America
THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY
JAN. 5–12, 2009 $2.75

THE HARVEST IS GREAT

VOCATIONS IN A MODERN CHURCH

CHARLENE DIORKA • RICHARD G. MALLOY • MARGARET ORMOND

OF MANY THINGS

With this issue, dated Jan. 5, we begin the 200th volume of **America**. Our first issue bore the date April 17, 1909, and on April 13 this year we will publish a special centennial issue. With the current issue we launch a redesign of the magazine with an updated look. We hope that with our new face **America** steps into the future even as it remains connected to our past.

Most magazines do a makeover every few years. In our case, it has been a decade since our appearance last changed. That format introduced full-color photos and illustrations as well as the Signs of the Times news section. The new design will include an expanded news section, opening with longer background features or analytical commentary, and a Books & Culture section, which will provide more frequent reviews of film, media and the arts from across the country and around the globe.

James Martin, S.J. , our new culture editor, has gathered a formidable company of critics from a variety of backgrounds as contributors. We will be making a determined effort to escape our New York base and to publish reports and reviews from other regions of the country. We also hope this expanded section will enable us to provide more probing criticism of cultural trends, as seen through the lens of Catholic faith. Patricia Kossmann will continue to serve as our literary editor. With the decline of book reviewing nationwide, we are conscious of the special service our book reviews provide to our readers—and to authors.

We will also be introducing three new columnists: Kyle Kramer, Tom Massaro and John DiIulio. Readers know Mr. Kramer from his recent essays in our pages on spirituality and rural life. He is director of lay programs at Saint Meinrad's School of Theology, Saint Meinrad, Ind., and a hard-working organic farmer. We look forward to his being our own Wendell Berry, but he will write on a variety of topics, including local church life. Thomas Massaro, S.J., teaches social ethics at the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry and is a popular author of books on Catholic social teaching and U.S. public policy. John DiIulio is the Frederick Fox Leadership Professor of Politics, Religion and Civil Society at the University of Pennsylvania. He is a nationally known social policy analyst who was the first director of the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives.

Our redesign has been led by a team of editors and production staff headed by Matt Malone, S.J., in conjunction with Ken Silvia, a nationally recognized magazine designer, who has been honored by numerous professional organizations, including the New York Art Directors Club, the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education and the American Society of Business and Professional Editors.

Updates in printing technology will enable us to use color throughout the magazine. It will also allow us to provide readers with richer informational graphics. Drawing on developments in digital photography, our newly formatted pages will present sharper, more memorable images in a greater variety of formats. A mix of traditional and contemporary fonts will lend visual interest to our pages, and increased spacing between lines should make for easier reading.

None of this redesign would have beeen possible without the long hours and technical skills of Robert Collins, S.J., our managing editor, and Stephanie Ratcliffe, our design and production specialist, a true artist. Together with Matt Malone, S.J., they will now implement our collective vision. **DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J.**

America

Published by Jesuits of the United States

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Cover Shutterstock/Noam Armonn

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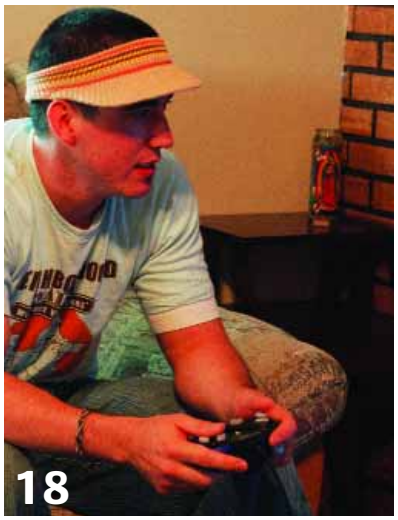
www.americamagazine.org VOL. 200 NO. 1, WHOLE NO. 4841 JANUARY 5–12, 2009



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BOOKS & CULTURE

ON THE WEB

The editors introduce **America**'s new design on our podcast. From the archives, Bernard Häring on the priesthood. Plus, Emily Brennan reviews playwright Conor McPherson's "The Seafarer," and a video reflection for the Epiphany. All at americamagazine.org.

Avery Dulles: Disciple of Jesus

Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J., died on Dec. 12, 2008, after a long illness. Among Cardinal Dulles's many publications, perhaps the most influential was *Models of the Church* (1974). He taught at Woodstock College and The Catholic University of America, and until last spring he held the Laurence J. McGinley Chair of Religion and Society at Fordham University. "The most important thing about my career of many years," he wrote in his last McGinley lecture, "I feel sure, is the discovery of the pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in the field, the Lord Jesus himself" (see "A Life in Theology," **Am.,** 4/21/08).

'Conversion'

Commenting on his "conversion" to Catholicism, he noted that after being led to theism through his reading of philosophy and to Christianity through reading the Gospels, his attraction to Catholicism came from three sources: reading Renaissance thought, the vitality of the Neo-Thomist revival and the Catholic life of Cambridge, Mass., where he then lived. "I was attracted in many ways to the liturgy, too," he told **America** in 2001. "It was a kind of solitary journey, but later I discovered that others were making the same journey...." In October 1946 he entered the Jesuit novitiate at Saint-Andrew-on-Hudson, Poughkeepsie, N.Y., and was ordained a priest in 1956. In 2001, in recognition of Father Dulles's service to the church and to theology, Pope John Paul II named him a cardinal.

Theology

Cardinal Dulles's early theological career focused on fundamental theology and ecclesiology. Of his 27 books, 13 treated aspects of ecclesiology (the theology of the church). He was best known for his typological writings, *Models of the Church* (1974) and *Models of Revelation* (1982), which in place of univocal definitions presented an array of interpretative schemes for understanding the mysteries of faith. Pressed for his preferred model of the church, he devised an additional model, "community of disciples" (*A Church to Believe In*, 1983). "The institution," he commented in an interview with **America** in 2001, "is for the sake of the spiritual life, for the sake of holiness, and is not an end in itself."

Some of Cardinal Dulles's more original work came with his application of Michael Polanyi's philosophy of personal knowledge to the faith experience in works such as *The Survival of Dogma* (1971). There he used Polanyi's distinction between tacit and focal (explicit) knowledge to explore the relation between faith and doctrine. Tradition played a key role in his theology, as it did in Polanyi's philosophy of science. The first inkling of his turn to social questions came with his signing in 1975 of the Hartford Declaration, which warned of 13 modern heresies, at the request of his friend Richard John Neuhaus.

Much of his theological career was also devoted to ecumenism. He was a member of the Lutheran/Roman Catholic dialogue, Evangelicals and Catholics Together, and consultor on ecumenism to the international theological journal Concilium. In the Lutheran dialogue, he made significant contributions to *Peter in the New Testament* and *Mary in the New Testament* and influenced *Mary and the Saints*.

"I do not particularly strive for originality," Cardinal Dulles wrote, looking back on his career. "Very few new ideas, I suspect, are true. If I conceived a theological idea that had never occurred to anyone in the past, I would have every reason to think myself mistaken."

Regarded in his latter years as a theological and political conservative, he continued to take independent positions both as a consultant and a nonvoting member of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. He strongly backed the bishops' recognition of lay ecclesial ministers, for example, and criticized the bishops' Dallas Charter regarding sexual abuse by Catholic clergy for what he considered the unfairness of its draconian measures toward possible offenders.

Final Passion

Cardinal Dulles died after a long, disabling illness. In his last months, he could neither stand nor eat, neither speak nor write. Though he had written his final McGinley lecture last spring himself, it had to be delivered for him. The closing lines of that lecture confessed his acceptance of "suffering and diminishment" as "normal ingredients of life, especially in old age." He concluded:

> As I become increasingly paralyzed and unable to speak, I can identify with the many paralytics and mute persons in the Gospels, grateful for the loving and skilled care I receive and for the hope of everlasting life in Christ. If the Lord now calls me to a period of weakness, I know his power can be made perfect in infirmity. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Amen. R.I.P.

Fighting Global Poverty

Pope Benedict XVI has written two encyclicals, one on love, the other on hope. Especially last year, which was the 40th anniversary of Paul VI's *Development of Peoples* and the 20th anniversary of John Paul II's *On Social Concern*, speculation was rife that the pope would write a social encyclical on globalization. In his World Day of Peace Message, published on Jan. 1, Pope Benedict has now issued a commentary on poverty in the global economy under the title *Fighting Poverty to Build Peace*. It extends the teaching of his predecessors on solidarity in development to today's globalized economy, with a renewed plea for the inclusion of the poorest nations in the world system.

The heart of the message is that solidarity, especially with those nations that participate least in the global economic system, is the virtue that meets the challenges of globalization. It urges us, "in our dealings with the poor, to set out from the clear recognition that we all share in a single divine plan: we are all called to form one family in which all—individuals, peoples and nations—model their behavior according to the principles of fraternity and responsibility." Amid its praise for the productivity of the post-World War II economy—world poverty has been cut by as much as 50 percent in the last 30 years—it focuses intently on the world's poorest nations, which stand outside the global economic system, especially in Africa. These countries are strapped, on the one hand, by lack of fair access to world markets for their products and, on the other, by the rapid rise in world commodity prices during the last year. Like Pope Paul VI's *Development of Peoples*, the 2009 message appeals "for all countries to be given equal opportunities of access to the world market, without exclusion or marginalization."

