripture must remain “the soul of sacred theology” (No. 25). This fundamental principle had been affirmed in 1893 by Pope Leo XIII in *Providentissimus Deus* and again in 1920 by Benedict XV in *Spiritus Paraclitus*. Each of these encyclicals addressed the need for the renewal of the scholastic rationalism of 19th-century theology.

In 1943, as a 50th-anniversary commemoration of Leo XIII’s teachings, Catholic understanding of the centrality of the Word and the value of scientific exegesis was confirmed in Pius XII’s landmark encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*. A half-century of often contentious debate, which led to some unfortunate casualties among Scripture scholars, had produced general agreement.

THE MOST REV. RICHARD J. SKLBA is auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee.

The efforts of distinguished and faithful Catholic scholars, like Marie Joseph Lagrange, O.P., at the École Biblique in Jerusalem, were finally given public papal recognition and official approval. The importance of distinguishing literary forms was widely accepted, and the fundamental responsibility of Catholic exegetes to search out the original historical meaning of the inspired texts and the intentions of their authors was recognized.

Out of that history what could be called a renewed second common language was restored to the church; Scripture was proposed by the documents of the Second Vatican Council as the lingua franca for all Catholic teaching, preaching and praying. As a result, soon after the council, a lectionary with many more selections from the Old and New Testaments was published. The Sunday and weekday eucharistic life of the church was enriched. More recently the theologian John Cavadini of the University of Notre Dame praised the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) for the remarkable manner in which it uses the language of Scripture so pervasively in presenting the faith of the universal church.

Debates within the exegetical community continued. What was the relative importance of literal translations as opposed to translations that were more dynamic (but conceptually faithful) and aimed at providing access to the witness of ancient worlds very different from our own? New exegetical methods inspired by movements in the church like feminism and liberation theology challenged the hegemony of historical-critical approaches. A deep hunger for biblical literacy began to flourish in Catholic lay circles, possibly encouraged both by people's liturgical experiences on the weekend and by the growing popularity of the American evangelical movement among Protestant neighbors and co-workers.

ART BY JULIE LONNEMAN

Preparatory Documents for the Synod

In late spring of 2007, the usual early draft of the council's agenda, called the *lineamenta*, was issued to offer some broad outlines for discussing the proposed synodal topic for the 12th Ordinary General Assembly of bishops. An initial study of that document leaves one with several impressions: it honestly acknowledged that ignorance of the Bible is still pervasive among many Catholics; it recognized the need to respond to the more aggressive forms of evangelical proselytism, sometimes blatantly anti-Catholic; and it clearly emphasized the practice of *lectio divina*. The document seemed to emphasize an individualistic approach to the Scriptures rather than evoke communal experiences. Many references to past papal encyclicals seemed to encourage a more spiritual use of Scripture, neglecting the importance of historical-critical methods. The enthusiastic invocation of past patristic ages seemed to favor allegorical approaches to the understanding of Scripture. Responses and reflections were submitted from around the world. Biblical scholars noted the document's limitations and flaws.

In June of 2008 the *instrumentum laboris*, as the customary next phase in preparation is called, was published inviting further reflection. The document emphasized the Word as a person, not merely a printed text, and clearly endorsed the "application of every scientific and literary method available." If the earlier text seemed to suggest reservations about the importance of historical criticism, that caution was now less pronounced. The treatment of all the issues related to "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the

Church" seemed exhaustive. Nevertheless, it was still clear that the more devotional *lectio divina* was emphasized and that the authors of the text did not have a full, professional background in the Catholic study of Scripture.

The Landscape Today

By definition synods are convened to offer counsel to the pope in the pastoral governance of the church. Their recommendations simply provide the raw material from which a post-synodal apostolic exhortation is written and promulgated by the pope. As part of our own preparation for those discussions, which should engage the entire Catholic community worldwide, I offer from the American scene three cautions and one hope.

As part of our preparation, I offer from the American scene three cautions and one hope.

Caution One: the Patristic Revival. One of the great blessings of Catholicism has been the fact that the church has long held in great esteem the literal meaning of the text, but never been held hostage to it. Early third- and fourth-century debates between the more literal Antiochenes and the more typologically oriented Alexandrians recognized the differences. Medieval schools of thought continued the debates, especially as a clear biblical foundation was sought for Marian doctrines. More recently, the strong commitment of Catholic scholars to historical criticism has been supplemented by more literary approaches, asking, "What does this passage say in its current context and nuance?" The contemporary interest in reclaiming the fruits of the patristic commentaries, however, requires considerable caution. The early fathers often developed brilliant Christian theology, but their interpretations of the Bible were not always grounded in a sure reading of the text. Patristic exegesis was often creative and imaginative but not always grounded in the text itself.

If the deliberations of the coming synod neglect the serious scholarship of the past century, it will be a great disservice to the church. A recovery of patristic exegesis can supplement our understanding, but the literal historical meaning of the text is also "spiritual," and any suggestion to the contrary is simply erroneous.

Caution Two: Contemporary Popularization. As a result of the renewal of the church in recent decades we have been blessed by a new influx of popular teachers whose expositions of biblical topics have been warmly welcomed by catechists and the general Catholic population alike. People are hungry for the Word. The academic world, however, can sometimes speak on a technical level that is beyond the ability of enthusiastic novices to appreciate. The result can be loss of interest. The church needs the scholarly work of Catholic academics, but also the pedagogical and catechetical skills of those who can find solid pastoral nourishment in biblical scholarship.

At the same time, if the catechists, for all their enthusiasm, are recent converts from a more evangelical and Calvinist background, their presentations may not always embody the fullness of the Catholic tradition. They can remain rooted in another very different ecclesial perspective. As a teacher and pastor I recognized that danger in the early charismatic movement, and I see it again in some of the biblical materials promoted at the parish level. For that reason I emphasize the following convictions.

It is also profoundly Catholic to want to know the history of any given biblical concept and the way in which its meaning was deepened and developed over the centuries. Granted, the oldest expression is not necessarily the best, but the earliest should be kept in mind when attempting to understand the root of our most cherished expressions of faith. This caution is particularly valuable when ecumenical eyes are brought to a text and the prism of the church's various understandings over the years is explored. Under grace ideas mature and deepen.

It is also profoundly Catholic to want to understand the literary context of each statement and the type of literature in which it is expressed. But biblical history alone, like the Bible history booklets used in my own childhood catechetical experiences, does not nourish the faith. Those who have merely transferred their biblical knowledge from one Christian tradition to the Catholic communion without an appreciation of Catholic literary analysis, liturgy and devotional tradition will be very limited in their ability to communicate the riches of our Catholic biblical tradition.

Fundamentalism—the preoccupation with the literal wording of the text without regard for its historical context and isolated from the life and teaching of the church community—can be dangerous. A recent document from the Pontifical Biblical Commission in Rome called that mindset "intellectual suicide" (*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*).

Caution Three: Canonical Contexts. Sometimes the inspired books of Scripture speak to one another as well as to the casual reader. It is not by accident that the church early on bound the individual scrolls into a single codex. The

Book of Job can serve as a clear reminder that simplistic invocation of blessings for the faithful and punishments for the wicked, as the Deuteronomic theologians once asserted, simply does not explain the mystery of evil or the way God actually works in the day-to-day lives of people. Or again, the narrow accent, for example, on the purity of Jewish identity upon return from Babylonian exile needs to be balanced by the remarkable witness of the Ninevites, who responded so enthusiastically to Jonah's preaching (to his chagrin and disgust, as the tale points out), or by the devotion of the foreigner Ruth to her mother-in-law, Naomi.

The uniting of books from the First and Second Testaments links the experience of the synagogue to that of Christianity, and it is also profoundly Catholic to recognize the difference as well as the continuity. Although we may see hints of Christ in the former, they must be allowed to speak in their own terms. Hasty spiritualization must never be allowed to obscure the Jewish character of our biblical heritage.

It is profoundly Catholic to insist on the differences among the literary forms found in the inspired library we call the Bible, and to allow each to speak in its own voice. In our quest for understanding, it matters greatly if the purported teaching is found in poetry, legend, moral exhortation or even in the inspired catechetical reminiscences that we proudly call the Gospels. Popular biblical teachers who never allude to such differences shortchange our people's early introduction to the Scriptures.

A great deal more care must be given to the Catholic critique of materials used at the parish level. In a capitalistic society, popularity and availability often rule without solid critique or assessment from the standpoint of the full Catholic tradition.

A Concluding Hope

If the synod is to embrace the full scope of the Word of God in the life of the church, then the question of liturgical translations, both biblical and sacramental, cannot be relegated to the margin of the bishops' deliberations at this moment in our history. The Word must be clearly intelligible when proclaimed orally and faithfully expressed in language that is not stilted, clumsy or wooden.

Access to the fullness of our Catholic tradition is a fundamental right of our people. They should not be shortchanged by reducing the message of the Gospel to a simple spiritual inspiration, which inevitably fails to go beneath the surface level of the Word's life-giving promise. A

Drew Christiansen, S.J., previews the Synod on the Word of God, at americamagazine.org/podcast.

The Original Testament

A Catholic approach to the Hebrew Bible

BY RICHARD J. CLIFFORD

FOR THE TOPIC OF the October Synod of Bishops in Rome, Pope Benedict XVI has chosen "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church." The agenda committee, after polling bishops and others, published a working document known as the instrumentum laboris. High on its list of topics was the Old Testament, which, the committee frankly acknowledged, "seems to be a real problem among Catholics, particularly as it relates to the mystery of Christ and the Church" (No. 17).

As a professor of Old Testament for many years at Weston Jesuit School of Theology (now part of the new Boston College School of Theology and Ministry), I would like to contribute to the synod by posing and answering four frequently asked questions: How does the Old Testament fit in the Christian Bible? How should we understand its depictions of violence and hatred for the enemies of Israel? Did all its miraculous events actually occur, or are they literary inventions? What should we call the Hebrew books in the Christian Bible: the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, the First Testament?

RICHARD J. CLIFFORD, S.J., is professor of Old Testament and dean of the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry (founded in June 2008). A former editor of The Catholic Biblical Quarterly and past president of the Catholic Biblical Association, he has written extensively on biblical interpretation. His most recent book is a commentary on the Psalms (Abingdon Press).

How does the Old Testament fit in the Christian Bible?

The question should be reversed: How does the New Testament fit in the Christian Bible? The short answer is that the Old Testament reaches its climax there (though it continues beyond). Modes of divine activity and communication depicted in the Old Testament—word, wisdom, spirit, glory, Davidic kingship—are expressed in the New Testament in a full and personal way in Jesus.

Biblical authors were storytellers, not essayists; their books present narratives, not arguments. Modern-day men and women tend to use stories to illustrate a point or to entertain, but biblical authors viewed the story itself as significant because it expressed God's action in the world. Prizing their history as revelatory of God, they sometimes described it in different versions, for, to them, God's activity was far too subtle and complex to be caught in one version. Yet, despite the variety, biblical writers never lost sight of a single divine intent from creation to consummation.

ART BY JULIE LONNEMAN

The biblical story began with the creation of the world populated by the 70 nations (the number given in Genesis 10); it continued with the calling of Abraham's family out of those nations and, somewhat later, with the establishment of the nation Israel as God's special people (Exodus-Deuteronomy). The historical books (Joshua to Kings) and the prophets tell and interpret the subsequent history—the periods of the judges, the kings and the exile in the sixth century B.C. Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah develop exilic themes and history.

In the mid-second century before Christ, the Book of Daniel saw history from a different angle and spoke in veiled language of the *end* of earthly kingdoms and the definitive *coming* of God's kingdom. Daniel, and books like it, ignited Jewish dreams of the imminent arrival of God's kingdom; these persisted for the next three centuries. The community at Qumran, whose library is known as the Dead Sea Scrolls, nurtured dreams of a new exodus and conquest of the land, and the definitive establishment of God's kingdom. Adapting this apocalyptic framework, Jesus preached the kingdom of God, and New Testament writers understood Jesus as the culmination of the history described in the ancient Scriptures. If one understands this view of history, one understands how the New Testament fits in the Christian Bible.

Since biblical writers were convinced that their history exhibited an overarching divine plan, they saw connections among events in that history. A biblical event or person could foreshadow a later one or, conversely, echo or "fulfill" an earlier one. Sometimes these cross-references are called "typological," part of a network of hints. The network can operate between the New and the Old Testament or within each Testament. An example of typology is the portrait of Moses in Exodus, which echoes the portrait of Joseph in Genesis: both Joseph and Moses are shepherds-turned-rulers; both were separated early from their families, survived conspiracies to murder them, endured exile, married daughters of foreign priests and fathered two sons; and both, one dead and the other alive, left Egypt together (Ex 13:19). The typology shows a mysterious power operating in the lives of the two leaders. The typology continues in the Gospel of Matthew, in which Jesus is portrayed as sharing some traits of Moses (the slaughter of the innocents in Matthew 2 echoes the slaughter in Exodus 1; Moses and Jesus both teach on a mountain). The cross-references among Genesis, Exodus and Matthew are not merely ornamental; they lend depth and meaning to biblical events.