Though the message ends with John Paul II's radical call in *Centesimus Annus* for "a change of life-styles, of models of production and consumption, and of the established structures of power," its content seems less radical, surveying the dimensions of poverty today, the ambiguous effects of globalization and the implications of the world financial crisis for the prospects of alleviating poverty in the most disadvantaged nations. It is devoid of the insightful biblical analogies and ambitious proposals of Paul VI and the incisive social spiritual diagnoses of John Paul II. Given the shocking drop in the world economy, its confidence in economic growth as an engine of progress seems surprising. On the epochal dereliction of financial institutions leading to the current economic crisis, it simply comments that the "lowering of the objectives of global finance to the very short term reduces its capacity to function as a bridge between the present and the future, and as a stimulus to the creation of new opportunities...."

The message seems to break with previous church teaching on the importance of holding inequalities in check as a step to preventing deeper and more widespread poverty. Given the expansion of inequality worldwide during the last 30 years of growth, a phenomenon the message acknowledges, its outright dismissal of redistributive programs ("mere redistribution") as an "illusion" is all the more remarkable. Only when redistributive measures, like investment in education, health care, maternal and infant nutrition and job creation, are in place has economic growth proven to reduce poverty across the population, and not just in a privileged segment of it.

The reality of contemporary poverty, the message points out, possesses several features in need of the world's attention, including pandemic disease, child poverty, military expenditures and the food crisis. The food crisis, it notes, results primarily from speculation in petroleum and other basic commodities, including the price of imported food. It also results from the unfairness of so-called free trade regimes that open up poor countries to industrial products, whose prices "rise much faster than those of agricultural products and raw materials in the possession of poorer countries," which in their turn have more restricted access to markets in developed countries.

The message gives special attention to the moral relationship between disarmament and development. Pope Benedict reminds his audience that "immense military expenditure...is in fact diverted from development projects for people, especially the poorest...." He continues, "The resources saved could then be earmarked for development projects to assist the poorest and the most needy individuals and people...." He concludes, "Efforts expended in this way would be efforts for peace." We should expect high interest on the part of the church, therefore, in resolutions to be proposed to the new U.S. Congress and to the United Nations in 2009 that money spent on nuclear weapons should be applied instead to meeting the needs of children.

MACEDONIA

Bringing Reconciliation to the Balkans

Orthodox Christians attend services in Ohrid, Macedonia.

The ancient town of Ohrid, in Macedonia near the Albanian border, has winding streets and alleys full of Christian treasures, like the ninth-century St. Sophia Cathedral. But after decades of religious suppression under Communism and the breakup of Yugoslavia, Ohrid's Catholic community was down to 100 or so faithful when a Catholic pastoral center opened in 2003. "So much remarkable history, yet we had dwindled to a handful of elderly believers," recalled Stjepan Kusan, S.J., who has served as the center's director from the start. With the strong support of the Croatian Province of the Jesuits in Zagreb, the Archdiocese of Skopje, Macedonia, and Catholic foundations like Renovabis in Germany, Father Kusan set out to revive the community.

The center is credited with bringing about a Catholic spiritual and cultural revival as well as reconciliation between religious groups in the region. In the Balkans, where tension between faiths is far more common historically than ecumenical dialogue, it is rare to find the level of cooperation between religious groups that now exists in Ohrid. Relations between the town's Catholic and Orthodox churches have been described as excellent by observers ranging from local police officers to teachers, the most cordial and cooperative since the civil war fought between the government and ethnic Albanian insurgents ended in June 2001.

"The hatred and distrust fomented by the Balkan wars means that we, the churches and clergy, must find new ways to be together, identifying common ground which benefits the spiritual and educational development of all our people," Father Kusan said. "Reconciliation must be premised on concrete activities taken up together," he said.

The Church of Sts. Benedict, Cyril and Methodius sits between two wings of the pastoral center. The center also houses the Jesuit Refugee Service office covering Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. Programs to benefit young Balkan land mine victims are held there each summer. The center has also helped several local Orthodox priests get scholarships to study abroad and has started a marriage encounter program with a local Orthodox parish to help improve communication between husbands and wives. Muslim couples have joined the program as well.

For the last three years, the most popular programs offered by the collaborating parishes are language classes in Albanian, English, German, Turkish and even Vlach. Support for an unusual language like Vlach underscores the balance sought by the center's leadership: encouraging ethnic identity while guarding against conflict. The Vlachs were nomadic shepherds living in compact communities in Greece, Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Turkey and Romania. They were the first ethnic group given cultural autonomy under the Ottoman Empire in 1905.

"We believe people should be able to keep their own language and culture," Father Kusan said. "This allows freedom of expression and pride, without being separatist or aggressive." More than 1,500 people have graduated from the courses since the program began. Approximately 65 percent of Macedonia's population belongs to the Macedonian Orthodox Church. Muslims comprise 33 percent of Macedonians, while other Christians make up less than 1 percent of the population.

NEW YORK

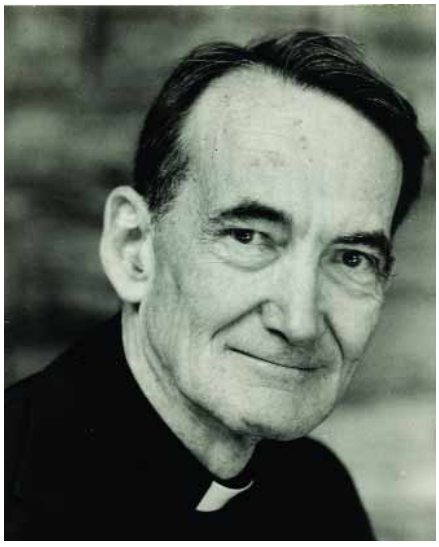
Avery Dulles Dead at 90

Avery Dulles, a Jesuit theologian who was made a cardinal in 2001, died Dec. 12 at the Jesuit infirmary in the Bronx, New York. He was 90 years old. Cardinal Dulles was born Aug. 24, 1918, in Auburn, N.Y., the grandson of a Presbyterian minister. He entered the Catholic Church in 1941 while a student at Harvard University. He served in the Navy in World War II, then entered the Jesuits after his discharge in 1946. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1956.

Cardinal Dulles had been the Laurence J. McGinley professor of religion and society at Fordham University in New York since 1988. He also had taught at Woodstock College, now part of Georgetown University, from 1960 to 1974, and at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., from 1974 to 1988. He had been a visiting professor at many Catholic, Protestant and secular colleges and universities.

The most famous of his 27 books on theology was his groundbreaking 1974 work *Models of the Church*. Past president of both the Catholic Theological Society of America and the American Theological Society, Cardinal Dulles served on the International Theological Commission and also served as a consultant to the U.S. bishops' Committee on Doctrine.

Cardinal Dulles was the son of Janet Avery and former Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who served under President Eisenhower. Dulles had two other relatives who served as U.S. secretary of state: his great-grandfather John W. Foster and his great-uncle Robert Lansing. The cardinal's uncle, Allen W. Dulles, served as Director of Central Intelligence for Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy.



CONGO

Bishops Appeal to U.S. for Help With Peace Accord

Congolese church officials appealed to the United States to help implement a foundering peace accord among warring militias and Congolese troops. Calling the conflict in eastern Congo the worst since World War II, Bishops Fulgence Muteba Mugalu of Kilwa and Fridolin Ambongo Besungu of Bokungu said on Dec. 9 that the United States must help implement the Amani Program, the peace process set up as part of the January cease-fire signed in Goma, capital of the North Kivu administrative region. "The average Congolese thinks that Rwanda is behind the conflict and that the United States backs Rwanda," said Bishop Muteba. The average Congolese thinks his or her "misfortune is the fault of the United States. Right or wrong, but that is the perception of the average Congolese," added Bishop Muteba, who is also president of the Congolese bishops' social communications commission. "It is important that U.S. diplomacy" show this is not the case, he said. The bishops and Marie-Bernard Alima, a member of the Society of St. Joseph who is executive secretary of the Congolese bishops' justice and peace commission, were on a tour through Canada, the United States, France and Belgium.

U.S. Group: Iraq Violates Religious Freedom

A U.S. watchdog group monitoring international religious freedom said Iraq should be named one of the world's worst violators of religious freedom. In a report released Dec. 16, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom said Iraq deserved the designation "in light of the ongoing, severe abuses of religious freedom and the Iraqi government's toleration of these abuses, particularly abuses against Iraq's smallest vulnerable religious minorities." The commission said Chaldean Catholics and other Christians face dire circumstances. "These groups do not have militia or tribal structures to protect them and do not receive adequate official protection," it said. "Their members continue to experience targeted violence and to flee to other areas within Iraq or other countries, where the minorities represent a disproportionately high percentage among Iraqi refugees." The commission, an independent body, makes its recommendations to the president, secretary of state and Congress. Four commissioners out of nine voting members dissented from the decision to name Iraq as a country of particular concern, saying that government inaction or complicity with such abuses had not been sufficiently established.

Archbishop to Convene Education Summit

In the wake of declining enrollment and increasing financial challenges, Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien of Baltimore is convening an education summit of priests in January to help strengthen Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Parents and other supporters of Catholic education also will be invited to participate in the process, Archbishop O'Brien said. The archbishop announced the summit in his weekly column in the Nov. 27 issue of The Catholic Review, Baltimore's archdiocesan newspaper, while also outlining recent enrollment and financial trends in archdiocesan schools. He previously shared the data with his closest advisers during a November meeting of the priests' council. In conjunction with the summit, the archbishop formed an education-related pastors' advisory committee to help him plan for the future. Members of the advisory committee met twice among themselves and once with the priests' council. In his column, Archbishop O'Brien reported that enrollment is down 5 percent this school year—twice the average rate of decline over the previous five years.