> Biblical authors were storytellers, not essayists; their books present narratives, not arguments.

How should we understand the Old Testament's depictions of violence and of hatred for the enemies of Israel?

The two major reasons for the Old Testament's depiction of violence are the nature of human beings—prone to evil schemes and violence—and the nature of the Old Testament God—just and compassionate and involved. In the dramatic world of the Bible, the compassionate God hears the cry of those oppressed by evildoers and in justice responds to rectify the situation. God "judges" the world (the Hebrew word has the sense of ruling and governing) by upholding the righteous and putting down the wicked. Evil in the Old Testament is imagined concretely—embodied in particular people and embedded in institutions and systems like families and nations. Not surprisingly, the Lord is frequently portrayed as a warrior who roots out evil and rescues Israel by defeating its enemies. But the divine warrior is not a nationalist. God turns against Israel when it rebels.

Four things soften this seemingly harsh portrayal. First, the war imagery is not the main purpose, which is to show God "judging" (i.e., ruling) justly. Second, when the psalmists cry for "vengeance" (a divine righting of wrongs), they place entirely in God's hands both timetable and implementation. Third, the Old Testament reveals a God who is merciful as well as just. When the two are in conflict, it is mercy and compassion that usually win out (see Exodus 32-34 and Hos 11:9). Fourth, the Old Testament concern for justice inspires Jesus' program of God's rule, which means the elimination of unjust structures and the building of a righteous and obedient community.

Perhaps the most succinct comment on God's justice was passed on to me by a friend from Georgia, who quoted an elderly janitor of a poor black church: "If the Lord doesn't come back with power, he won't do me much good."

Did all the miraculous events narrated in its books actually take place, or are they literary inventions?

I will here simply illustrate the difference between modern ways of describing extraordinary events and the biblical writers' ways. (For a more extensive treatment of biblical historicity, see **Am.** 1/2/06.) I suspect that if we witnessed something entirely out of the ordinary and had no idea of its cause, we would describe it in two paragraphs. Our first paragraph would objectively describe the phenomenon, and

our second paragraph would discuss possible causes, psychological, physical or epistemological. If we believed in God, we would also add divine intervention as a possible cause. In other words, when we report unparalleled events, we tend first to give an objective description and then to provide an interpretation of the event.

But biblical writers go in a different direction. Preferring the narrative form to the essay, they give their interpretation as they tell the story. They describe and interpret in one paragraph; they are "one-paragraph" writers. For example, the author of the account of Elijah's miraculous ascension into the heavenly world in 2 Kgs 2:1-18 incorporated narrative features that interpreted it: Elijah was "taken up" like Enoch in Gn 5:24 and the righteous psalmists in Pss 49:16, 18 and 73:24. Like Moses, Elijah's final resting place was unknown, and like Moses' successor, Joshua, Elijah's successor, Elisha, used his master's cloak to split the Jordan River and cross over. Through purely narrative means, the attentive reader learns that Elijah was accepted by God as righteous, that he authentically continued the mission of Moses, and that Elisha, his successor, will carry on his work. Modern readers interested in "exactly what happened" are bound to be frustrated by the account. In short, biblical writers were one-paragraph people for whom narrative details communicated both the event and its significance. Modern people, however, typically need two paragraphs, one to describe the event and another to give the meaning.

What to call the Hebrew books in the Christian Bible?

New Testament writers customarily refer to their sacred library as "Scripture" (*graphē* sometimes in the sense of "this scriptural passage"), "the Scriptures" (*graphai*), "the Law and the Prophets," but never as "Old Testament" (or "Covenant"). "Old Testament" and indeed "New Testament" as designations of a collection of books came into use only in the late second century, when Christians realized that their sacred writings formed a collection with a table of contents, with certain books included and others excluded. The use of the word "testament" for books was based on texts such as 2 Cor 3:14, "for to this present day the same veil remains unlifted when [the people of Israel] read the old covenant, because through Christ it is taken away." Another influence was the Letter to the Hebrews, which asserted that the new covenant is superior to the old.

Many scholars today avoid the term "Old Testament" on the grounds that it implies supersessionism, the replacement of Old Israel by New Israel. The word "old" in our culture often implies worn out and ready for replacement. Since the Holocaust, Christians have rediscovered their deep bonds with the Jewish people and realized that the anti-Judaism in Christianity fueled the catastrophic anti-Semitism of modern times. Christian scholars today avoid derogatory references to Jews and highlight the Jewish matrix of Christianity. Some Christians opt for "less imperial" terms than "Old Testament" and use instead "Prior Testament," "First (and Second) Testament" or "Shared Testament."

A number of Christian scholars (I among them), however, use "Old Testament" without apology. We find substitute terms awkward and unable to resolve the main difficulty, which is supersessionism, the view that the Christian church supersedes or replaces the Jewish people as God's chosen people. All Catholic biblical scholars that I know fully embrace Pope John Paul II's famous rejection of supersessionism when he affirmed that God's bond with Judaism is "the covenant never revoked." The Jewish New Testament scholar Amy-Jill Levine in *The Misunderstood Jew: The Scandal of the Jewish Jesus* (Harper, 2007) also affirms the validity of "Old Testament" on the grounds that the books were not all written in Hebrew, that Orthodox Christian Churches use the Old Testament in Greek translation, and that Protestant and Catholic Churches differ somewhat in their list of books. "Old," therefore, is good (as it would have been in the ancient world) as long as we regard "Old" as synonymous with accepted and revered, and "New" as synonymous with renewed and brought to a new stage. A

‘A Hymn With Many Voices’

Communicating God’s presence through preaching and proclamation

BY JOHN R. DONAHUE

CARDINAL CARLO MARTINI, S.J., Archbishop of Milan and a biblical scholar who promoted the study of Scripture in the pastoral renewal of his diocese, observed in 1993 that there is still some resistance to the biblical renewal in parts of the church. He proposed that a synod of bishops be called to consider how the church has responded to *Dei Verbum* (the Second Vatican Council’s “Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation”). His hope may be realized in the 12th Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of the Bishops on “The Word of God in the Mission and Life of the Church,” which will be held in Rome from Oct. 5 to 26, 2008.

To judge from the working paper prepared for the synod, the Rome meeting will constitute the most extensive reflection since Vatican II by an official body on Scripture as the Word of God and its importance to the life of the church in liturgy and the proclamation of the Word. The working paper does not constitute a set of authoritative norms. It is possible that its observations will not appear in any document that comes out of the synod, but the paper does reflect the current state of the question as seen in the concerns of bishops and other groups in dioceses around the world.

Two fundamental concerns run through the document: Scripture must be given a higher priority in the church, and Catholics need to recognize that “the Word of God is Jesus Christ, an awareness that lends a sense of mystery to the reading of every word in the Bible.” The document pays particular attention to the Christological dimension of the Word and the understanding of the church as born from the Word of God. More than any previous document, the working paper emphasizes the pastoral application of Scripture. Each expository section is followed by a number of “pastoral implications.”

Two interrelated concerns about Scripture have risen time and again in discussions after the Second Vatican Council. The first is the challenge to respect the prime rule of interpretation articulated since *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, namely that the intention of the text in its original historical context must guide all later reflection, even as we relate Scripture to contemporary spiritual hungers. A second concern, reflected in virtually every survey of Catholic opinion, is the quality of preaching. Both concerns receive attention in the working document, but I will address its implications for preaching. Since the document is long (12 times the length of *Dei Verbum*) and theologically complex, any summary of even one of its concerns must be limited.

The Word of God, the working document tells us, is “like a hymn with many voices,” but its primary focus is Trinitarian: “The Word of God abides in the Trinity, from which it comes, by which it is sustained and to which it returns. The Word of God is the enduring testament to the love of the Father, to the work of salvation of the Son Jesus Christ and to the fruitful activity of the Holy Spirit” (No. 9, a). Through the Incarnation this Word assumes a Christological identity and also an ecclesial one since the church comes forth from the Word. The Bible is then “the Word of God recorded in human language” (No. 15, c).

> Despite constant calls for better formation in biblical studies and homiletics, many seminaries offer inadequate preparation.

To Preach the Bible

The document clearly recognizes that the ministry of the Word is broader than preaching: “The Word continues its course *through vibrant preaching* and its many forms of evan-

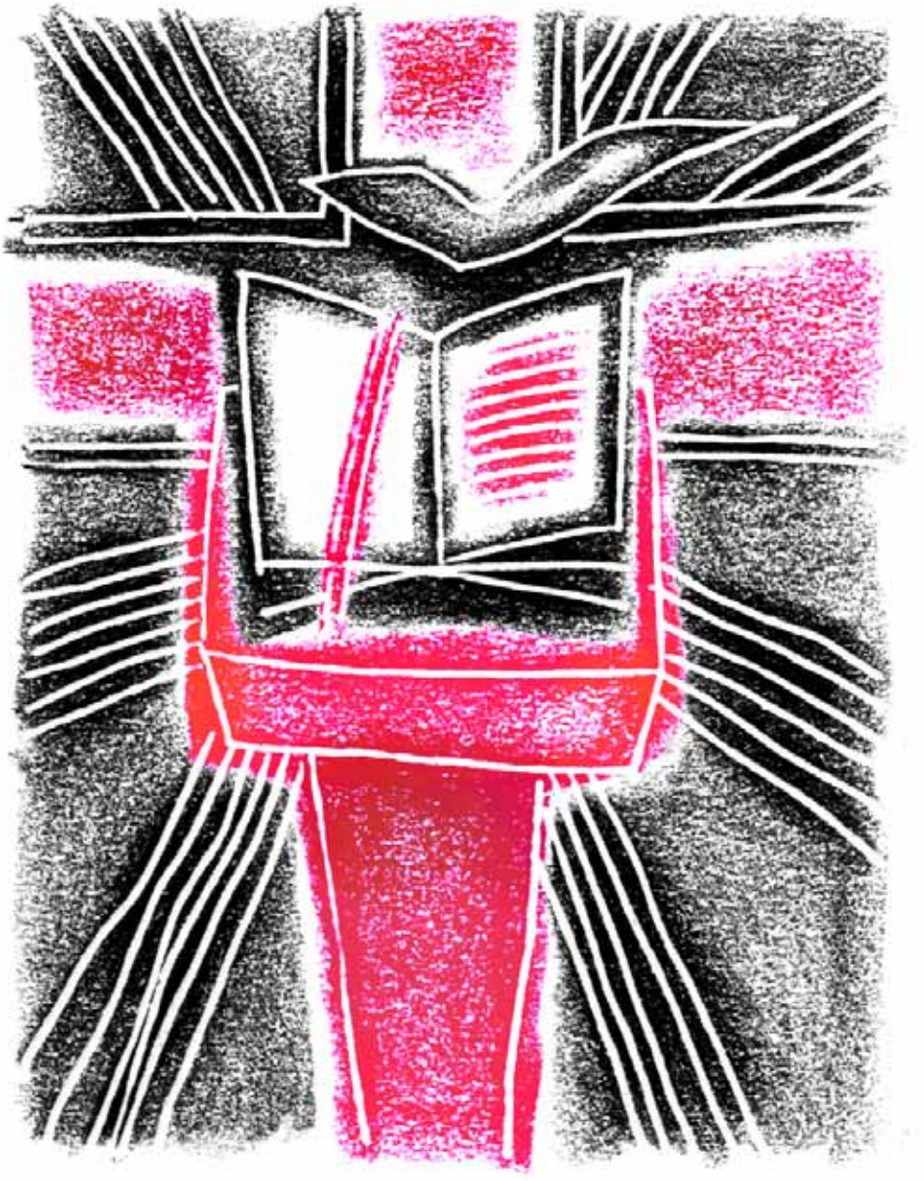
JOHN R. DONAHUE, S.J., is research professor in theology at Loyola College in Baltimore, Md. He wrote The Word column for **America** from 1999 to 2002.

gelization, where *proclamation*, *catechesis*, *liturgical celebrations and the service of charity* hold a high place. Preaching, in this sense, under the power of the Holy Spirit, is the Word of the living God communicated to living persons" (No. 9, original emphasis). "In the homily, preachers need to make a greater effort to be faithful to the biblical text and mindful of the condition of the faithful, providing them assistance in interpreting the events of their personal lives and historical happenings in the light of faith" (No. 37).

This latter observation echoes the description of the homily in the still important document of the U.S. bishops, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* (1982): "a scriptural interpretation of human existence which enables a community to recognize God's active presence, to respond to that presence in faith through liturgical word and gesture, and beyond the liturgical assembly, through a life lived in conformity with the Gospel."

While constantly emphasizing the intimate connection between preaching and the life of the Word in the church, the document expresses some concern about the quality of contemporary preaching and offers suggestions for improvement. Are those who preach sufficiently familiar with *Dei Verbum* and with the Bible itself? Do they recognize difficulties in understanding biblical texts, especially the Old Testament? Are they able to relate the Bible to doctrinal and moral teaching? Is sufficient attention paid to the proper liturgical proclamation of the readings? Are the liturgical homilies faithful to the Scriptures while sensitive to the actual condition of the lives of the faithful?

Concrete recommendations balance criticism. Citing Vatican II, the document states that all clergy "ought to have continual contact with the Scriptures, through assiduous reading and attentive study of the sacred texts, so as not to become idle preachers of the Word of God, hearing the Word only with their ears while not hearing it with their hearts" (No. 46). Further, "In every diocese a biblical pastoral program, under the guidance of the bishop, can insert the Bible into the church's great initiatives in evangelization and catechesis." Seminary formation should stress "a greater, up-to-date knowledge of exegesis and theology, a solid formation in the pastoral use of the Bible and a true and proper initiation into biblical spirituality" (No. 49).



ART BY JULIE LONNEMAN

Points for Dialogue

By issuing the working paper well in advance of the synod, the Council for the General Secretariat of the Synod invites responses not only from bishops and delegates but from the wider church. The following observations are part of this dialogue and an invitation to readers to join the conversation.

Even as the church has been significantly renewed as a Bible-reading and Bible-praying community, there is constant need "to renew the renewal" at all levels of church life. The proclamation (reading) of the Word in liturgy, which began with enthusiasm after Vatican II, has often devolved into ill-prepared readers who really do not understand the texts they are reading. The ministry of lector should be

renewed by following the recommendations in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, especially in regard to the training of lectors and the public appreciation of their work.

Some dangers are occupational hazards for homilists: homilies too often can move away from the Scriptures, become overly moralistic (the challenge is to preach the good news, not simply give good advice), with too much emphasis on specific issues that may be of little concern to the majority of a congregation. In the original Greek, *homilia* means first "close association, social interaction or company," and is used to describe "conversations." The Sunday "homily" occurs in the company of Christ the Word, and is a three-way conversation among the Scriptures, the one preaching and those to be nurtured by Scripture.

Despite constant calls for better formation in biblical studies and homiletics, many seminaries offer inadequate preparation. Special attention also should be given to better training in biblical studies for those dedicated persons who are called to the permanent diaconate. Even when well prepared and devoted to preaching, working pastors, both the newly ordained and veterans, are often so overwhelmed by pastoral demands that the necessary continuing formation can be neglected. In a few years pastors may also be preoccupied with trying to train their parishioners to respond, "and with your spirit," or "under my roof," as new liturgical edicts stream from Rome. But the working paper for the synod rightly insists that attention be given to better and continued preparation for preaching. This should be a special concern of the diocesan bishop, and it will demand time and resources for renewal programs.

It is inevitable that recommendations on Scripture for a world church will often be phrased in abstract terms, with few references to other church statements or patristic authors. Though good preaching ultimately rests on good scholarship, the working document at one point alludes to a kind of biblical scholarship that can pose a problem for interpretation. The document ignores the efforts of a generation of writers who mediated solid scholarship through less technical publications: commentary series, periodicals and published homily aids. The recommendations that will follow the synod could profitably urge local church officials to make use of the resources available in the existing corpus of excellent works on biblical spirituality that can make the Word of God vital to people's lives today.

The working paper, unfortunately, reflects a clerical tone that may also be inevitable. An example of this is the instruction that "the proclamation of the Word in the liturgy is an office proper to the instituted ministry of lector. In his absence, a qualified lay man or woman can proclaim the readings" (No. 50). Proclaiming the Word, in other words, is doled out to laypeople by way of exception. Near its conclusion the working document, in discussing "The Task of the Laity," while acknowledging that "all members of the Church through baptism are sharers in Christ's priestly, prophetic and royal office" and that "the laity have the responsibility to proclaim the Good News to mankind in the everyday circumstances of their lives," nonetheless identifies the laity's "special tasks: the Bible in the Christian initiation of children; the Bible in the pastoral care of youth, for example, in World Youth Days; and the Bible for the infirm, soldiers, and those in prison" (No. 51). This seems unnecessarily limiting. There is no recognition in the document that, at least in the United States, much of the best scholarship and contribution to biblical interpretation has been offered by laypeople. Given the continuing shortage of priests, the synod might recommend more creative norms for homilies to be given by trained and competent laypeople.

A fond hope for the synod is that the words of Isaiah invoked by St. Paul (Is 52:7, Rom 10:16) may echo throughout our church: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings glad tidings, announcing peace, bearing good news, announcing salvation." A

From February 1966, the editors on "The Council and the Word," at americamagazine.org/pages.

Sowing the Word

Scriptural understanding has flourished since Vatican II, but challenges remain.

BY PHEME PERKINS

As the synod of bishops reflects on the challenge in the Second Vatican Council's "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" (*Dei Verbum)* to integrate the Word into the liturgical and spiritual life of God's people, it should also appreciate the substantial gains made since the encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* was published in 1943. Today's problems ought not obscure all that has been achieved. The working paper prepared for the synod does not affirm these foundations clearly. They should be the basis for moving forward. I single out here four areas of accomplishment: restoration of liturgical balance, renewal of Catholic spirituality, development of Catholic biblical scholarship and participation in ecumenical dialogue. As a result of these developments, Catholics who have grown up in the post-Vatican II church now assume that Scripture is as fundamental to a Christian life as are the sacraments.

Celebrating Our Accomplishments

Liturgical Balance. Such liturgical reforms as the new Lectionary, the location from which the Word is proclaimed, and participation by members of the worshiping community as lectors have enhanced the importance of the Word. A celebration that allocates equal time to the proclamation of the Word and to the Eucharist provides an appropriate balance. At celebrations where the children leave for their own liturgy of the Word and return for the Creed or the presentation of the gifts, one sees those who have heard God's Word being gathered to receive the Word (Jesus) present in the sacrament. Parishioners who drift back to our parishes after a few years attending Protestant services speak of having felt incomplete without the Eucharist. Bible reading, sermons, music, prayers and social engagement with others might be of superior quality in other Christian congregations, but receiving the body of Christ remains essential to the Catholic soul.

The funeral ritual marks another pastoral gain in liturgical renewal. Engaging family members or the persons who are terminally ill in selecting the readings for a funeral Mass allows a deeper affirmation of our belief that "in death life is not ended" than do routine platitudes. Many of the seniors in our parish's weekly Bible study group have selected readings for their own funerals already. Non-Catholic family and friends accustomed to the blander fare of memorial services often are surprised by the proclamation of the Word of God during the Catholic funeral liturgy. That liturgy incorporates the Word as part of the believer's sacramental life, which began with baptism and was nourished by the Eucharist.

Spirituality. Scripture has also played a key role in revitalizing Catholic spirituality since Vatican II. Translations of the Psalms based on a scholarly understanding of their language and poetic forms, along with revised readings for the Office of Readings, make the Liturgy of the Hours educative, schooling in the Word all those who pray it. Whether they participate in an eight-day retreat or a day of recollection, Catholics find reflection on Scripture at the heart of the process. Many lay Catholics regularly take part in summer Bible institutes or in parish-centered Scripture study programs. When asked to bring their Bibles, Catholics now produce as good a collection of well-worn Bibles as those found in Protestant churches. Most parish renewal programs have a scriptural component. Even at the mundane level of parish committees, an opening prayer incorporates a reading of the Word, usually the Sunday Gospel.

Biblical Scholarship. These substantive gains draw upon the efforts of Catholic biblical scholars, who have mastered a wealth of data about biblical languages, surrounding cultures, archaeology and the literary forms in the Bible. Thanks to scholars who pursued the emerging philological and historical knowledge despite official censure prior to the mid-20th-century change in direction, Catholics were able to catch up quickly as the church recognized how important it is to hear the Word of God being spoken to those in specific historical situations. Those who are ideologically opposed to rigorous, historical scholarship allege that it undermines faith when it points to the gap between dogmatic proof-texts, the Latin Vulgate or patristic exegesis and what the Bible was saying to the faithful in its own cultural situation. The great patristic exegetes like Origen or Jerome or Chrysostom, however, would have employed our

PHEME PERKINS, professor of New Testament at Boston College and author of *Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels* (2007), is a parishioner at St. Zepherin church in Wayland, Mass.

new methods just as they used the best scholarship of their own time. By ignoring the rich diversity of interpretation among patristic authors, church documents can create the false impression that the church fathers gave a single meaning to particular passages. New translations of the church fathers and historical studies of their theologies have contributed much to our understanding of how the Word of God has shaped the church. Contemporary academic commentaries include patristic commentaries on the text.

Current Catholic biblical scholarship is second to none in all areas of academic research. Exegetes have met the challenge of translating the Bible into modern languages, using the best research into ancient texts and languages. Annotated Bibles and study materials exist for use at all educational levels. Meetings of the professional associations of Catholic biblical scholars combine the highest level of technical proficiency with equally spirited discussions about making the Word available to the people of God. Even more important as the center of gravity in the church shifts away from North America and Europe, students trained in our doctoral programs from South America, Africa, Indonesia and Asia are beginning to make their own contributions to biblical research.

Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue. Vatican II encouraged Catholics to enter into genuine dialogue with their fellow Christians and with the Jewish community. Our ability to unite around a shared appreciation for the Word of God has played an important role in eradicating centuries of hostility. Catholics, Protestants and Jews work together on common Bible translations, annotated editions, dictionaries of the Bible and commentaries. As we create and share common resources for unlocking the meanings of the sacred text, we also acknowledge the role that each community's liturgical and theological tradition plays in the life of faith. Ecumenical sensitivity to the special place of the Jewish people in God's plan of salvation leaves us still struggling to find appropriate language when we speak of the "Old Testament" section of the Christian canon. Terms such as "Jewish Scriptures," "Hebrew Bible" and "prior covenant" fill in the gaps but confuse many readers. Chain bookstores, for example, often shelve the *New Jerusalem Bible* in the Judaica section.

Churches that employ a lectionary have worked toward a common cycle of Sunday readings, and this facilitates ecumenical Bible study. My writing for Protestant homiletic services and preaching in Protestant pulpits, though, constantly reminds me that each church is different in some way. The first reading, the psalm text and even the Gospel may shift on a given Sunday. The Catholic canon, which incorporates books not found in the Protestant "Old Testament," provides a wider range of first readings than those available in other churches. Differences aside, these ecumenical efforts have made it possible for Christians from all denominations to share faith based on the Word of God. Parishioners in my home parish sometimes bring non-Catholic visitors to our weekly Bible study; sometimes parishioners participate in opportunities provided by Protestant churches. Sharing the Word with other Christians does not weaken Catholic faith. It confirms the genuinely biblical foundations of our liturgical and theological heritage.

Quick Fixes and Fundamentals

With such a solid record of achievement, why call a synod of bishops to discuss the Word of God? There are several reasons. Unlike the sustained interest in Bible study among Catholic laity, clergy participation in workshops that could refresh their knowledge of Scripture has declined. The paternalistic tone of *Dei Verbum*, which imagines the cele-

ART BY JULIE LONNEMAN

brant initiating the faithful into the Word of God, can often sound out of date. Some Catholics at Mass have spent more time with the Sunday readings in study and/or prayer than has the homilist.

An effective homily combines several factors: exegetical insight into one of the texts read, an application that connects the Word addressed to "our ancestors in faith" with our contemporary situation, and a homilist who speaks to the people in the pews. When those requirements are met on a college campus, even undergraduates who are half asleep on Monday morning will remember at least something said at Mass on Sunday. Of course, theology majors in an exegesis course may catch a mistake if a preacher has used outdated reference materials. That too is a learning opportunity when students check out the facts. In short, the Word preached must be a Word worth opening—that is, inviting further thought, questioning and discussion.

My sister, a teaching pro member of the Ladies Professional Golf Association, proposes two options for those with a problematic golf swing: a quick fix that will get you through a round or two but breaks down in the long term, and "rebuilding the fundamentals," which will take time and dedication but lasts. With the many excellent print and online resources devoted to lectionary-based preaching, there is no excuse for failing to obtain an exegetical quick fix. The rebuilding of poor fundamentals, however, is another issue.

Even those who have never heard of golf could bear in mind a lesson from the L.P.G.A. teaching division. Ask students to articulate their issues; get them to commit to a goal and proceed accordingly. Some swing-flaws you work around. Physical problems or psychological resistance can make change impossible. For the student who needs to play well tomorrow, look for the quick fix, with the understanding that it will not last. Rebuilding from the foundations is only for the seriously dedicated and often leads to worse play as swing-changes are put in place. Getting the right clubs and using all 14 in the bag can be taxing: some are comforting; others produce anxiety.

Miscues From the Lectionary

Most preachers fall back on a limited repertoire of insights, social issues, pieties or stories that they tie to most any Gospel passage. Some even manage to find a link to the generic theme in the first reading. The second reading, an epistle read more or less in sequence, might as well not exist. Despite the laudable goal of introducing the faithful to their Jewish heritage and to the unique insights of the individual evangelists, the Lectionary does not come close. Its selections are a bit like playing golf with assorted clubs from the garage—okay and awful.

> I like to remind academic advocates of multiculturalism that the Bible is not a Western, European or modern book.