NEWS BRIEFS

Mary McAleese

The Catholic **Church in Wisconsin** is reaching out to the more than 5,000 families who will be affected by the impending closure of a General Motors plant in Janesville, Wis. • **Cardinal Adam J. Maida** of Detroit emphasized on Dec. 17 the need for urgent government action to help Detroit's automakers stay afloat. • **John P. Foley, S.J.,** executive chairman of the Cristo Rey Network of inner-city schools was among the 24 people awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal on Dec. 10 by President George W. Bush. • The University of San Francisco has angered some Catholics by giving **Irish President Mary McAleese** an honorary degree despite her public support for gay rights and the ordination of women. • **Robert Kearns, S.S.J.,** known as Rocky, former superior general of the Josephites, died in an Alabama hospital Dec. 6 from complications of cancer. He was 72. • **Bishop Anthony B. Taylor** of Little Rock is believed to be the first U.S. Catholic bishop to join the popular Web site Facebook. As of Dec. 11, he had 894 friends worldwide and counting.

Kuzma of Van Nuys Dies at 83

Retired Bishop George M. Kuzma of the Byzantine Eparchy of Van Nuys, Calif., died Dec. 7 at Mount Macrina Manor in Uniontown, Pa. He was 83. An announcement from the eparchy about his death said Bishop Kuzma's "deep love and dependence on the Holy Spirit [was] a recurring theme of his priestly and episcopal ministry." Bishop Kuzma was born July 24, 1925, to Ambrose and Anna (Martin) Kuzma of Windber. He served in the navy during World War II and then began his studies for the priesthood.

From CNS and other sources. CNS photos.

MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE

Peaceful Change

ON ELECTION DAY every year we take our children to the polls, hoping to instill in them a sense of civic participation. The poll workers expect this, and usually have stickers or treats. This year we visited the National Mall in Washington, D.C., on election eve. Tourists took pictures of themselves grinning next to cardboard cutouts of their favorite candidates. School children giggled on their way to see the artifacts of our democracy. It was just another day in the nation's capital. We faced none of the electoral violence of Zimbabwe or Kenya or too many other places in the world where parents would not dream of endangering their children by bringing them near the polls. On the brink of a dramatic change of power, there was no drama in the capital's streets, no riots, no bullets, no violence.

Democracy has many faults. It allows us the freedom to elect bad leaders and make bad laws. We elect crooks and celebrities. We have passed bad laws, from the horrors of slavery to the strange outlawing of juggling on Sundays in Wyoming. But the genius of democracy is that it gives us tools for peaceful change. Like our God, it allows second (and third and fourth) chances to try to get things right. The freedoms of speech, assembly, press, religion and others, along with the vote, work together to allow us to change course. Change may take years, or in the cases of minority and women's rights, even centuries. But the levers for peaceful change are built into the system, within reach of every hand that can scribble a sign or pull a voting curtain. I can say to my students with confidence, "I'll meet you on Jan. 20 on the Mall every fourth year, for the peaceful transfer of power."

Peaceful political transfer is not magic; it has been purchased with the blood of martyrs, and we must cherish and protect it. The United States is not immune to political violence, from civil war to assassinations, Birmingham to Kent State. But we have been able to rebuild the political peace after each breach, so that today we have "Get Out the Vote" drives because people are too bored to vote, not because they are too afraid to vote.

Peaceful political transfer is under tremendous threat.

Peaceful political transfer is under tremendous threat this year, from both practical and ideological dangers. Unprecedented inaugural crowds and logistic dilemmas create challenges. Officials estimate two to four million people will attend the historic inauguration of President Obama, a 500 percent to 1,000 percent increase from the capacity crowds that swamp the Mall annually for Fourth of July festivities. Even opening the Mall from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial cannot accommodate that many bodies. Understandable security searches and fences will create chokepoints and waits. At least 10,000 buses have been chartered to bring people to the inauguration, not counting other private buses, school and church buses, and vans. A line of 10,000 buses would encircle the Capital Beltway and back up all the way north to Baltimore. Where will they park? How will the riders then get to the swearing-in ceremonies? If people were crushed to death at Walmart stores during holiday sales, how can our infrastructure accommodate these guests without incident, on top of the six million people who already live in the capital region?

Those are merely the practical, logistical obstacles. Police face a much greater challenge to peace: white supremacists who deliberately plot violence. At least two plots to assassinate Barack Obama have already been intercepted and the conspirators arrested. If you think hate groups are a thing of the past or do not operate near you, think again. The Southern Poverty Law Center's Web site tracks hate groups and crimes by state and zip code (splc.org). Many of these groups celebrate Obama's election, believing it will finally stoke the race wars they have tried so hard to incite. As David Duke, former head of the Ku Klux Klan, puts it in his article "A Black Flag for White America," "Obama is a visual aid for White Americans who just don't get it yet that we have lost control of our country, and unless we get it back we are heading for complete annihilation as a people."

Let us work and pray this Epiphany that Americans will reject violence and seek the light of Christ's peace, that our children and our world will remember the inauguration as a celebration of peaceful change.

Political transfer is under tremendous threat this year.

MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE *is professor of international relations at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.*

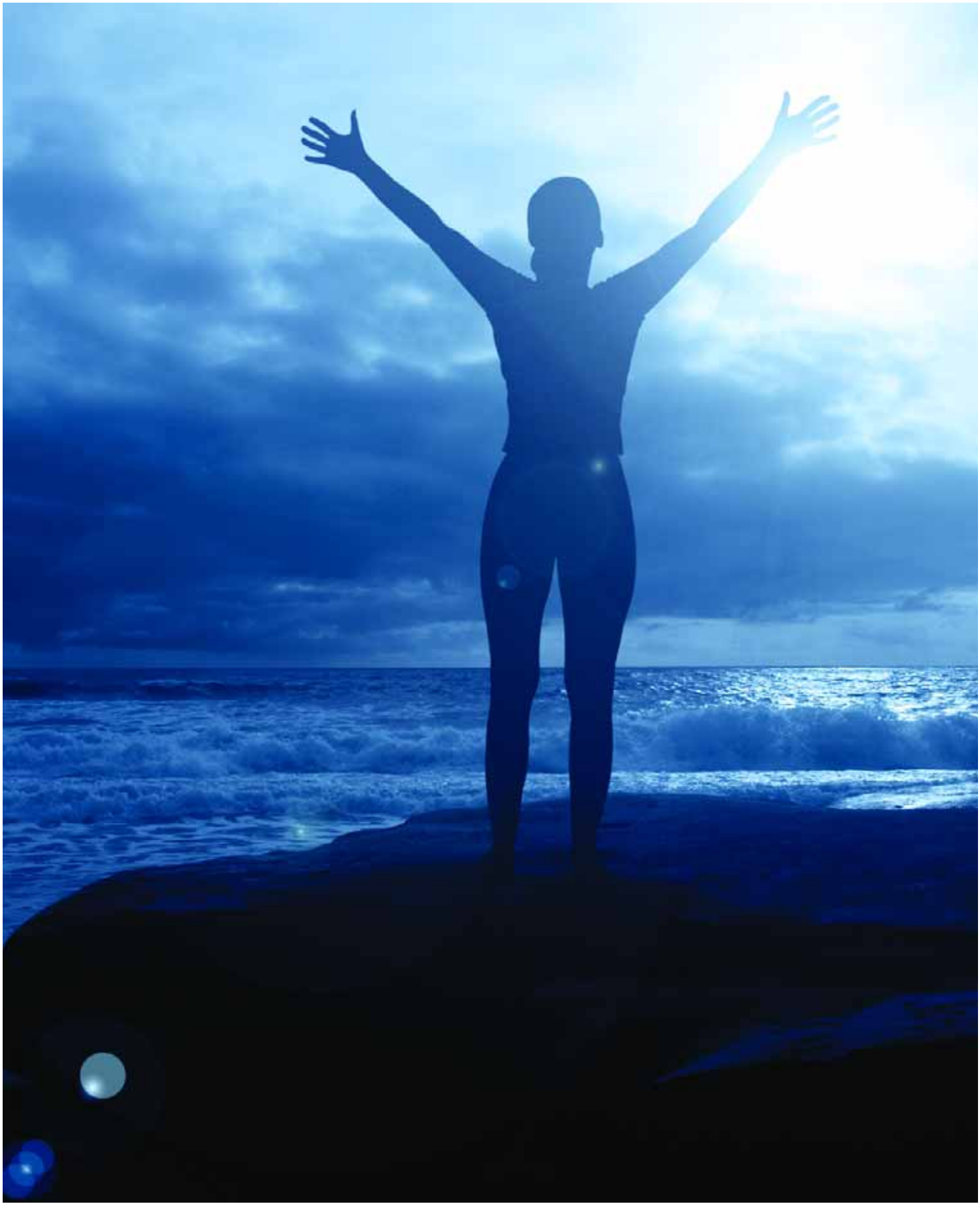


PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK / IOANA DRUTU

A WOMAN RELIGIOUS PONDERS HER CALL

Listening for God's Dream

BY CHARLENE DIORKA

Recently I was traveling on a puddle-jumper from Seattle, Wash., to Portland, Ore. My assigned seat was between a five-year-old boy and a young woman in her 20s. As often happens when traveling, we started a conversation. It began, however, when the little boy leaned over, winked at me and asked my name. The twentysomething beside me commented, "I think he's trying to pick you up!" Then she introduced herself as Kelly. It wasn't long before she asked me what I did. Having spent six years in vocation ministry, I cut to the chase and said, "I'm a Catholic nun!" "No way! Cool!" she said, "I never met a real nun. My mom will be so happy!" She asked how long I had been a nun and whether this trip was part of my work. She wanted to know when I got "the call" and how I knew. She asked if I was happy and if I had any regrets. Then she asked me for my business card so she could officially substantiate that she had met a real, live nun.