In other words, some of the problems for preachers and the faithful are related to the Lectionary itself. Many of the selections are too short to represent the literary and theological sense of the passage. Other selections have been sanitized by not including the harsher sections or the specific details that point to the concrete realities that the biblical author was addressing. I know from working with a weekly parish Bible study for 17 years that restoring a historical context provides the most exciting points of contact with 21st-century experience. Pious generalities get old fast. Seeing how God's Word spoke to real people in a different time and culture is not only exciting, it often makes today's challenges seem easier by comparison. For that reason, a few of our parishioners are convinced that in the first century C.E. they would have been Pharisees.

Since on Sundays the first reading is meant to correlate with the Gospel and the psalm text picks up a related image, there is more integration among those texts. The liturgical use of the Old Testament, however, is a heavy crosswind blowing against the Jewish faith of the biblical authors. Catholic supersessionism—the idea that the new covenant

replaces altogether the old covenant and the church displaces the Jews as the people of God—is alive and well. From the pulpit, the Old Testament reading appears to be at most a preparation for the Gospel, not in itself a mature expression of faith. A homily can correct for the errant ball flight if the homilist makes a conscious effort to highlight the enduring value of the Jewish tradition. But more dialogue with Jewish believers on both the academic and personal level is required to sort out the liturgical difficulties of speaking about the scriptural texts we both revere. Contemporary exegesis of Paul's Letter to the Romans provides one possibility: Paul reads Scripture as God's promise. The Gospel does not annul the Law and prophets but shows God's fidelity to that word of promise.

Our parish provides lectors with the *Workbook for Lectors* (Liturgy Training Publications) as a background resource. But even with this to help them, they say, "I don't have a clue what that's about." Though it may offend liturgists, many of them opt out of presenting the second reading altogether. Attempting to see the text from their point of view, I have concluded that the problem is twofold. The selections are detached from the readings that surround them, and they are not rhetorically complete units. More lector training will not solve that difficulty. Truth be told, our Bible study group often shortchanges the second reading too.

Some of the problems with Lectionary selections could be fixed quickly if the Lectionary were revised to include slightly longer passages. Bigger concerns about the overall shape and depiction of Jewish faith, however, belong in the "rebuilding the swing" category.

Good players also change the set of clubs in the bag to adjust to different course conditions. In a global church the regional conferences of bishops have a major responsibility to see to it that the tools for proclaiming the Word of God are appropriate to local conditions. Since the homily has a specific function within the larger liturgical celebration, it should not be treated as a "cure-all" for problems in Catholic identity formation, catechesis or detailed knowledge of church teaching. Good preaching can contribute by highlighting identity formation and what it meant to be God's people in biblical contexts; it can also articulate basic Catholic teaching appropriate to the readings of the day. Major renewal of faith communities with respect to other features of Catholic belief and life, however, requires sustained initiatives beyond the liturgy.

The Word for a Global Church

I like to remind academic advocates of multiculturalism that the Bible is not a Western, European or modern book. Scholars have worked hard to describe the diverse cultural values and understandings of human life with God found in the Bible. Recent studies have focused on how the new social and personal identities formed among God's people freed them from slavery to dominant political powers and cultural ideologies. Many of these insights should help with a serious task facing the church in the 21st century: becoming a global faith without imposing or transferring the North American and European cultural hegemony of past centuries.

As the Synod of Bishops assembles to consider the Word of God in the life and mission of the church, it should celebrate the substantial achievements of the 20th century. The foundations of liturgical renewal, biblical spirituality, outstanding scholarship and ecumenical dialogue provide an excellent base for meeting the challenges now facing a global church. Whatever comes from the synod, one can hope that it expresses the transforming power of the Word expressed in Is 55:10-11: "As the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return there until they have watered the earth….so shall my word be…It shall not return to me empty." A

Clotheslines

I feared the bugs in Nicaragua
more than invading contras.

Other foes, omnipresent dust and drought,
rendered remarkable the clotheslines,

clean garments flaunted flag-like
before the enemy.

Strong women skilled at washing
grime and blood and tears
would not succumb to dust.

Each washing pledged them to tomorrow
for their children.

Camille D'Arienzo

CAMILLE D'ARIENZO, R.S.M., is a member of the Mid-Atlantic Community of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

Ever Ancient, Ever New

Lectio divina is not just for monastics anymore.

BY JOHN B. KLASSEN

IN WRITING THIS SHORT reflection on *lectio divina* in relationship to the coming Synod of Bishops. I was again forcefully reminded of the great watershed that the Second Vatican Council has been for Roman Catholics and for all other Christian churches. For 400 years following the Counter-Reformation, the church hesitated to make the Scriptures accessible to lay women and men out of fear that the biblical text might be misinterpreted because of a lack of proper tools or methods for approaching it.

With the creation and publication of the "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation" (*Dei Verbum*), the church changed course and once again urged the faithful to return to the Scriptures as a source of spiritual nourishment. "Let all the Christian faithful learn 'the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ' (Phil 3:8) by frequent reading of the divine scriptures. 'Ignorance of the scriptures is ignorance of Christ'" (*Dei Verbum* No. 25). The constitution also acknowledges the importance of prayer when reading the biblical text, so that the dialogical character of this practice is apparent. There is, however, no explicit mention of the practice of *lectio divina*. By contrast, the working paper (*instrumentum laboris*) for the synod devotes a whole section (No. 38) to *lectio divina*. What a difference 43 years make!

What is *Lectio Divina*?

Lectio divina is reading a passage from the Scriptures (usually 7 to 10 verses) in a slow, reflective manner, either alone or within a group. Usually the text is read out loud so that words can be savored, phrases can receive their full value and the flow of the text can be discerned. The reading is followed by a period of silence, in which one can focus on a word or a phrase that resonates strongly. The text is read out loud again: if in a group, a different reader voices it. Again it is followed by a period of silence. I usually use this time to reflect on what grace might be in the words or phrase that struck me. Others may choose to place this in the person of Christ. The text is read a third time, followed by a period of silence and the question, "What is this text asking me to do?" This point in the process provides a rich opportunity for prayer: for oneself, for the church, for another member of the group, for the needs of people of our time. Finally and importantly, there is time to rest in silent contemplation, to imagine to oneself resting in God's love.

Lectio divina is a Spirit-filled practice for encountering the mystery of God in the Scriptures, in part because it is utterly simple and flexible. Since there is no one right way to do it, groups and individuals will need to explore and to trust their own intuitions about what is most appropriate for them. *Lectio divina* is not a technique. Rather, it is an engagement between the meaning of the text and the narrative of God's saving action in one's own life. This engagement is sensory: reading, listening, sensing the words, breathing, being silent, dwelling, praying and being silent again. It takes time.

Certainly, the practice is powerful because it goes against the grain of contemporary culture. So much of our world is driving, hammering, shouting, screeching, clamoring for attention, ramping things up for one exaggeration after another. The engine of continuous, expanding consumption uses excess stimulation and noise for fuel. Like the plant in "Little Shop of Horrors" that needs ever more

ART BY JULIE LONNEMAN

JOHN B. KLASSEN, O.S.B., is the abbot of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minn.

fresh human blood in order to live, so a consumption economy needs speed, noise, hype, impulsive buying and using things up in order to live.

Much in the contemporary world is truly outstanding, of course. We need to love our world as much as God does in creating it, in sending the Word to become flesh, in blessing it with the Holy Spirit. As the monastic writer Michael Casey points out, *lectio divina* is a low-pitched daily practice that allows for the gradual uncovering of our egocentrism and its transformation into other-centered living by the Holy Spirit. This kind of self-awareness, which does not collapse into egocentrism, is hard to come by in a world of overstimulation.

Useful Examples

Teachers in some Catholic elementary schools have begun to use *lectio divina* in the classroom. One third-grade class practices it every Monday and Wednesday, as the teacher invites the students to assume a prone position on the floor during a 15-minute session. With a group of very young learners, a teacher might play meditative music in the background as they quiet down. A short passage from the Scriptures is read and the usual group process for *lectio* is followed. These young students find that *lectio divina* helps them to quiet down ("It feels as if God is right beside you the whole day after you do *lectio*"), and they learn something about the Scriptures ("You feel like you were there in the Bible story").

Some elementary-grade teachers who have used *lectio divina* acknowledge that at first they did not think it would work; they doubted that their young charges would be able to settle down and focus on the text. Most of the time, however, they could, which is what most adults also experience with *lectio*. What matters is perseverance, trusting the Spirit to help one learn to listen while one attends prayerfully to the text.

A Benedictine school in Chile has prominently put a Bible on a stand in every classroom. Students practice group *lectio divina* at the beginning of every day, using a general ritual, but with enough freedom to foster the creativity and imagination of students. To be sure, the approach grows in sophistication as students move through the grade levels. There are no Benedictine monastics in this school. Lay women and men have worked to introduce Benedictine values and practices into the school's entire program, and *lectio* is central to that effort.

Still other groups are exploring the use of a combination of *lectio divina* (holy reading) and *visio divina* (holy looking). Since most people are visual learners, *visio divina* taps into their visual archive of memory to provide an immediate entree into their life experience. In this example, an Episcopalian pastor created a Lenten program for groups. Each Sunday a passage from the Lenten Gospels was chosen and members of the group did individual *lectio divina* with it over the next three days. On Thursday, the group came together for a group *lectio* session; then they explored the layers of meaning by looking at an illumination of the text from the Saint John's Bible (a new richly illustrated Bible being produced by artists in Collegeville, Minn.). This combination of intensive individual *lectio*, followed by group reflection and interaction with a multilayered illumination proved to be a rich, prayerful and imagination-opening experience.

Clearly, *lectio divina* is not just for monastics anymore.

Three Resources

Sacred Reading: *The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina,* a helpful, readable and comprehensive book by Michael Casey, a Cistercian monk of Tarrawarra Abbey in Australia.

Bible Reading for Spiritual Growth, a fine, short handbook by Norvene Vest, a lay oblate of Saint Andrew's Abbey in Valyermo, Calif.

Praying the Bible: *An Introduction to Lectio Divina,* by the Benedictine Archbishop Mariano Magrassi, weaves the patristic foundation for lectio into the narrative.

Each of these is a fine resource for reading about *lectio divina*. They carry a danger, however, that we will read about *lectio* rather than picking up the Bible and actually doing it.

Why Does *Lectio Divina* Matter?

As the synod's *instrumentum laboris* notes: "*lectio divina* is not confined to a few, well-committed individuals among the faithful nor to a group of specialists in prayer. Instead, *lectio* is a necessary element of an authentic Christian life in a secularized world, which needs contemplative, attentive, critical and courageous people who, at times, must make totally new, untried choices." This is a strong statement. *Lectio divina* matters because it provides a contemplative, Scripture-based foundation for a thoughtful Christian response to our world. This response comes as Scripture touches human experience with the "mysterious stirring" of the Holy Spirit. By making the Scriptures more accessible to lay men and women, the church has provided a powerful source for spiritual growth and transformation.

In particular, group *lectio* has a powerful, unique impact because faith-sharing is implicit in the practice. As Christians we can draw enormous encouragement, hope, insight and courage from listening to the witness of another's lived faith experience. By praying out of our own lives for the good of another in response to the biblical word, our hearts expand—we long for holiness and for unity with each other and with Christ. A

From Council to Synod

What the world's bishops have learned from Vatican II's "Constitution on Divine Revelation"

BY RONALD D. WITHERUP

THE SYNOD ON THE WORD OF GOD is truly a monumental event for the church. Now that the final agenda for the synod is available with the publication in May of its working document (called in Latin an *instrumentum laboris*, *IL*), it is useful to consider how the agenda can help implement the church's most important modern doctrinal teaching on the Word of God, the Second Vatican Council's "Constitution on Divine Revelation" (*Dei Verbum*, 1965, *DV*).

Comparison and Contrast

Whereas *DV* is a constitution promulgated by an ecumenical council, with consequent formal authority in the church, *IL* is a nonauthoritative working document for a synod of representative bishops, meant to be a guiding statement, not a definitive product.

IL is about five times as long as *DV* and consists of eight chapters, divided into introductory sections, three major divisions and a conclusion. The history of *DV* shows that it was to a considerable degree a compromise document hotly debated among the bishops at Vatican II. *IL*, on the other hand, was prepared by the general secretariat of the Synod of Bishops based upon input solicited from the world's bishops after the publication of the *lineamenta*, an early draft of the synod's agenda, in April 2007. Just as *DV* might be called a product of collegial consultation with the world's bishops, *IL* too is the result of a collegial polling of the world's bishops to help refine the synod's agenda. In fact, the introduction to *IL* by Archbishop Nikola Eterovic, general secretary of the synod, highlights certain groups that were consulted in preparing the document, including bishops of both Eastern and Western rites, the Roman Curia and the Union of Superiors General. Unlike *DV*, however, in which one can often detect the influence of experts who gave advice to the bishops during the council, it is not known what experts may stand behind *IL*. In fact, it is unclear whether the Pontifical Biblical Commission, the church's expert consultative body on Scripture, had any input at all.

Both are rich and inspiring documents. The *IL* is so lengthy, though, that I will not be able to do justice to it in such a short article. Nonetheless, some observations can be made with brevity.

Context

Before addressing the content of *IL* in relation to *DV*, a word about context is essential. *DV* was promulgated more than 40 years ago, and stands as the church's most important modern statement on divine revelation since the First

ART BY JULIE LONNEMAN

RONALD D. WITHERUP, S.S., recently became superior general of the Sulpicians and is the author of *Scripture: Dei Verbum* (Paulist, 2006).

Vatican Council. The goal of *DV* was to foster a proper understanding of God's Word in modern times, with a view to promoting more accessibility to and familiarity with the Word of God in the church and the world. In other words, it was a refined theoretical document with an eminently pastoral goal.

IL specifically draws attention to the fact that although many more people read the Bible now and the church has made more explicit use of the Word of God in its life and liturgy, nonetheless there is a lack of familiarity with *DV* itself and a less than complete use of the Bible in people's ordinary lives. In this sense, *IL*'s intense pastoral goal is evident. Unlike *DV*, which for the most part placed the pastoral dimensions of the Bible in its last chapter on Scripture in the life of the church, *IL* has specific pastoral recommendations at the end of every chapter or major section. This technique causes a certain amount of redundancy, but one cannot miss the desire to promote the overt pastoral application of Scripture in the life of the church. The title of *IL* confirms this: "The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church."

The context of the synod's working paper is more concretely pastoral than *Dei Verbum*, but both share a focused desire to make the Word of God a genuinely fruitful encounter with the God of revelation.

IL also draws attention to other contextual influences. There is concern about the ongoing gap between biblical scholars and nonspecialists, who often do not have access to current research in a digestible format. Moreover, the influence of secularism and religious and cultural pluralism sometimes interferes with healthy encounters with the Scriptures, and some desire to have the Scriptures' message of liberation be more explicit in helping to alleviate poverty and suffering.

The context of *IL* is thus more concretely pastoral than *DV*, but both share a focused desire to make the Word of God a genuinely fruitful encounter with the God of revelation.

Intersections of *Dei Verbum* and the *Instrumentum*

By my count, *IL* quotes or cites *DV* some 65 times in the text and twice in the notes. The titles of the three main sections of *IL* also indicate a close relationship to *DV*: Part I: The Mystery of the God Who Speaks to Us; Part II: The Word of God in the Life of the Church; Part III: The Word of God in the Mission of the Church.

This outline follows the basic pattern of *DV*, which moves from an analysis of divine revelation to the impact of that revelation in the life and mission of the church. The movement is outward. One receives the Word of God as an act of personal communication from a God who desires to share himself with the world, but who also invites the church to share this revelation with others by its life and mission.

Most important is the common starting point of the two documents. God's revelation to humanity is of primary importance. God initiates a dialogue by means of this gracious and mysterious gesture. Both documents quote Heb 1:1-2 (among other significant passages), which emphasizes Jesus Christ as the primary way in which God has spoken definitively. Both documents are centered on God's revelation through Christ and develop this through pneumatological and ecclesiological perspectives. The view is profoundly Trinitarian. The Bible, God's Word inspired by the Holy Spirit, is a message from God, mediated through the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, who is the precious embodiment of this sacred communication. *IL* also quotes *DV* (No. 2) in noting that God speaks to humanity as "friends." This highlights one of the aspects of *DV* that was so remarkable, namely, that God's self-revelation is nothing less than the mysterious, invisible God of all creation seeking to make himself known within the world, in the arena of human history. This highly personalized view of revelation in *DV* helped counterbalance previous propositional views of revelation predominant at the Council of Trent and Vatican I.

This deeply Christological orientation shows itself in other ways. *IL* quotes St. Bernard, for instance, that the Incarnation is the center of the Scriptures (*IL*, I.1.B). It also repeats the oft-quoted dictum of St. Jerome, as does *DV*, that "ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ." The primary setting for this encounter with Christ is the church's liturgy, where Word and sacrament meet. The *IL* emphasizes the dual aspects of "hearing and proclaiming the Word of God," a repetition of *DV*'s own teaching about the importance of the liturgical setting for the Word of God.

At times *IL* does not so much deepen the insights of *DV* as reiterate them. One important example of this is the discussion of the complex relationship between Scripture and

Tradition (*IL*, I.2.A.; see *DV*, Nos. 9-10). This is one of the thorniest problems to arise from *DV*. On the one hand, the relationship between Scripture and Tradition has been an important and distinctive Catholic principle since at least the patristic era. On the other hand, how this relationship works has never been definitively explained. *DV* acknowledges this principle explicitly and *IL* repeats it, yet neither resolves the issue of how they operate together concretely. Church Tradition interprets Scripture, guaranteeing its authenticity, yet does so as the "servant" of the Word, not its master. Perhaps this will be one of the themes the bishops will discuss at the synod.

When it comes to pastoral application, *IL* makes specific recommendations—for example, to those who fulfill various offices in the church, like bishops, priests, deacons, catechists, various ministers of the Word, religious and seminarians, and to laypeople. As one might expect of a document intended to promote discussion, *IL* often goes far beyond *DV* in making observations or recommendations of this kind. It notes, for instance, the need for improvements in the design of the Lectionary and in seminary instruction on preaching the Word, as well as the need for creative use of newer methods of communication and media (like CD's, DVD's, the Internet). The *IL* even suggests, tentatively, that the Word of God could be better understood at Mass "if the lector made a brief introduction on the meaning of the reading to be proclaimed." This is occasionally done in some parishes, but it requires extra training of lectors, something the document also encourages.

Divergences

As much as *IL* makes use of *DV*'s primary teachings, there are some noteworthy divergences. One is the synod document's consistent call for a reappropriation of the ancient prayerful meditation of Scripture called *lectio divina*. This term appears some 30 times in *IL*, and two large sections are devoted to an explanation of the practice (II.4 and II.5). Although *IL* gives some preference to time-tested monastic practices of *lectio divina*, it does not affirm any one method as predominant, and it acknowledges equally the value of both personal and communal exercise of this devotional practice. Clearly *IL* sees this as one of the most pastorally important ways to promote Scripture.

IL also mentions the danger of fundamentalism, something not explicitly addressed in *DV*. It warns that fundamentalism "takes refuge in literalism and refuses to take into consideration the historical dimension of biblical revelation." This echoes the warning issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993). It is clear from the context, though, that the target of this warning is certain Christian "sects" that view the Bible in a literalistic fashion that does an injustice to its historical context.

Another divergence is in reference to the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation that has been characteristic of most 20th-century exegesis, both Catholic and Protestant. In *DV* this method is more implicit than explicit. The council fathers noted the importance of using every possible scientific means to study Scripture and also adopted a nuanced view of how the Gospels came into being in three stages and thus do not reflect "history" in the absolute sense, but *DV* does not discuss the methodology explicitly. *IL*, on the other hand, mentions historical criticism by name three times, each time favorably. But it also emphasizes that this can never be the sole method of exegesis; it needs to be supplemented by other methods designed to lead to the deeper, more profound meanings of the Word of God that nourish and strengthen one's life.

This acknowledgement of historical criticism is impor-

tant because this is a particularly neuralgic point in current biblical studies. Some blame this method for discouraging use of the Bible for spiritual enrichment or for undermining people's faith in the Scriptures as historically accurate. Basically, *IL* is not offering anything new here. It is merely suggesting what other church documents have done since at least 1943 when Pope Pius XII's famous encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* encouraged Catholic scholars to use all available means to study Scripture and help people learn its message. Historical criticism, properly applied, is still essential, though it cannot give the last word on any given meaning of a biblical passage.

The Work of the Spirit

The *IL* is indeed a rich document. We have barely scratched the surface here of what it offers the synod participants, who in any case will have three weeks to discuss its contents at length. The synod's goals—to foster a better familiarity with *DV*, promote more frequent use of *lectio divina* and increase the impact of the Word of God in pastoral ministry—are all admirable. Whether they will be attained by the synod's reflection remains to be seen. I fear that *IL*'s length, its considerable repetition and its often formal language, typical of so many official church documents, may discourage many from studying it or using it for their own reflection. While one wishes that some direction had been given on key issues like theories of inspiration or the relationship between the Word of God and Tradition, *IL* generally provides a fruitful orientation that can enrich the implementation of *DV* in the life of the church.

Some people have been worried that the synod will be used as an opportunity to backtrack on the advances made in Catholic interpretation of the Bible since Vatican II. That may be a danger, but *IL*'s use of *DV* suggests to me that this is not likely to happen. One hopes that the Holy Spirit, so evident at Vatican II, will continue to move among the synod participants and breathe new life into the church's appropriation of God's inviting, comforting and challenging Word. A

Pomp and Simplicity

The wonders of Lourdes in its jubilee year

BY JAMES MARTIN

THE MEMBERS OF THE Order of Malta, or at least its American branches, concluded their annual one-week pilgrimage to Lourdes in May. As in the past few years, I participated as a guest of (and chaplain for) the "Federal Association" of the order, which makes its home in Washington, D.C., but draws its membership from farther afield. Accordingly I shared Masses, Marian processions and meals with a diverse and accomplished group of men and women from Maryland and Virginia, to be sure, but also from Texas, Georgia and Florida.

This year is a jubilee year in Lourdes, the 150th anniversary of the apparitions of the Virgin Mary to St. Bernadette Soubirous, a young girl living in squalor in the small town in southern France. Signs of the jubilee were everywhere, the most obvious being the gargantuan number of people. Yet despite the massive crowds, life in Lourdes was, as always, cheerful, calm and well organized. (Compare that to my first sight of Pennsylvania Station in New York on my return, where, despite their far lower number, the crowds seemed much grumpier, and my appreciation for what happens in Lourdes deepened considerably.)

PHOTO BY BURNS McLINDON

Lourdes is a marvelous mix of pomp and simplicity. For the pomp, few places outside Rome can match the pageantry of the pontifical Masses celebrated in the vast underground concrete church, the Basilica of St. Pius X. That worship space, the site of the largest Masses in town, is saved from looking like a 1960s-era parking lot only by the immense banners with pictures of saints from around the world. (I seem regularly to find myself seated under the picture of St. Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei.) Besides the 25,000 pilgrims and the hundreds of priests and deacons, the assembled dignitaries included Cardinals Pio Laghi and Roger Mahony, not to mention Archbishops George Niederauer of San Francisco and Timothy Dolan of Milwaukee, and Bishops William Lori of Bridgeport, Conn., William Murphy of Rockville Center, N.Y., and Michael Cote of Norwich, Conn.

Other prelates, despite the long list of names of episcopal personages on the program, remained somewhat mysterious to me. I walked up to one bishop and complimented him on his lovely homily, only to find out later that he hadn't spoken at the Mass at all! (Fortunately, he spoke little English and gleefully accepted my words of praise.) At Sunday's Mass, Fra Matthew Festing, the order's new grand master, offered the prayer of the Order of Malta in Latin, and

JAMES MARTIN, S.J., is associate editor of **America** and author of *Lourdes Diary: Seven Days at the Grotto of Massabieille.*

though the good-natured Englishman confessed that his command of the language was no better than that of an "idle schoolboy," it sounded fine to me.

My First Latin Mass

Speaking of language proficiency, while my schoolboy French miraculously returns each year in Lourdes, my Latin does not, for the simple reason that I don't know any. Nonetheless I celebrated (or rather, concelebrated) my very first Latin Mass in Lourdes, which is a fine place to ring in the old. Another Jesuit and I were pulling a cart carrying one of the *malades* (the French word used in all languages for those seeking healing at Lourdes) into the underground basilica when we got stuck in the crowd and ended up at the tail end of the procession. There were a few extra seats in the first row, and I was politely pulled up to the very first seat. The priest behind me laughed and muttered, "I hope you know your Latin, because you'll probably be brought up onto the altar."

I was. Fortunately, all the official liturgies in Lourdes are astonishingly well organized. The French M.C. silently handed me a little Mass booklet, so that when Pio Laghi peered at me over the stone altar, I could look like I knew what I was doing.

As with the rest of the Catholic Church, in Lourdes the personal makes its home alongside the public, and the powerful rubs up against the powerless (though who is which is always a good question). At the center are those whom Bishop William Curlin, retired bishop of Charlotte, N.C., always calls "our beloved *malades*." On our pilgrimage this year I met dozens of *malades*, their families and friends, as well as the knights and dames of Malta, who were there to help accompany the *malades* to the baths, push their carts so that they could get a good spot in the grotto during Mass, fetch them a drink of water, make sure that they got their coffee and croissants in the morning, and, most of all, pray with them.

To mark this jubilee year, Pope Benedict XVI granted a plenary indulgence to those who, while in Lourdes, visited four sites: first, the Grotto at Massabielle; second, Bernadette's home at the time of the apparitions (called the "Cachot," after the French word for "jail," which is what the place had been before the Soubirous family took up residence); third, the church of her baptism; and fourth, the "hospice" where she made her first Communion. This two-hour-long pilgrimage (along with confession) seemed, while arduous, not too high a price for the full remission of temporal punishment for my sins.