My experience with Kelly is neither uncommon nor unusual. I have had plenty of opportunities to witness to consecrated life over the years. Whether teaching in elementary school or high school, helping young adults with discernment as a vocation director or ministering to other vocation directors as the associate director of the National Religious Vocation Conference, I have met people, especially young adults, who are interested and inquiring about religious life. They desire to understand the mystery of God's call; they long to follow their own heart; and they struggle to live with meaning and significance. They want to know "how to know if you are called." Kelly gave me an opportunity to reflect on my 25 years of life as a sister and the difference it has made. Kelly's keen interest and poignant questioning allowed me to ponder anew the significance of my call and what I have learned.

CHARLENE DIORKA, S.S.J., *is a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia and associate director of the National Religious Vocation Conference in Chicago, Ill.*

A call always involves an invitation to freely come and see. Reflecting on my own call has helped me in tending to others as they discover theirs. Each vocation is a unique mystery. It is our story. We commonly expect God's call to be dramatic, clear and unquestionable. More times than not, it breaks into life when we least expect it and life is moving along nicely. It occurs in the midst of our everyday, ordinary circumstances. I remember minding my own business teaching junior high school, planning for a future with someone I thought I was in love with, and being satisfied with an active social life. But there was this recurring sense of wanting more and desiring to be satisfied on a deeper level. Ultimately, I did not want to settle for what others expected of me in life. I felt drawn to pursue an alternative possibility: religious life.

My call to religious life, like that of many others, did not come in isolation. It arose as one among several good opportunities from which I could choose. I was not grasping at this choice as a last chance because there was nothing else to do. God provided a rich array of invitations and allowed me to see that they were all good. I looked for which choice would allow me to be most at home in myself, to be generous in service to others and to live the dream that God was dreaming for me.

When I started to embrace God's call I began to discover what my gifts were—what I was good at, what gave me energy and joy and provided me with what I needed to be interiorly at home. Of all the things that I could do, I wanted to choose what would let me give myself away in service to God and God's people. Frederick Buechner, a writer and Presbyterian minister, defines "call" as "the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need." Ultimately, my call to religious life made a way for God's dream to be lived out in me and for me to be joyful. The thought that I could love deeply, work professionally and minister to God's people was exciting. It spoke to me of the fullness of God's word with all its promise and potential. Coming to recognize these aspects of call has helped me to listen more deeply with others for how God is moving them. I suggest that those who are discerning a call meet with someone like a vocation director, who can accompany them on the journey. That provides a way of reflecting on all of life's experiences and helps them to listen for God's dream and their deep joy.

A call is about God's time. It involves waiting and tending to a process. After experiencing an initial call to come and see, I realized that God was faithful to me in the invitation to religious life. I needed to allow myself to surrender to God. Like anything that intends to grow, I needed nurturing, support and attentiveness so that I could cultivate eyes to really see and ears to really hear God. I realized that tending to the discernment process meant more than completing all the necessary tasks or doing all the appropriate things. In the process, I waited on God's time. My impatience sometimes made the waiting seem purposeless, when really it was an opportunity to be especially mindful and attentive. Jesus' parable of the barren fig tree is a favorite of mine. Like the orchard owner, I had little time for what appeared to be a barren, useless tree. There was no fruit, and to anyone unfamiliar with the process of waiting for things to germinate and grow, it might seem reasonable to cut it down prematurely. My temptation was to shortchange the fertile waiting process because it seemed barren.

Frederick Buechner defines call as 'the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need.'

A profoundly personal experience early in my religious life taught me the inestimable value of waiting and the potential for recognizing God's presence even in what appears barren. On a fall day in 1994 my mother was walking home from church when she was struck and killed by a drunk driver. The grieving process was an unforgettable lesson in waiting. Initially, it was chaotic, disorienting, empty and unproductive. It was nothing like what I expected the grieving of a loved one to be. I believed that an experience of death should yield resurrection and new life.

Needless to say, I was impatient with the bereavement process. Like the orchard owner in the parable, I wanted to cut down the process. I was tending to it faithfully, yet still found no fruit. And the pain was wrenching. Why should the waiting and grieving exhaust my life? Slowly and gradually, in God's time, I began to see and hear signs of God's presence with me, gently leading me. Because I fully entered the dark and barren experience of grieving, I met God who was waiting to prod me along, taking the most abrupt and tragic sorrow of my life and using it to cultivate my heart. What seemed like barren waiting was bearing rich fruit. On one of my annual retreats during that time, God gave me the gift of freedom, grace to let go of this burden and know that Jesus the Mantle of Light was enfolding, healing and holding my mother no matter how she died. At the same time, I was being invited to rest in her care. Like a child in her arms, I experienced her tenderness in a new way. I came to know God in this intimate way as well. As God promises, not even death could separate us.

This experience has become a tremendous gift to me as I have accompanied others in sharing their stories and the details of their lives. It has attuned my heart to listen deeply

and actively to wait with them in the distillation process that purifies God's call. God's time and God's way are often not like ours.

A call is a journey of trust, and God is always with us. Often when I am walking, I find pennies. My friends laugh as I stoop to pick them up, but I think they are constant reminders of God's presence in our lives. They challenge me to recall in whom I place my trust: "In God we trust!" I certainly believe this, but it is quite a challenge to live. God invites us to step out in faith. For those discerning a call, it is no different. We are not given to see the end, only the horizon that lies before us. With a long line of predecessors, Jesus calls us to follow. In reflecting over these 25 years of religious life, I am reminded of my own call to religious life and that the loving God who created me and provided for me this far will not abandon me now. This is the ministry that vocation directors, spiritual directors and mentors offer others who are discerning their call. We accompany them with the grace and wisdom that we have come to know; we are spiritual companions. We give life to the scriptural stories of Abraham, Moses, Ruth and Mary, each of whom responds yes to God's invitation in an act of profound trust. Together we come to know Emmanuel, God with us.

A call is a gift graciously given and full of grace. Meeting Kelly on the plane that day was a provocative encounter and a graced moment in which I could share the unique vocation story that is mine. Tracing the loving activity of God in my life, I realize the privilege of being a co-worker with God in vocation ministry. This privilege has exposed me to the joy and gratitude of those who recognized God's invitation to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. It has opened me to the sacred story of many. It has united me with women and men seeking a wholeness they thought impossible, but who came to realize that all things are possible with God. And it has undoubtedly shaped and formed the sister I am today. Vocation ministry has been a challenge, to be sure, but a formative and life-giving one. I believe that religious life is alive and well, that God is still calling people. Our witness every day, in big and small ways, is a testimony to this life. It has been the best of 25 years for me. Here's to 25 more! A

ON THE WEB

Tony Blair reflects on the place of faith in a globalized world, at americamagazine.org/podcast.

‘Preach at All Times’

The heart of the Dominican vocation

BY MARGARET ORMOND

‘If you are what you should be, you will set the world ablaze,” said St. Catherine of Siena, a 14th-century Dominican sister. Today Dominican sisters around the world are heeding this advice. Ministering in over 103 countries, they are making God’s love and mercy more audible and visible in the world.

When I recently visited with Dominicans in Eastern Europe, I found them rediscovering their vocation as preachers—inspiring, ardent, at times even incendiary—for a world that sorely needs them. During the Communist period, Dominican sisters were forced to practice their religion “in secret.” They could no longer live in community or wear their religious habits. Their properties were confiscated, and they were forced to engage in secular activities to earn their keep. For 40 years they worked in factories and at tedious tasks. Prior to this period of oppression, however, our sisters had worked as high-level professionals: psychiatrists, philosophers and professors.

In July 2008 I went to Eger, Hungary, to give a preaching workshop for 70 young sisters from Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Latvia, Belarus, Ukraine and Germany. Though all were under age 40, they had experienced Communism and the changeover in their respective countries. Every one was truly marked by this experience. The spying on and persecution of family members and the cynical skepticism took their toll and left scars. One sister recalled an incident from her childhood, a day when the police came to her house and took away her father because he was accused of being against the ruling Communist party. Each day after she would ask, “When is Daddy coming back?” He did return five days later, but, she recalled, “Only half of him really came home. He changed; he was silent and withdrawn.” After that, it was difficult for her to trust; she never knew when and how someone in her family might disappear and be damaged.

MARGARET ORMOND, O.P., *a Dominican Sister from Columbus, Ohio, works as a consultant with religious women in Africa.*

The culture that remained now struggles with depression and a tendency toward guardedness and all-abiding secrecy. Convinced that the proclamation of the good news of the Gospel is a powerful antidote to the post-Communist mentality, the Dominicans initiated the preaching workshop. Through preaching, they try to re-engage with the communities where they once lived. Because of the hidden ways of the past, the sisters felt called to make their preaching explicit and clear. It had to be forceful, unambiguous and appealing to attract the people of their day and make a difference.