It was the object of some humor that the sole street that the town seems to have chosen to repair this year is the one leading to the Cachot. This meant not only that the helpful white line painted along the streets to enable pilgrims to find their way simply stopped, but also that wheelchairs and carts would find it hard to make their way to one of the central spots of worship in the town. "Gee," said a friend, "why didn't they repave the grotto while they were at it?"

My own plenary pilgrimage was completed on a sultry day, and I felt happy when I finally received the last of four stickers to affix to the little blue paper disk that I had been given by an official in the sanctuary. (I imagined presenting my little disk to God when I get to heaven, saying,

"Do you accept these here?") The next day at Mass, though, we all received an indulgence, courtesy of the Bishop of Tarbes, Jacques Perrier. It made many of us wonder what we would do with two plenary indulgences. The answer from a Jesuit friend: offer one for a deceased person. This I did, for my father.

A Miracle?

What was the best part of the trip? That's easy: being with the generous knights and dames, the tireless volunteers and companions, and especially the hopeful *malades*. Each of the *malades* comes to Lourdes for different reasons. As a group, they are at different places with their illnesses. (This year I heard anger for the first time, which struck me as bracingly honest and real.) But all were hoping for some sort of healing—physical, emotional or spiritual. With all the good humor and faith of the *malades*, it's sometimes easy for me to forget the deep emotions that lay just underneath the surface, but conversations can quickly turn serious over breakfast, lunch or dinner, or while you're waiting in line for a bath. Tears come quickly at Lourdes and flow as fast as the Gave River, which runs silently past the grotto.

Spiritual healings come quickly, too; but after I return people always ask me about the physical ones. Were there any miracles? Yes, though maybe not as dramatic as the 66 authenticated ones. For example: One man in our group had suffered from injuries during the first Persian Gulf war and, as a guest of the Order of Malta, had come to Lourdes seeking healing. His eyesight, never good, had deteriorated since being injured. He told me, while we were waiting in line for the baths, that as soon as he landed in Lourdes his eyesight somehow seemed to get even worse. Someone suggested he take off his eyeglasses to let his eyes rest. A few minutes later, he told me, he could see perfectly well. "Look," he said, "I can read your nametag from here." And he did, from a few feet away. "I haven't been able to see that well for 25 years!"

What do you make of that? Well, as one character says in the film "The Song of Bernadette," for those without faith no explanation is possible; for those with faith no explanation is necessary. A

Explaining Evil

Original Sin

A Cultural History

By Alan Jacobs

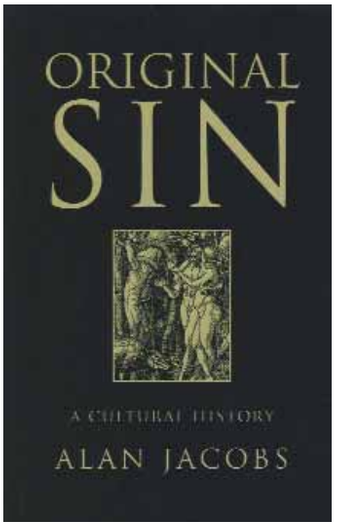
HarperOne. 304p $24.95
ISBN 9780060783402

Alan Jacobs's new book is best read as an intellectual *jeu d'esprit*: a playful, wide-ranging, erudite meditation on the nagging question of whether human beings enter the world predisposed to evil and sinfulness. Jacobs, a professor of literature at Wheaton College, deploys a staggering range of literary, theological and cultural sources—from Odilo of Cluny to the movie "Hellboy," from the rabbis of 17th-century Amsterdam to his own experiences in 1990s Nigeria. The result, while constantly entertaining, is sometimes chaotic.

The author's approach is unwaveringly diachronic. His book stresses the idea that, *mutatis mutandi*, we have been having more or less the same debate about human nature for several millennia. Perhaps so, perhaps not: but the role of contingency, of specific historical circumstances, in that debate ought not to be underestimated. Jumping back and forth from Augustine to C. S. Lewis to Milton, from this century to that century, as though all such peoples and times were engaged in an identical intellectual endeavour, is sometimes instructive (and demonstrates just how widely Jacobs has read), but it can also be misleading and a bit reductive. One is reminded of those critics of the cognitive scientist Stephen Pinker, quoted by Jacobs, who, dismayed by Pinker's suggestion that a tendency toward aggression is part of our genetic legacy, accused him of reinventing Augustine for a new age, of producing a "jumped-up, down-market version of original sin." There is endless room to debate the virtues of Pinker's theorizing, but it has to be understood on its own, historically determined terms, not simply as a rehashing of a hackneyed idea. Jacobs rightly scolds the sneering tone of some of Pinker's critics, but he sometimes comes close to imitating their errors of oversimplification.

The thought of people as different as St. Paul, Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Grandison Finney, Coleridge, G. K. Chesterton and the rest of Jacobs's luminous cast of characters ought not to be corralled into a single, overly static historical narrative. It seems unhelpful, for instance, to refer to Pelagius as "something like the Tony Robbins of his time."

This major cavil aside, *Original Sin* has a great deal to offer both the general reader and those already well versed in this most controversial of theological arenas. Many of the grand battles in the debate about original sin—St. Augustine versus Pelagius, 17th-century Jansenists versus the Jesuits, the leaders of the Great Awakening and their critics—are recounted with economy and precision. Jacobs also strives to be even-handed. He is perhaps a little charitable when it comes to analyzing the hugely influential, some would say hugely debilitating, thought of Augustine of Hippo; but he makes the excellent point that those who argued from the opposite perspective—those who stressed the importance of human free will or even dreamed dreams of human perfectibility—were no less likely to take up dogmatic, unflinching, even fanatical positions. The message of Augustine's great rival Pelagius, for instance, with its insistence on the role of free will in the salvific economy, might seem at first blush to encourage a decidedly optimistic, empowering worldview. In fact, Jacobs suggests, it placed the "terrifying weight of complete freedom on the individual" at every moment, which was just as likely to engender anxiety, excessive asceticism and a "creed for heroes" to which few people could measure up. Admittedly, Jacobs fastens upon some conspicuously soft targets in making this point (Pelagius, Rousseau, and so on), but his point is still a good one. Positing a neat division between bleak, mean-spirited believers in original sin and their jolly, optimistic opponents is often entirely misguided.



Into the bargain, the seemingly devastating consequences of a belief in original sin and human depravity and cupidity could sometimes have a surprisingly positive cultural, political and intellectual impact. Such beliefs could fuel a pragmatic political realism and form the basis of a sophisticated, robust, even comforting devotional attitude. Such results might not have been to everyone's taste. In the political realm, for instance, belief in original sin usually encouraged a conservative, even reactionary outlook; but this does not diminish the fact that those few sentences in Genesis, as filtered through the thought of thinkers like Augustine, possessed an extraordinary cultural creativity.

Original Sin includes many intriguing digressions, but it is at its best when it enters solidly theological terrain. The accounts of how religious thinkers have sought to conceptualize the stain of man's first disobedience and hammer out its consequences are often extremely well wrought. Readers will sometimes be distracted by the author's inability to resist a good story, however tangential it might be, but they will also be reminded that, far from being an arcane theological construct, the doctrine of original sin is at least "an intellectually serious attempt" to answer that abiding question: where does all the wrongdoing come from?

Jonathan Wright

The Reviewers

Jonathan Wright, who writes extensively on early modern religious history, is the author of *God's Soldiers: A History of the Jesuits* (Doubleday, 2004).

Emilie Griffin, who lives in Alexandria, La, has described Lewis's conversion in her book *Turning: Reflections on the Experience of Conversion* (Doubleday, 1980).

Pam Kingsbury, the author of *Inner Voices, Inner Views: Conversations With Southern Writers* (Enolam Group, 2005), lives in Florence, Ala.

Gerald T. Cobb, S.J., is associate professor in the English department at Seattle University.

‘Don’t Bother About Thrills’

Yours, Jack

Spiritual Direction From C. S. Lewis

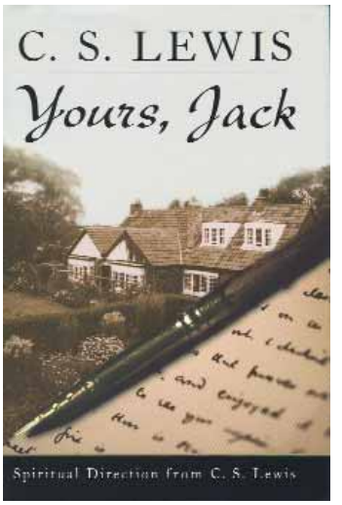
Edited by Paul F. Ford

HarperOne. 400p $23.95
ISBN 9780061240591

This new selection of C. S. Lewis’s letters on spiritual matters makes good reading even for someone already conversant with Lewis’s life and work. Compiled by the longtime Lewis scholar and enthusiast Paul F. Ford, *Yours, Jack* is reader-friendly. The subtitle suggests that the collection comprises Lewis’s letters of spiritual direction—that is to say, letters written to those he was advising in spiritual matters. While these do form a large part of the collection, Ford in fact has included two other kinds of letters. Some are addressed to spiritual companions, like Bede Griffiths, one of Lewis’s former students at Oxford and later a Roman Catholic Benedictine monk. Another spiritual companion is Lewis’s childhood friend Arthur Greeves, with whom he kept up a lifelong correspondence of the heart. Other peer-friends, like Lewis’s brother “Warnie,” are represented as well.

Still a third category includes Lewis’s letters to his own spiritual mentors, some as exotic as Don Giovanni Calabria, with whom Lewis corresponded in Latin. Calabria, a Roman Catholic, has since been canonized a saint. Some early letters date back to Lewis’s atheist days, so that the whole collection serves to trace the arc of his spiritual life (and religious beliefs) from his late teens to the days just before his death in November 1963.

The letters offer plenty of sound spiritual advice. A letter to Mrs. Ray Garrett in 1960 indicates Lewis’s kind of balanced spiritual counsel: “We must not bother about thrills at all. *Do* the present duty—*bear* the present pain—*enjoy* the present pleasure—and leave emotions and experiences to take care of themselves. That’s the programme, isn’t it?” Lewis wrote quite a number of letters like this, offering wisdom and comfort to correspondents, some of whom he never met, who had asked for his advice. *Yours, Jack* includes more than 220 such letters to various individuals, whose names will be unfamiliar to most readers—Rhona Bodle, Vera Mathews Gebbert, Michael Edwards, Genia Goelz, Mr. Green and others, some of whom have coded names like “Mrs. Lockley.” Of these, the only correspondent recognizable to me at once is Sheldon Vanauken, who received 11 of the letters in this collection. (Vanauken became an author in his own right.) Lewis supported people during their illnesses and saw them through grief, helping them to navigate prickly relationships with pastors and recurring doubts about faith. Lewis’s own faith life is exposed here; the down-to-earth simplicity of the letters is touching.



There is no question that the “spiritual direction” letters can legitimately be classified as such. But it is equally plain that Lewis did not regard himself as a spiritual director. In a letter to Mary Neylan (1941) he seems to equate spiritual direction with confession and absolution, while commending the practice. In an effort to encourage Neylan he commends the practice of receiving holy Communion:

> I suppose the normal next step, after self-examination, repentance and restitution, is to make your Communion; and then to continue as well as you can, praying as well as you can…. This, I would say, is the obvious course. If you want anything more—e.g. Confession and Absolution which our church enjoins on no-one but leaves free to all—let me know and I’ll find you a *directeur*. If you choose this way, remember it’s not the psychoanalyst over again: the confessor is the representative of Our Lord and declares His forgiveness.

The director’s advice, Lewis adds, is of “secondary importance.” In the same letter he recommends spiritual reading “in small doses”: *The Imitation of Christ* and *Theologia Germanica*, the New Testament and the Psalms. Further counsel: “Don’t worry if your heart won’t respond: do the best you can.” Soon we find that Lewis has made a connection for Mary Neylan with his own confessor and spiritual director, Father Walter Adams, a Cowley father in Oxford.

Roman Catholics can be at ease with Lewis’s spirituality. Yet in some letters he reveals his Protestant sensibility. In June 1952 he writes to Mary Van Deusen, who has inquired about incense and Hail Marys: “Incense and Hail Marys are in quite different categories. The one is merely a matter of ritual: some find it helpful and others don’t….” For Lewis, however, the Hail Mary “raises a *doctrinal* question: whether it is lawful to address devotions to any creature, however holy.” Lewis advises it is not wrong to offer a salute to a saint or an angel, and likens this to “taking off one’s hat to a friend.” But he cautions against addressing prayers to the Blessed Virgin, a practice that he thinks may lead to treating her as a deity. “And if the Blessed Virgin is as good as the best mothers I have known, she does not want any of the attention which might have gone to her Son diverted to herself.” Nearing the end of his life, Lewis affirms in one of his final letters (1963) his simple and literal belief in the Virgin Birth. So it is clear that he honors the Virgin in a very Protestant-leaning Anglican style.

How did Lewis fit these letters into his full academic schedule and heavy writing routine? Where did he find the time? Apparently he saw such letter-writing as a kind of Christian duty. Besides, he enjoyed it.

Yours, Jack provides only scanty information about Lewis’s correspondents. To know more, readers may turn to *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*. Ford acknowledges his debt to these three massive volumes, letters “so admirably and lovingly edited by Walter Hooper.” His short collection is in fact drawn from Hooper’s expansive one. In Hooper’s meticulous work, each correspondent is given an exhaustive biography. (For instance, Mary Neylan’s long association

with Lewis is described in elaborate detail.) Ford's collection, by contrast, is a lighter, more manageable read. Even so, it provides real insight into one of the most genuine and persuasive spiritual writers of the last century. ***Emilie Griffin***

More Than a 'Magical Series'

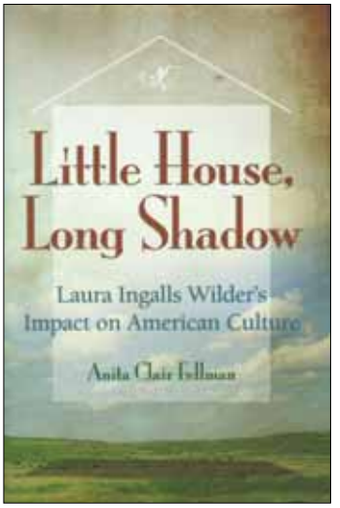
Little House, Long Shadow

Laura Ingalls Wilder's Impact on American Culture

By Anita Clair Fellman

Univ. of Missouri Press. 376p $34.95
ISBN 9780826218032

The Little House on the Prairie series—in book, television and, now, DVD—has long captured the imagination of readers, writers and teachers. Many readers look back on the collection with great affection and nostalgia, believing the writing suggests a simpler time. In the introduction to *Little House, Long Shadow*, Anita Clair Fellman (chair of women's studies and associate professor of history at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Va.) admits that she "was not a devoted fan of the stories in childhood." But when the time came for her to read books to her own children, she was "determined to foist" the books on them and in doing so became "captivated." Her involvement with the works became personal and political, in part because "the emotional appeal of the series is formidable."



One of her many theses is that the Wilder stories have enduring appeal because they represent the American ideal of self-reliance. In her quest to find answers about the works' influence, her studies often led her into other people's memories of Laura Ingalls Wilder's collection. It is important to note that even though the first book in the series was published in 1935, a time when the cost of owning children's books was prohibitive, the books have never gone out of print, remain best sellers and are among the most frequently used texts in schools.

The Wilders—both Laura and her daughter Rose—were acutely aware of the ways in which America's Great Depression paralleled life on the frontier. The authors advocated less government interference in the personal lives of America's citizens because they wanted to believe that most citizens, when left to their own devices, could better regulate the local community than could a government based hundreds of miles away. And so the novels served as morality tales, whereby the "good" people made sure the "bad" people got their comeuppance.

The books' popularity has led to the stories' being adapted for stage and television—both as a series and a mini-series (in England and America)—and as a cartoon by the Japanese. From the first publication, teachers and families have read *Little House on the Prairie* aloud as a form of entertainment. (Ronald Reagan was a huge fan of the television series. According to Fellman's research, he watched it nightly while eating dinner from a television tray in the family quarters of the White House.)

Some educators have even used the collection as a starting point to teach reading, history, math and social studies. Students make sunbonnets, log cabins from cardboard boxes, and participate in other activities featured in the various stories. There are online groups devoted to endless discussions of the way the television series deviated from the books. To scrutinize such a beloved text in a scholarly fashion is risky. The great strength of *Little House, Long Shadow* is Fellman's willingness to present the multiple sides and arguments, gently nudging the reader to keep context in mind.

Even though the works were written in the third person, many readers assumed the stories were the tales of a truthful nar-

rator. There is always the question of whether or not Laura's recollections were composites, reliable narrative, or fell under the heading of "remembering as an act of imagination." During the first years of publication, the narratives were classified as non-fiction because they were being written down by Laura Ingalls Wilder, who had lived through the migration to and settling of the American Midwest. Her stories were taken to be autobiographical rather than representational. She was given some license to omit the painful details, such as the death of her infant son. As scholars gained greater access to family history, the books are now classified as "historical fiction."

More information about the complicated and multi-faceted relationship between Laura and her daughter Rose has also come to light with scholarly inquiry. Letters and assorted family documents have established that Laura wrote the stories while Rose edited them, found the publisher for them and took care of the various literary duties associated with the writing life. Each woman apparently resented the symbiotic work relationship, finding it difficult to give the other credit. The two women seemed closest when living great distances apart. There is plentiful speculation that their difficult relationship is the basis for "Pa's" role as the dominant parent in the books. The lives of women and the problems women faced are often ignored, presumably because they were considered unimportant during the years the books were initially published (1932-45).

Political correctness has also prompted educators to reconsider the books. Whites were not the first people to view most of the territory about which Ingalls writes, and teachers have had to find ways to balance historical accuracy with the fictional license taken by the authors. (Louise Erdrich cites the works as childhood favorites and is working on her own correlated series, told from a tribal perspective.)

Anita Clair Fellman argues convincingly that Laura Ingalls Wilder has had a significant influence on American culture, children's literature and readers worldwide. Fellman's research is impeccable. She delves into the questions of what would have constituted literal truth in the works, why readers still find resonance in the works, and whether the works should be taken off school reading lists for reasons of racial sensitivity.

Little House, Long Shadow will appeal to the reader who values accuracy as much as imagination. Fellman's judicious interpretation and critique of the Little House series reminds readers that works of literature often reflect the social and political mores of their time. She celebrates individuality—that most American of ideals.

Pam Kingsbury

Apocalypse Now

World Made by Hand

A Novel

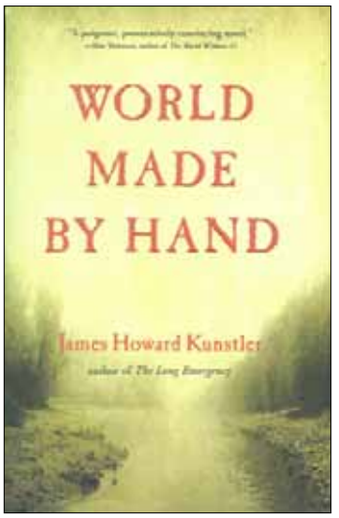
By James Howard Kunstler
Atlantic Monthly Press. 336p $24
ISBN 9780871139782

James Howard Kunstler's novel begins in the pastoral setting of a riverbank, where the narrator, Robert Earle, and his best friend Loren Holder have concluded a successful fishing excursion. Although they are slightly intoxicated by the natural beauty around them and by some homemade wine, they are also profoundly aware of the dire context of their lives: nuclear attacks on Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., combined with a cutoff of oil to the United States, have ushered in an apocalyptic age.

Kunstler is well known for his non-fiction work *The Long Emergency* (2005), whose subtitle reads: "*Surviving the End of Oil, Climate Change, and Other Converging Catastrophes of the 21st Century.*" In his new book Kunstler assumes these catastrophes have taken place, and he offers a stark portrait of the ensuing daily life of a small New York town.

Kunstler's version of the future is in many ways a regression to the past, to the "world made by hand" of the book's title. The people of Union Grove must recover some long-lost survival skills, and in fact they do much better than just survive. Robert reflects, "You could argue that people are generally better-adjusted now, mentally, in many ways than we were back then. We follow the natural cycles.... We're not jacked up on coffee and televi-

sion and sexy advertising all the time. No more anxiety about credit card bills." With dramatically reduced effluents and pollution flowing into waterways (virtually all manufacturing has ceased), rivers and streams teem with fish. Compared to the total annihilation portrayed in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, Kunstler offers a sobering but far less grim vision of post-Armageddon America.



Kunstler also balances the harsh realities of the new age with a rediscovery of a primal spiritual authenticity. One character bemoans that "in the sight of God we don't matter," but Robert counters that a sacred goodness of people resides, "In all the abiding virtues. Love, bravery, patience, honesty, justice, generosity, kindness. Beauty too. Mostly love." In this context there is a new relevance for religious communities: "Those of us who remained did not have diversions like television or recreational shopping anymore, and the church had become our get-together place in a way it had ceased to be for generations."

While Robert affirms a sense of the sacred in nature and in humanity, he also expresses wariness about a band of retro-puritanical folk called the New Faith Church of Jesus, led by the mysterious Brother Jobe, whom Kunstler has described in an interview as "a comically dark figure who is a combination of Boss Hogg [from "The Dukes of Hazzard"] and Captain Ahab." Brother Jobe pursues the classic American dream of building a city on a hill. In this effort he preaches a new emancipation, because he believes Americans had fallen into material slavery: "They made themselves slaves to the car and everything connected with it and it destroyed them in the end." Jobe's pronouncement is just one example of a recurring concern in the novel about social and environmental collapse.

Brother Jobe's foil to some extent is Loren, the town preacher who is called upon to become a constable, thus upholding both divine law and what's left of human law. Loren's services are certainly needed, as Union Grove has become a kind of Wild West wasteland menaced by several bad guys. One operates a huge salvage market out of the former town dump, while another controls all commerce on one stretch of the Hudson River. When a crew of townsfolk goes missing on the river, Loren and Robert form a posse that is in effect a SWAT team on horseback.

Kunstler suggests that much of the social progress made over the last decades in the United States would quickly unravel under the pressure of working simply to survive. Union Grove's town trustees are all male, because "As the world changed, we'd reverted to social divisions that were thought to be long obsolete. The egalitarian pretenses of the high octane decades had dissolved and nobody even debated it anymore, including the women of our town." There are other disquieting changes in the social fabric: Loren shares his wife with the widower Robert, and only a single child has been born to the entire community of Union Grove in the first eight months of the year.

Anyone who has read Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* or Alan Weisman's *The World Without Us* senses that topics formerly labeled as "unthinkable" have now become a central preoccupation for a number of writers who wish to describe in a compelling way the dystopias we will avoid only if we can find a way to change our lives and lifestyles significantly enough. Kunstler plays on primal fears about where we are going, but he also raises primal hopes. A number of times in the novel he describes fireflies flickering in the evenings, perhaps to suggest that even in an apocalyptic time of darkness there are likely to be remnant lights, however small, to give us hope and motivation to come up with a brave new "world made by hand."

Gerald T. Cobb

The editors pose questions for the presidential candidates debate, at americamagazine.org/connects.

Classified

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For more information or to apply please contact Rev. Jim Urbanic, C.P.P.S., P.O. Box 339, Liberty, MO 64069; Ph: (816) 781-4344. E-mail: JimUrbanic@aol.com. Applications and contact information submitted by Oct. 20, 2008.

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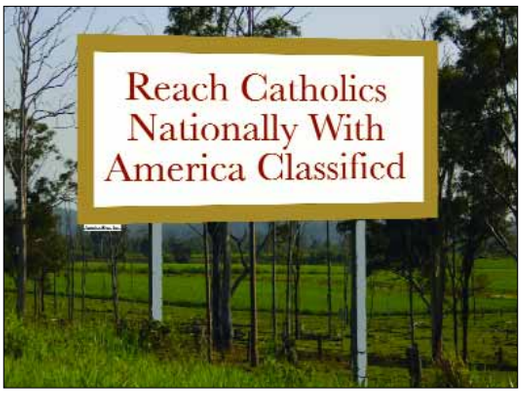

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Letters

Justice for Africa

As someone who works to promote social justice in Africa, I applaud "Decline and Progress in Africa," by Peter Schineller, S.J. (8/11). Schineller is absolutely correct in suggesting that the solution to Africa's problems must come from within Africa and that international institutions can do more to support developing nations. But the role that the United States plays in destabilizing as well as aiding the countries of the continent needs to be highlighted.

Yes, Africa has received increased aid to help with H.I.V. and AIDS victims, malaria and education. But many African governments have also received substantial support from the United States in the form of military aid. The true goals for the United States in Africa may be to increase access to Africa's oil, counter terrorism and offset China's growing influence in the region. Humanitarian aid has also become a business in many cases. Budgets of many a nongovernmental organization are greater than available national coffers. How can the solutions to Africa's problems come from within when their efforts are undermined by such external factors?

True security and development in Africa is dependent upon responsible and fair U.S. policies toward the continent. Increased military aid and support for illegitimate governments is not what the people of Africa need and not what they are asking for. To continue the substantial progress, Schineller notes, the United States must be a responsible and real partner with the people and governments of Africa.

Rocco Puopolo, S.X.
Executive Director
Africa Faith and Justice Network
Washington, D.C.

The Threshold of Forgiveness

The subtitle of "Mercy Toward Our Fathers" (Camille D'Arienzo, R.S.M., 8/18) says that "forgiving priests could be the key to healing." Although D'Arienzo carefully acknowledges the huge impediments to forgiveness from those who were sexually abused by clergy, she fails to cite one of the fundamental barriers for those abused, their families and even for the average person in the pews.

Truth and accountability are indispensable for any threshold of forgiveness. Without them survivors are being asked to forgive not only their direct abusers but also the very same hierarchical leaders who continue to abuse them through corporate defense strategies, secrecy about the full extent of abuses and demonization of survivors whose only realistic option for justice, however inadequate, is civil suits and/or financial settlements.