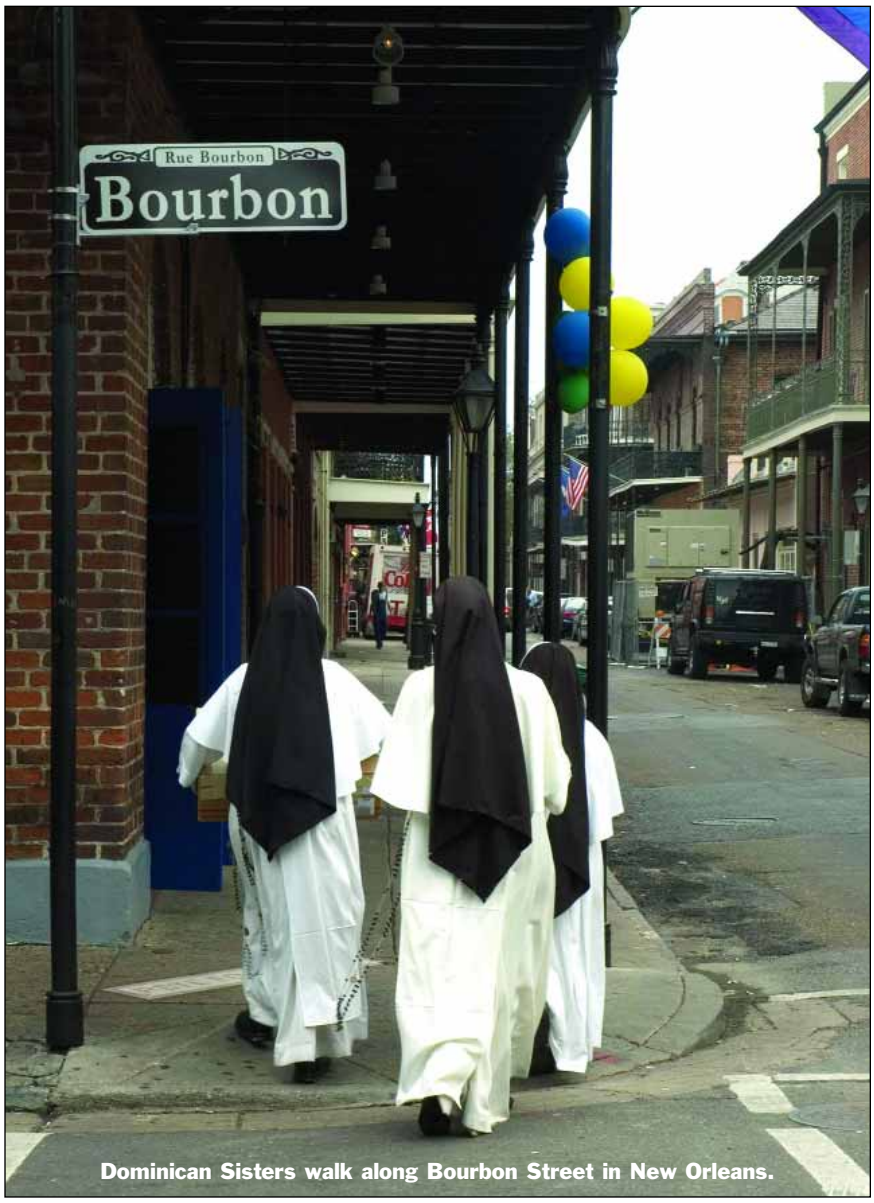
So for one week they studied the word of God as presented in the daily Scriptures, as well as the cultural, historical and theological context of each text, in order to relate the text to their depressed people. Out of their study came a burning enthusiasm to share its fruits with their students, faculties, parishioners and especially with young people. “For the first time,” one sister said, “I realized that the word of God I held in my hand was impelling me to be and to bring good news to others.”

> **‘Preach the truth as if we had a million voices, for it is silence that kills the world.’**
>
> —St. Catherine of Siena

The preaching workshop reminded me of some elementary truths and untruths about our Dominican identity that have inserted themselves into our thinking over the years. Sometimes Dominican sisters relegate preaching only to those among them who hold advanced degrees in theology. At other times, consciously or unconsciously they equate preaching with the homily we laity are not allowed to preach. The sisters forget they are preaching at all times. As St. Francis of Assisi said, “Preach the Gospel at all times; if necessary, use words.” Preaching is at the heart of the Dominican vocation, its animating, pulsating lifeline. Those who teach, nurse or do other ministries are proclaiming the good news through their work. Just as the covenant was written on our hearts in baptism, so, at Dominican profession, preaching is written on the sisters’ hearts. Whether in word, deed or relationship, they are to engage in it as a public act that manifests God’s presence with and among God’s people.

St. Catherine also said, “Preach the truth as if we had a

million voices, for it is silence that kills the world." Being a preacher invites us to embrace our call to be audible and visible in our world today. It also means allowing ourselves to be preached to by the world, its peoples, cultures and poor, for God speaks through them. As a former master general of the Dominican order, Damian Byrne, O.P., has said, "Being a preacher requires time and presence among those to whom and with whom we would preach, because it is truly from their experience that we will hear the Gospel in new ways."



Dominican Sisters walk along Bourbon Street in New Orleans.

PHOTO: CNS/THERESA LAURENCE, TENNESSEE REGISTER

Direct Service in Africa

Each month Sister Regina, a Dominican in Zambia, brings food stamps from a European aid agency to Umbela, a grandmother whose daughters and their husbands have all died of AIDS. Grandma Umbela lives with her 13 grandchildren in a hut without electricity or plumbing. The doors are not on hinges, so it is easy to see that the cupboard is bare. Umbela was happy to receive Regina and me as guests. Upon our arrival, Umbela immediately took down the only thing left on the shelf, the bag of peanuts she had just picked in the field, and offered them to us.

The Missionary Dominican Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Zambia have 46 professed sisters, 35 junior sisters and 8 novices who live in 7 apostolic communities. They have established two grant-aided high schools and three basic community schools (for children who had not attended any school and were too old or too poor for the government basic schools). Most of the children in the three basic schools—900 of them—are orphans or vulnerable children. The sisters also maintain five homes for orphans who attend primary and secondary schools and provide for girls who are H.I.V.-positive or who are physically or mentally handicapped. The sisters staff a rural health center and run a mother and child care program and an extensive outreach service. The nurses travel to scattered villages offering health services, including home-based care for H.I.V. patients.

Serving the poor daily is their way of incarnating St. Dominic's vision. As the story goes, Dominic, following his mother's example, responded to those suffering from famine in Palencia, where he was a student; he sold his books to feed the poor. He could have said, "This isn't really my problem, and besides my studies are more important." But he said, "Why save dead skins when live ones are starving." And Dominic altered his cherished devotion to study and taught that study is useless if it does not benefit the poor.

A World Ablaze

As women of learning and experience who employ knowledge to change society, Dominican sisters around the world proclaim the Gospel of justice and peace. Most of the sisters in Africa proclaim it through direct service, while those in the Northern Hemisphere do this along with advocacy to bring about systemic change. Wherever I go, I see sisters working to eliminate poverty and hunger, to achieve universal primary education, to empower other women, to reverse the spread of disease and to ensure environmental sustainability. In such ways they preach the just word, proclaim the Gospel of mercy and set the world ablaze. A

Making a Mark

Attracting young adults to priesthood and religious life

BY RICHARD G. MALLOY

Luke is a smart philosophy major who attended both a Jesuit high school and university. Good with people. Attends 10 p.m. Mass on Sundays. When I tell him he should really think about being a Jesuit, he is moved. "Honored" he says, stumbling as he strives to formulate a response. "Wow, Father. It's really awesome that you'd even think of saying that to me. I'm really kind of amazed. There's just one thing...." I'm thinking, celibacy? Poverty—an even bigger issue for young adults raised in a materialistic culture? Obedience? Luke goes on: "I don't believe in God."

Another young man, Matthew: a superlative Jesuit Volunteer, an Irishman filled not only with charm and blarney, but also with the virtues of hard work and persistence. He has put in a long year in an inner-city Catholic grade school; and the kids, teachers and staff all swear he can walk on water. He once stopped a food fight among the fourth graders by singing a song that made the kids laugh so hard they forgot why they were launching ketchup-dripping Tater Tots at one another. I ask him if he or any of his friends from the Jesuit college he attended had ever thought of being a Jesuit. "No," Matt replies matter-of-factly, as if the answer is self-evident. I follow up, "Why wouldn't a young man consider being a Jesuit today?" Matt: "I guess that as a priest you really can't make your mark."

To say we could use a few more priests, brothers and sisters is not meant to disparage lay people's generosity and expertise in service of the Gospel. Thousands of young men and women are preparing for lay ministry in the church, and they may well be the model for future ministry. But vocations to the priesthood and religious life play a crucial symbolic and cultural role in the life of the people of God. In 1965 there were 299,349 priests, seminarians and religious for 46 million Catholics in the United States. In 2006, for 69 million Catholics, there were 120,938, and the vast majority of the priests and sisters were well into their 60s and 70s.

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PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES/BETH PERKINS

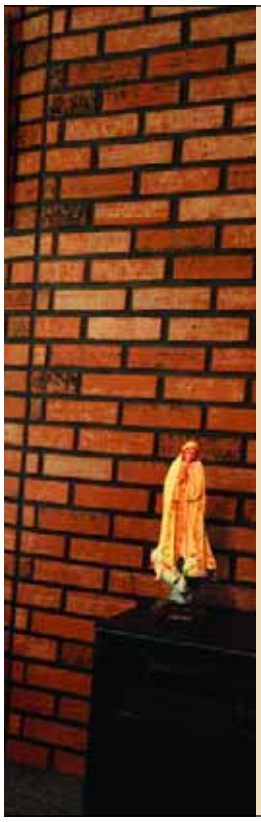
What can we do to foster in the imaginations of young adults the possibility that they could be priests or religious?

1. Engage young adults in the fascinating pursuit of God. We might assume that young adult Catholics know who St. Francis and St. Ignatius were. We do so at our peril. Few have ever heard of Catholic social teaching, let alone the Catholic intellectual or spiritual traditions. Contemporary young adults often know more about other faiths than they do about their "own" religious tradition.

And young adults, like many older Catholics, have difficulty grappling with the intellectual demands of our faith tradition. I tell undergrads that chemistry is easy compared with the intricacies of theological and biblical studies. Learning that Jesus may actually have been born in Nazareth, not Bethlehem, or that other ancient figures were "born of virgins" rocks the thinking of those who cannot understand the differences between the communicative

truth of metaphor and literal truth. To suggest that the good Samaritan may have been a figure only of Jesus' imagination confuses those who cannot think on the complex levels necessary to understand the ramifications of parables.

Still, Catholics in their 20s can be energized to pursue the joyful intellectual undertaking that understanding the faith actually is. How? Give a young adult Catholic a good book on the faith, like Elizabeth Johnson's *Quest for the Living God*, James Martin's *A Jesuit Off-Broadway*, or John Dear's autobiography. Sit down with a young person and watch a movie that deals with religious issues ("Places in the Heart," "The Mission," "The Shawshank Redemption," "Groundhog Day," "Dogma" or oldies but goodies like "The Nun's Story," "The Cardinal," "A Man for All Seasons" and "Chariots of Fire"). Further, engage young adults in what Tom Clancy, S.J., called the "conversational word of God." Share with a young person what you believe and why. Accompany him or her to a good talk or workshop on the living of our faith and discuss it. Get them asking theological questions, and they may even rise up to read the Gospels, the catechism and Catholic social teaching on their own. We can even dare hope they engage Bernard Lonergan and Karl Rahner! Once they are turned on to the sheer wonder of good theological thinking, they will discover that reflecting on God is much more interesting than the mind-numbing hours they spend pushing the buttons of Halo 3 or Guitar Hero.



What can we do to foster in the imaginations of young adults the possibility that they could be priests or religious?

2. Service is often a way into conversations about how young adults will spend their lives. Vowed religious and diocesan priests should hang out where the young people are. Many years I spend a few weeks in August with J.V.C. volunteers as they prepare for their year of service. Chatting and hearing what is on young adults' minds, one quickly realizes that latent in their year of service is often a deep desire to discover God's will for their lives.

Those desires often need to be teased out and discerned, which is not an easy task for young adults who have lived in the blizzard of seemingly chaotic cultural changes. But conversations with such young men and women about their deepest, truest desires can transform imaginations. In such chats, we let the Matthews know that religious life is a way to allow God to help us "make a mark" on our world. The stories of our lives are filled with such marks.

3. Listen to stories and tell them. Culturally, we are the stories we listen to and tell. So pay attention to the tales that young adults consider important. Reading Harry Potter novels gives one common ground with millions of twentysomethings. "What's your favorite movie?" is always a conversation starter. Young adults live in a media-filled world foreign to those of us who can remember when there were only three television channels. Do not decry and dismiss this virtual world of 30-second ads, Facebook, constantly texting cellphones and blinking video games. Rather, pay attention to what these cultural currents reveal about the young people immersed in them. God's transformative loving grace pulsates in cyberspace. Those striving to seek God in all things must develop ways of conversing with the young adults who live there.

Listening to stories of people was the mission of those who carried the faith to lands where customs and languages differed from their home turf. Christians listened to people's tales and told the story of "the Son of God [who] became one of us so that we might become God" (St. Athanasius).

Knowing that we are listening, young adults will eventually ask about, and listen to, the stories important to us. Just as we priests and religious men and women need to be ready to share our narratives, we need those who have had good experiences of brothers, sisters and priests in religious life to share with young adults the stories of how those people affected their lives. Parents, you can tell your son or daughter about the Jesuit who kept your life on track, or the Sister of St. Joseph who consoled you when your mother died. Aunts and uncles, you can tell your nephew or niece about the Sister of Mercy who serves the poor and homeless in your city, and how you support her work. Grandparents, you can tell your grandson or granddaughter about the nuns and priests who took your lower middle-class Irish or Italian or

Polish immigrant community from poverty to comfortable lives by providing a thriving parish and school as the hub of neighborhood life. The young hunger for your history.

4. Be upfront and frank about chastity and sex. Celibacy does not pose the obstacle it did in the midst of the 1960s sexual revolution. Young adults, although tempted by an easy culture of "hooking up," also yearn for the meaning and deep peace that comes from the practice of sexual sanity and fidelity. Love commitments that are congruent with our nature as persons, whose relationships mirror and monitor our relationship with God, are perceived dimly by those who have been burnt by the murky meaning of "friends with benefits."

Religious should speak openly and often of the joys of the vow of chastity and of its challenges. The church's teaching that chastity is the integration of our sexual powers (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2337) comes as good news to those oppressed by the "six-pack abs" and "body to die for" dictates of Maxim and Cosmopolitan. Celibate chastity grants one a freedom to be available and to love across a wide spectrum of friends and families that is less possible for those whose lives are lovingly focused on spouse and children. A celibate lifestyle also allows one to be present to others without the murky miscommunication inherent in lives lived at loose ends. When one is clear about who and what one is, others are better able to drop defenses and trust.

Most importantly, the embrace of celibacy's gift of solitude opens one for commitment to the transformative practice of contemplative prayer. Someone who sleeps alone, whose nights will never be interrupted by a small child's fear of monsters, has more time to pray every day. Prayer practiced regularly brings an abiding awareness of God in our lives. Prayer makes our desires and choices more easily and authentically attuned to God's loving, leading guidance. Through prayer we learn who we deeply desire to be and what we truly want to do, revelations of who God wants us to be and what God needs us to do. Daily Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours, *lectio divina*, Ignatian contemplation, centering prayer, the rosary—all such ways of prayer help us discover our true selves and thus to know God as companion and challenge.

We must also talk more openly about the challenges surrounding chastity and sexuality. Early in Jesuit life, celibacy was more of a front-burner issue for me. The thought of sleeping with a loving spouse could seem the solution to all life's problems.

Today I listen to friends who are two or three decades into their marriages, and I am sure my life is no more challenging or difficult a path. Still, even though raising children can be demanding, the fact that no child of mine will ever live, play tee ball, or draw pictures for the refrigerator, tugs at my consciousness at times. One Jesuit I know said he did not really miss children, but he found himself missing the grandchildren he never had. For some, the peace and joy of solitude can become a real struggle with loneliness. Community life provides support and companionship, and as a Jesuit, I have been privileged to live with great men I would probably have never met otherwise. On the other hand, St. John Berchmans said he did no great penance: Jesuit community life was sufficient.

Christ calls us to live our lives heroically. Our sexual choices should make us admirable and authentic people, persons committed in love. Our faith is one of the signs and symbols pointing beyond the mere empirical realities they embody. In an overly sexualized culture, those who freely choose celibacy are indicators that there is much more to life than we can know or imagine. We are like fingers pointing to the mysterious moon, calling people to know that there is more to life than pleasure, possessions and power. Sexuality is part of who we are, but does not by itself determine who and what we become as persons. Relationships of all kinds, from family to friends to those we serve, much more make up the total reality of our lives.

We also have to speak openly and honestly of the "elephant in the living room," or in the sacristy, as the case may be. In every diocese and religious community, there are gay men and women living and working as brothers, sisters and priests. In the wake of Donald Cozzens's book *The Changing Face of the Priesthood*, and others' reflections on homosexuals in the priesthood and religious life, many may think that religious life or priesthood is only for those who are homosexual. One young heterosexual man I know, on telling a friend he was entering a religious order, heard the reply, "Oh, I didn't know you were gay." This impression is troubling. If the perception is that religious life and priesthood are "just for gays," many may never consider it as an option.

In my 30 years as a Jesuit, I have not found the issue of sexual orientation very discomfiting or stifling. Despite Jay Leno's and Bill Maher's jokes, religious life is not dominated by a gay subculture. In fact, in most cases I would not even know men in my community were gay unless they told me. Many heterosexual priests and religious have learned to be more appreciative and understanding of the gay men and women among us. Homosexuals are called and generously give their lives in service to a community where they are forever a minority. It is not an easy cross to bear. At times I have been challenged to learn and grow as a heterosexual called to a community where a number of my brothers in Christ were homosexual. But that has never been a major stumbling block or difficulty. Ultimately it does not matter whether one is gay or straight, as long as a person wants to live the vows, serve God's people and proclaim the Gospel.

Furthermore, attitudes towards homosexuality and gays are radically different for those in their 20s than for those in

their 60s. For the millennials, gays are an accepted, admired and liked part of their social and cultural lives. Gay characters are a staple on many popular television programs, and every college campus has a gay and straight club of some sort. Young adults are consequently much more interested in and able to handle these realities. It is our silence on such matters that is more likely to give them pause.

5. Be willing to talk about the hot-button issues honestly and creatively. More difficult to address, especially among college-educated Catholics, are the attitudes of some in the church concerning church teachings on birth control, homosexuality and women's ordination. As a vocal minority of conservative Catholics trumpets its opposition to a "culture of death," a large majority of young Catholics quietly walk away, unwilling to engage the self-righteous in debate on such matters. Many young Catholics see the gray in areas that a relatively small number of Catholics paint as black and white. The 30 million former Catholics in the United States, 10 percent of the country's population, are often those who were never offered a subtle, intelligent and convincing presentation of the meaning of the faith. All they ever heard is what the church is against, never what the church is for.

As diocesan priests and religious, we support and accept the wisdom and guidance of the magisterium's teachings on birth control, abortion, premarital sex and homosexuality, while pastorally dealing with the cultural situations the people we are sent to serve must confront. Sending a message that one can be just as pastoral and creative in applying the church's teaching on these issues as we are on the teachings about social justice will attract many who, at this point, would not even consider a vocation to priesthood and religious life.