The actions of hierarchical leaders betray their own expressions of deep apology and their expectations of forgiveness. Perhaps a better formulation of the issue might be "truth and accountability could be the key to forgiveness."

Bill Casey
Chair of the Board of Trustees
Voice of the Faithful
Alexandria, Va.

Reciprocity

Thank you for "Bethlehem's Wall," by Austen Ivereigh (9/1). The practices he describes, as well as the fact that the government of Israel has still not implemented the agreement of 1993 with the Vatican, raise the question of why our government has not put some pressure on the Israeli government to act.

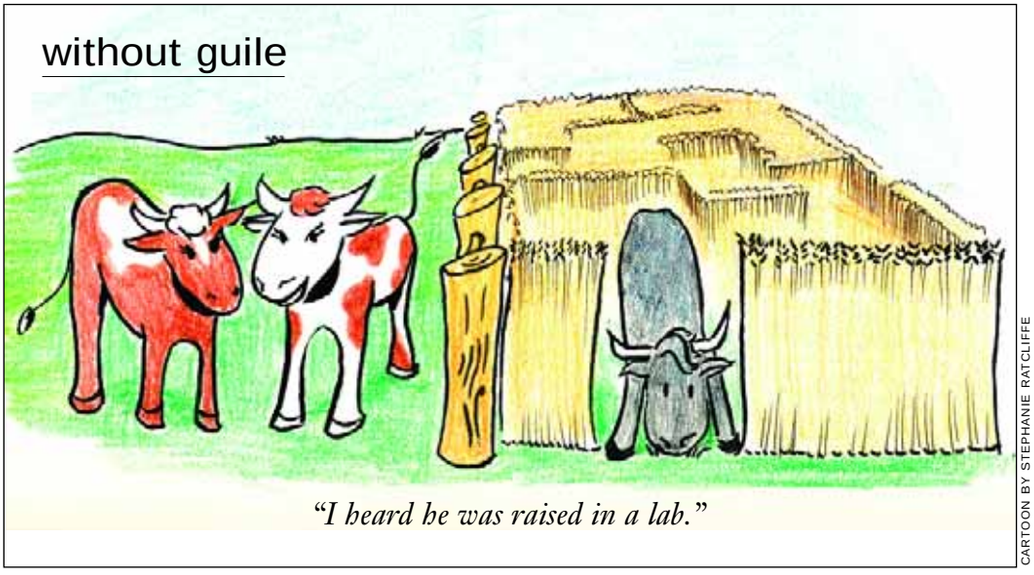
It also raises the question of why the American Catholic Church has not put more pressure on our government to take action on this matter. I can only hope Ivereigh's article will be sent to many members of Congress as well as the two presidential candidates in the hope that something will be done to allow Catholic priests in the Holy Land the same freedom that Jewish rabbis have in the United States, and to assist Christians in Bethlehem in maintaining their presence at one of Christianity's holiest sites.

Carl C. Landegger
New York, N.Y.

Thanks, But No Thanks

While reading "A Church Transparent" (Thomas J. Healey, 9/8), the following thought occurred to me: God save the church if it starts emulating the accounting practices and business principles of the leading investment banks, Wall Street firms and Fortune 500 companies. Ethical stewardship and financial and moral accountability were not invented by American entrepreneurs. How is it that, given the financial debacles seen on Wall Street in decade after decade, we are not slightly more humble about the practices of American business, especially when it starts preaching to the church?

Michael Manning
Rumson, N.J.



"I heard he was raised in a lab."

CARTOON BY STEPHANIE RATCLIFFE

Letters

The Perils of Change

Re "Expressing Holy Things" (Bishop Victor Galeone, 9/8): The church should be immensely hesitant to change any prayers that have become second nature unless there is an absolutely certain reason for the change (which is not the case with the recently approved changes to liturgical prayers, in my opinion). I know a chaplain who serves people who worship in a community that made substantial changes to the text of the Lord's Prayer, and those who are elderly and having mental difficulties are no longer able to say the prayer with others because it is so hard to learn new forms of prayer.

One change I would advocate would be to the Creed. What is wrong with "for us and our salvation" rather than "for us men and our salvation"? Is there anyone who is afraid that the "us" might be confusing to those who might otherwise think that the "us" also refers to our dogs and cats?

Patricia Gross
Arlington, Mass.

Anything but Bold

In "A Bold New Direction" (9/8), James T. Keane, S.J., and Jim McDermott, S.J., report that until the dying days of Richard H. Tierney, S.J., "the Irish Question remained a focus of the magazine." If so, poor Father Tierney must have been spinning in his grave these past 40 years (the latest phase of the Troubles, or the "Irish Question"). Apart from a few timid or safe comments, **America** was by its silence complicit (like the U.S. Catholic press in general) in the British oppression of Catholics in Northern Ireland. That, of course, merely followed the lead of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. With a few honorable exceptions, the Catholic bishops of the United States failed to take a stand against British injustice in Northern Ireland.

It's almost enough to make this Irish-born priest want to be a Protestant!

(Rev.) Sean McManus
President, Irish National Caucus
Washington, D.C.

Just Recognition

Thank you for the article by George M. Anderson, S.J., on the recent appointment of Miguel d'Escoto as president of the 63rd General Assembly of the United Nations ("A Transplant of the Heart," 9/8). His appointment was a historic event that apparently went unnoticed everywhere else.

I cannot comprehend how Father d'Escoto remains prohibited from performing his priestly functions, especially because (as **America** noted in the same issue) we are suffering from a "shortage of priests." How many young men were discouraged by observing how cruelly this great priest has been treated? How many young men with powerful vocations were turned away from the priesthood a quarter of a century ago because they identified too openly and too strongly with Miguel d'Escoto and his companions?

Charles Scanlon
Columbus, N.M.

Out of Alignment

In "Teaching Evolution" (9/15), Paul Cottle gives the impression that Catholic teaching offers an unqualified acceptance of evolution. I don't see this as the case—Pope Pius XII, in *Humani Generis*, called for research and discussion that should "be weighed and judged with necessary seriousness, moderation and measure." Differently from Cottle, I see Catholic teaching as giving a qualified acceptance of evolution, asking us to use the richness of Catholic thought to examine the origins of human life and evaluate evolution's proposals.

This shows why some Catholics are interested in theories of intelligent design. While some theories are held captive to ideas about the earth being relatively young, others allow us to explore larger issues about life's origins that align with Catholic teaching.

William Hayward, M.I.C.
Kenosha, Wis.

Where's the Beef?

Re "Dear Senator McCain," by John Kavanaugh, S.J. (9/22): The Catholic Church in the United States is great on trying to make sure every pregnancy comes to term. It is not so great on making sure those babies and their mothers have access to affordable, continuous health care. The Republicans do not care much about providing affordable health care either, clinging to a failed market-oriented approach that doubles the cost per person for health care compared to a single-payer, universal system.

Where's the beef? Do we want to take care of these babies or not? Forget the "isms"; we are talking about the most effective, cheapest way to provide health care to our brothers and sisters.

I would like to hear from the pulpit that we need to vote for politicians who can 1) get us out of the Iraq war and 2) give us a single-payer universal health care system in the United States. That would give any demands for making abortion illegal a little more credibility.

Bob Bjorkman
Omaha, Neb.

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America (ISSN 0002-7049) is published weekly (except for 11 combined issues: Jan. 7-14, 21-28, March 31-April 7, May 26-June 2, June 9-16, 23-30, July 7-14, 21-28, Aug. 4-11, 18-25, Dec. 22-29) by America Press, Inc., 106 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019. Periodicals postage is paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. Business Manager: Lisa Pope; Circulation: Judith Palmer, (212) 581-4640. Subscriptions: United States, $48 per year; add U.S. $22 postage and GST (#131870719) for Canada; or add U.S. $32 per year for overseas surface postage. For overseas airmail delivery, please call for rates. Postmaster: Send address changes to: America, 106 West 56th St. New York, NY 10019. Printed in the U.S.A.

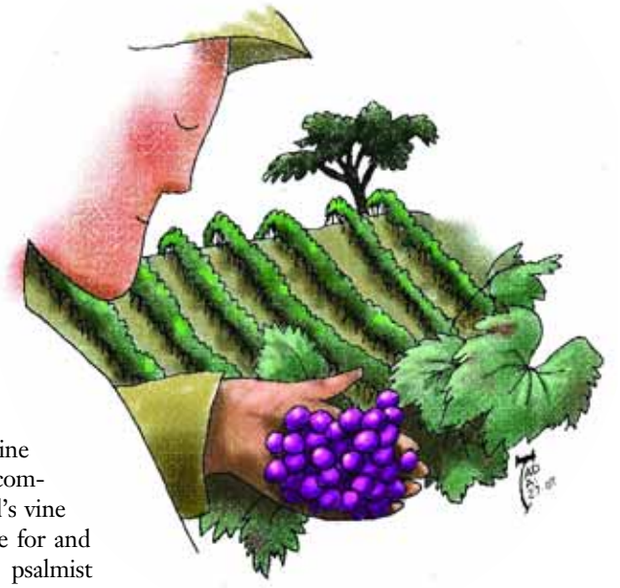
The Word

God's Vineyard

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time (A), Oct. 5, 2008

Readings: Is 5:1-7; Ps 80:9, 12-16, 19-20; Phil 4:6-9; Mt 21:33-43

"The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel" (Is 5:7)



ART BY TAD DUNNE

VINES ARE TENDED and grapes are picked in a vineyard. In ancient Israel grapes were a major agricultural product, used especially for eating and for making wine. Throughout the biblical period the vineyard was part of everyday life for many in Israel. So it is not surprising that the vineyard became a biblical symbol for the people of God.

The most famous use of the vineyard symbolism in the Old Testament appears in Isaiah 5, where we are told, "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel." In his "song" of the vineyard Isaiah recalls the careful and loving treatment that the owner (God) gave to his vineyard (Israel). Yet the vineyard yielded only wild grapes (sin and rebellion). Out of frustration the owner threatens to destroy the vineyard (by means of the Assyrian army) and make it into a ruin.

The historical context for Isaiah's song of the vineyard was an attack expected against Jerusalem by the Assyrian army in the eighth century B.C. Isaiah foresaw that such an attack would have disastrous effects for Judah, just as an earlier attack had on the northern kingdom of Israel. The only way the disaster might be averted, according to Isaiah, was for Judah to put aside its sinful and rebellious ways, and to try once more to do God's will as the chosen people of God. However, the way in which Isaiah's song of the vineyard is expressed held out little hope for such a conversion.

The vineyard image also appears in today's excerpts from Psalm 80. The psalmist describes Israel's origin as God's people in terms of a vine ("a vine from Egypt you transplanted"), comments on the sorry state of God's vine and asks God once more to care for and protect his beloved vine. The psalmist very likely had in mind Judah's experience of defeat and exile in the early sixth century B.C. Even though Isaiah's warning had been fulfilled, the vine remained the object of God's care.

The vineyard image appears also in Jesus' parable in Matthew 21. As the text now stands, the parable is clearly a kind of allegory. The landowner is God, the vineyard is Israel as God's special people, the tenants are the political and religious leaders of Israel, the harvest is the fullness of God's kingdom and the judgment that will accompany it, the servants sent to collect the landowner's produce are the prophets, and the landowner's son is Jesus.

The parable begins by describing God's extraordinary care for the vineyard in terms clearly alluding to Isaiah 5. When the tenants abuse the servants and the son, the owner comes and destroys the wicked tenants. In Matthew's context this is very likely an allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem not only in 587 B.C. but also in A.D. 70. Note, however, that the vineyard itself is preserved and placed under new management. Note also that the chief priests and elders of the people recognize that the parable is being told about them. They need to be replaced as the leaders of God's people.

These three vineyard texts insist that God remains in personal relationship with his people, continues to care for and preserve them and stays faithful even when the people fail to do so. Thus the vineyard is an image of hope: it emphasizes God's continuing care for his people. Christians believe that through Jesus' life, death and resurrection the people of God has come under new and different leadership from that of the Jewish chief priests and elders. Nevertheless, through Jesus of Nazareth the church retains its historical and organic relationship with Israel as God's people. The problem that Jesus and Matthew had was not with the owner (God) or the vineyard itself (God's people). Rather, it was with the tenants (the leaders). The New Testament parable of the vineyard teaches us to look forward in hope to the fullness of God's kingdom under the guidance of the risen Jesus as Emmanuel, the one who promises to be with us until the end of this age (Mt 28:20).

In the meantime Paul's advice to the Philippians can help us to promote peace at the individual, communal and international levels. Paul contends that peace of soul is a gift from God, that God's peace surpasses human understanding and that "the God of peace" will be with us. But God's gift of peace needs to be cultivated through prayer, virtuous living and fidelity to the Gospel.

Daniel J. Harrington

Praying With Scripture

- What are the major similarities and differences between Isaiah's song of the vineyard and Matthew's parable of the vineyard?
- How can these vineyard texts contribute to our understanding of the church?
- What makes you especially anxious today? How do you deal with your anxieties? Does Paul's advice help you?

DANIEL J. HARRINGTON, S.J., is professor of New Testament at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry in Chestnut Hill, Mass.