6. Five practical things we can do to help young people consider religious life or priesthood. (1) Pay for a young adult to go on a silent retreat. Religious life is at root a life of prayer. Many young people have never had an experience of the mysterious challenges and joys of silence. Giving them time and space for God to touch their consciousness is an invaluable gift. (2) Offer to help pay off college loans. Many never even consider priesthood or religious life because they come out of college carrying crippling debt. Give the gift of financial freedom to young adults, and see where God leads them. (3) Think about paying diocesan priests more. Salary in our culture is a measure of a person's worth. Diocesan priests do not take a vow of poverty, so pay them what they are worth. (4) Lovingly confront issues of race and class in your dioceses and communities. The United States in the not too distant future will be a society without any one majority group. Our religious communities should reflect the economic, ethnic and racial diversity of our society. (5) Strive to make the priesthood and religious life truly distinctive forms of living. Young adults want to give their lives to great and radical responses to the issues of our age.

ON THE WEB
From the archives, Bernard Häring reflects on the priesthood.
americamagazine.org/pages

I have found being a Jesuit priest a fascinating and extremely satisfying way of responding to life and God. As a young Jesuit, I met Bill Byron, S.J., the author of many books who at that time was president of The Catholic University of America. In casual conversation during a coffee break at some Jesuit meeting he said something I never forgot, "This is a great life, if you're called to it." Religiously tone deaf, too many young adults are missing the opportunity of a lifetime. A

FAITH IN FOCUS

Pa Rum Pum Pum Pum

Fifth in a series for Advent and Christmas

BY JIM McDERMOTT

You have likely heard "The Little Drummer Boy" played at least once in the last month. When it comes to the Christmas season, this simple song of a boy present at the Epiphany who does not think he has anything to give is one of the classics.

In Scripture, though, there is no mention of a drummer boy present with the wise men. And the idea of a boy playing his drum for a newborn is pretty preposterous. I don't care if she is the Virgin Mary; that's a one-way ticket to a time-out. The drummer boy seems like a figure taken from another context entirely, perhaps the American Revolution or the Civil War, one of the boy drummers from the corps laying before the Christ child a people's desperate prayers for peace.

Actually, the song "The Little Drummer Boy" originates from the mid-20th century, and its creation really did involve conflict. Supposedly the songwriter Katherine K. Davis wrote it in 1941, inspired by an old Czech carol. The tune, she said, came to her in a dream. Fifteen years later, however, Henry Onorati and Harry Simeone claimed they had written it. At the very least, they provided the arrangement that brought widespread attention to the tune, in the 1957 version sung by the Harry Simeone Chorale. But the dispute over who wrote the song was never fully resolved. And neither side seems ever to have explained the inspiration behind the little drummer boy himself. The Czech melody, if there ever was one, is long since lost.

While many performers have sung the song over the years (including my personal favorite, Marlene Dietrich—imagine her in a Christmas sweater!), perhaps the most famous performance was that of David Bowie and Bing Crosby in Crosby's "Merrie Old Christmas" television special in 1977. You can still find it on YouTube. After a warmly humorous introduction, the two of them stand at a piano and Crosby sings "Little Drummer Boy," while Bowie offers a counterpoint entitled "Peace On Earth": "Peace on Earth, can it be?/ Years from now, perhaps we'll see/ See the day of glory/ See the day when men of good will/ live in peace, live in peace again." The arrangement is simple, but the emotional wallop is significant.

Paradoxically, that moment, too, was born of strife. Bowie's counterpoint was written only after he informed the producers that he hated "Little Drummer Boy" and wondered if he could sing something else. He was on the show in the first place, he later explained, because he knew his mother liked Crosby. Crosby himself, who looks gaunt in the special, would die a month after filming.

The one significant attempt to imagine the story of the little drummer boy came in a 1968 television special for children. Two early stop-motion animation geniuses, Arthur Rankin Jr. and Jules Bass—of "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer" and "Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town" fame—produced a Christmas special, "The Little Drummer Boy," about Aaron, a shepherd boy with a drum who lives a frustrated life in a Bethlehem occupied by surly Romans. After a centurion runs over his sheep Baba, the boy turns to one of the three visiting kings, hoping he can save the animal. The king directs Aaron to the baby Jesus.

In the sequence that follows, even as the kings come before the baby Jesus, the camera never leaves Aaron. In fact, all present turn their attention to him, even the Holy Family. As Aaron closes his eyes and begins to play, they nod in rhythm, and so, we see, does everyone else. The idea that a boy with a drum would be the focus at the cradle of Jesus remains incongruous, yet the moment is strangely affecting.

From a literary point of view, the drummer boy stands in for us, for our sense of wonder and inadequacy before the person of Jesus. The three kings have their treasures, but what could we possibly offer to him? Clearly the answer is, give what you have. Come to him with whatever you have. If the history of the song shows anything, it is that something lovely can come out of it all, even out of pettiness and aggression. A

PHOTO: REUTERS/FELIX AUSIN ORDONEZ

JIM McDERMOTT, S.J., *is an associate editor of* ***America.***

ART | James Martin

BEAUTY CALLS TO US

Lourdes, Fatima, Vatican City, Fairfield—the first three of these sites are well known among Catholics; and each boasts the dazzling artistry of Marko Rupnik, S.J. His richly colored mosaics adorn the Basilica of the Holy Rosary in Lourdes, France; the Church of the Most Holy Trinity in Fatima, Portugal; and the pope's private chapel in the Apostolic Palace. Rupnik's style is instantly recognizable. His monumental figures are fashioned with vividly colored, oversized tesserae (mosaic tiles); their large eyes, placid faces and mannered poses show the influence of the iconographic traditions of the Eastern churches.

The fourth site, Sacred Heart University, a Catholic school in Fairfield, Conn., is about to unveil the latest of Father Rupnik's works, a colossal 28-by-44-foot mosaic that will serve as the centerpiece of the school's new chapel. The 14,000-square-foot chapel is an airy, modern structure designed by Sasaki Associates Architects. Behind the main altar stands the newly completed mosaic, which ties together several events of salvation history in one image. Inside the more intimate setting of the daily chapel, almost every inch of wall space is covered by a Nativity mosaic, literally surrounding the visitor with the story of the birth of Christ.

Anthony M. Cernera, the school's president, has been intimately involved in every stage of this bold artistic venture. Mr. Cernera first met Father Rupnik during the consistory in Vatican City in 2000. Rupnik, a Slovenian theologian who teaches at both the Pontifical Oriental Institute and the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, is also a member of the Centro Aletti, an international community of artists and theologians

PHOTO: TRACY DEER-MIREK

Gabriele Casale, a mosaic artist, worked on one of Marko Rupnik's new mosaics at Sacred Heart University in August 2008.

from the Orthodox, Oriental and Latin churches, based in Rome. "The chapel was on the drawing board when we met," recalls Cernera, who was impressed by Rupnik's work in the papal apartments, completed in 1999.

Over the next few years, the two worked together organizing ecumenical seminars for Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic participants. In 2005, Father Rupnik told Mr. Cernera that he had a question that he was embarrassed to ask. "Would you consider my being the artist for your new chapel?" said Rupnik. Cernera laughs at the memory. "I was mustering up the courage to ask *him*!" he said. "It was a providential moment."

Originally, the school had planned to place a simple cross in front of the reredos, in the space behind the altar. But Cernera and Rupnik saw the possibilities for something else. "We wanted to present the fundamentals of the faith in a way that would engage the students," said Cernera. The immense mosaic makes reference to the Annunciation, the Resurrection and Pentecost. "We chose the subject in dialogue," explained Rupnik in an email, "and together we arrived at a complete theme, which expresses in an artistic way our theological starting points."

On Aug. 17, 2008, a Sunday, Rupnik and 16 artists from the Centro Aletti arrived to begin their work. It was Rupnik's second commission in the United States (the other is in the Knights of Columbus headquarters, also in Connecticut). Before the craftsmen began the painstaking process of mixing the adhesive solution of Mapei powder and Isolastic liquid, and climbing the five-level scaffolding to affix the individual mosaic pieces to the back wall, Rupnik led the group in prayer.

Rupnik took care not to break with that iconographic tradition, nor with another that specifies which part of the image is to be created first. "It begins with the face of the Lord," he said, "because Sunday is the day of the Lord."

The labor continued unabated for two weeks, with artists sometimes working 14-hour days, marking off the designs, coating the wall with plaster and carefully placing the chunky tesserae into their designated places. It was a painstaking process; the face of the donkey in the Nativity scene, for example, contains 20 different colors of mosaic stone.

The resulting mosaics are notable not simply for their beauty but for their size as well. The massive reredos, highlighted by the brilliant gold background, the indigo of the tomb and magenta of the Virgin's robe, commands attention. The scale, however, is appropriate to the overall dimensions of the church, peopling the large space with holy men and women, much as the artist John Nava filled the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles with his magnificent tapestries of the saints. Like Nava's work, which offers a distinctive theology of the communion of the saints, Rupnik's work, the artist hopes, will help viewers meditate on an underlying theology. "The revealed truth is love," said Rupnik, "and the realized love is Beauty."

The chapel for daily use, located in the front of the church, is a jewel. Because of its smaller dimensions, worshipers are enveloped by the story of the Nativity, as if they were stepping into a dazzling icon. Mr. Cernera, who holds degrees in theology and education, was enthusiastic about the educational value of both mosaics. "In the Nativity scene," he said, "you see Jesus on the floor, offering an example of the poverty and *kenosis*, or emptying, of God. It's something that we wanted to present to the students."

As both artist and theologian, Rupnik tries to communicate the fundamentals of the faith visually. "Unlike contemporary art," he said, "the mosaic does not need to be liked," he told The Fairfield County Catholic, the diocesan newspaper.

"Yet little by little, it affirms the ability to discover the spirit and bring you to a higher level, toward the mystery of God."

The chapel occupies a central place on the campus. "It's a statement about the importance of Catholic identity and the centrality of the liturgy, which lies at the heart of our school," said Mr. Cernera. It will be dedicated sometime in late spring, making Sacred Heart University a new pilgrimage site for admirers of Father Rupnik's work and for anyone interested in contemporary religious art. "We wanted something beautiful for our students," said Cernera, "because beauty is one way that God calls us to see what God is doing in our midst."

JAMES MARTIN, S.J., *is an associate editor of* ***America.***

BOOKS | Wayne A. Holst

ONCE-THRIVING CENTERS OF FAITH

THE LOST HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY

The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia—and How It Died

By Philip Jenkins
HarperOne. 336p $26.95
ISBN 9780061472800

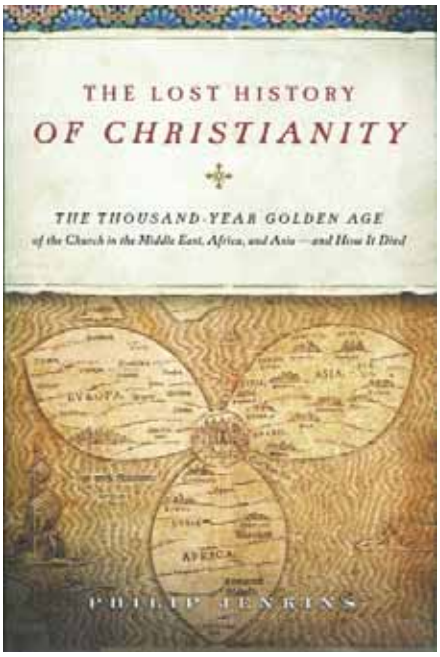
Some months ago, my wife and I stood in the square facing the dome and western facade of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice. We marveled at the intriguing blend of Eastern and Western architecture before us.

We later visited the chapel in the crypt where the body of St. Mark had lain for several centuries after being abducted from Alexandria during the 17th century. We also gazed at the church's high altar, beneath which the saint's body now rests.

All this prompted me to think of the rich and varied historical influences of Christian faith on the church in Europe. I realized that much of this inheritance was from now largely deserted communities in Asia and Africa. Strong centers of Christianity had once existed to the east and south, but these had now but a flickering vestige of their former vitality.

For 1,000 years many "other" Christianities had once existed beyond Europe. We in the West have been inclined to dismiss them as peripheral at best, or at worst to reject them as churches embracing Monophysite or Nestorian heresies.

Now a splendidly revealing overview of these churches has



appeared. Using his skill to discredit murky thinking and propose new understandings where the old no longer serve a good purpose, Philip Jenkins offers yet another jewel in what is becoming a crown of paradigm-shattering studies. *The Lost History of Christianity: The Thousand-Year Golden Age of the Church in the Middle East, Africa and Asia—and How It Died* will amply reward your investment of time and attention.

Christianity originated in the Near East, Jenkins reminds us. "It had its greatest centers, its most prestigious churches and monasteries in Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia." Were these Christians in fact the schismatics we have so casually assumed them to be? Hardly, says the author. "We must never think of these churches as fringe sects rather than as the Christian mainstream" of their time. Any history of Christianity that ignores these churches is missing a large part of the story. Forgetting them is as bad as losing them. To break the silence, we must recover the memories and restore the history.

The original Christian centers were in Asia, Africa and the Middle East. For many centuries, the churches located there possessed many of the characteristics of modern ecumenical communions. They were diverse, global in scope, rooted in the cultures where they existed and open to the influence of other great faith traditions.

In many ways they were "the original Christianities." The "alternative Christianities" of Catholicism and Orthodoxy came later and filled a vacuum left by their demise.

While ancient churches like the Copts of Egypt and the Maronites of Lebanon have persisted to modern times, many did not. Why have some survived while others expired? Why have others vanished completely in one place only to re-emerge elsewhere?

Jenkins, professor of history and religious studies at Penn State, believes that the real question is not "why do churches die?" but "why do they endure?" Much of his book is an attempt to answer that question.

He describes in a series of chapters early Christianities stretching from

North Africa to China; from Central Asia to Sri Lanka. One of the most interesting is the Mar Thoma church of Kerala State, India. Tracing its roots through the Syriac tradition and the apostle Thomas, this church has undergone various transformations in its 2,000-year history. Mar Thoma proudly refutes those who consider Christianity a late, foreign incursion.

Jenkins devotes considerable attention to the growth and development of Islam in regions formerly occupied by Christians. Early in its history, Islam was a rather tolerant religion that treated its non-Muslim minorities with respect. Only later, and at various crisis times, did Islam turn violent. The author tells that story candidly; Islamic persecutions were ruthless. He challenges Karen Armstrong's thesis that Islam has always been a peace-loving faith. We learn, for example, of the Ottoman Turkish genocide of Armenian Christians and the gradual decimation of Christian Arabs in Palestine.

That said, Jenkins also reminds us of the equally bloody crusades and the persecutions of religious minorities in Christian Europe.

The latter chapters set a more positive tone as Jenkins poses penetrating questions concerning both the extinction and the resiliency of Christian communities. He paints sweeping portraits and grand cycles as well as singular moments of particular immediacy.

Important lessons can be learned from such a high-quality interpretation. Declines, notes Jenkins, were often the result of sectarian conflict, introversion, the lack of a missional vision, genuine groundedness in new cultures—even geographic location. Some communities were refined by the fires of persecution while others adapted themselves into irrelevance.

Human standards of what constitutes success may not match God's criteria. Our definitions of success and failure are not ultimate or definitive, says Jenkins. To possess a mature understanding of the faith we need to recognize the meaning of disaster and defeat as well as triumph and growth. We need a theology of extinction, he holds, not just a missiology of continual Christian expansion.

My wife and I left the square of St. Mark in Venice and traveled in our imaginations to another famous sacred place—the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. At one time this magnificent edifice was a Christian church. Now it is a major Islamic mosque. Will St. Mark's in Venice remain a Christian basilica? Will the Hagia Sophia forever be a mosque?

There are no earthly guarantees, says Jenkins. Yet the chain of memory is itself a kind of resurrection.

WAYNE A. HOLST *teaches religion and culture at the University of Calgary and coordinates adult spiritual development at St. David's United Church in that city.*

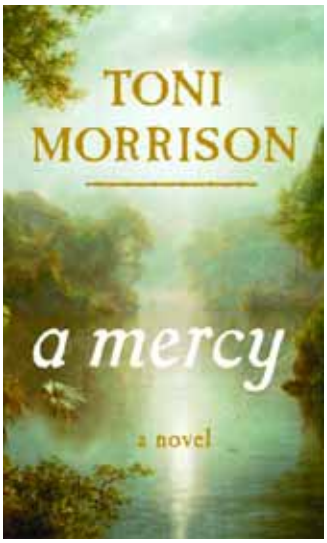
Pam Kingsbury

TAKE MY DAUGHTER

A MERCY
A Novel

By Toni Morrison
Knopf. 176p $23.95
ISBN 9780307264237

Toni Morrison—alongside Philip Roth and John Updike—represents the vanguard of excellence in American literature. The release of a new work by her, who began writing a bit later than Roth or Updike, is an always eagerly anticipated literary event.



Born Chloe Anthony Wofford, Morrison worked as an editor at Random House before publishing *The Bluest Eye*, her first novel, in 1970. She won a Pulitzer Prize in 1988, has taught at Princeton (among other universities) and has been a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters since 1981. Morrison, who has long understood and is unapologetic regarding "the necessity of the artist being a politician," won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. Her citation reads: Toni Morrison, "who in novels characterized by visionary force and poetic import gives life to an essential aspect of American reality."

In *A Mercy*, as in her eight earlier novels, Morrison revisits and builds on multiple themes—the roles of women, both of color and white, in a racist, patriarchal society; the value of language and storytelling; the far-reaching influence of slavery on this country; the inherent social distinctions involved in being a part of a community; and what might happen if women banded together in order to consolidate their power.

Though physically slight, the novel takes on the epic consequences and conflicting impulses underlying the buying, selling and trading of humans in the 17th century. Set in the Americas during a time when slavery was still relatively new to the colonies, the novel uses the story of a mother and daughter as a springboard to explore the early class

and religious differences between the settlers of America that allowed slavery and racial hatred to thrive.

Jacob, an Anglo-Dutch trader caught up in an unfortunate business deal, takes a young slave girl who has been taught to read and write as partial payment on a bad debt. Her mother understands that "with the hands of a slave and the feet of a Portuguese lady," Florens has reached a dangerous age; the master and his wife have both been eyeing the child with the understanding that she will soon be of age to bear children of her own. Florens's mother, recognizing Jacob's distaste for slaveholding and the look in his eyes that tells he knows this child is a human being, believes bartering her for the moneys owed is Florens's best chance to have a modest amount of control over what happens to her body in a world where owning and/or bartering flesh is acceptable.

Knowing that he would have few opportunities to settle the debt more honorably in Maryland, Jacob accepts the child. Florens, feeling displaced by her infant brother, rejected by her mother who brokered the exchange and cast out from the only home she has known, begins a lifelong quest for love. Initially she attempts to find a mother surrogate in Lina, an older servant at her new master's house; later she believes she has found love with an African blacksmith who has always been free.

Florens's arrival at Jacob Vaark's farm disrupts the household hierarchy. Jacob believes his young charge is not as capable or intelligent as his older servants. His wife, Rebekka, who was persecuted for her religious beliefs in England, understands she has little power to protect her charges while her husband is away on business. The couple's first servants—Lina, an indigenous woman who watched her tribe die from smallpox, and Sorrow, a woman of mixed race who spent too long at sea—have seen too much sorrow to be "normal." Willard and Scully, the indentured servants, keep deliberately extending their servitude in order to live in "the grandest house in the region." The women's alliances, desires, hopes, sorrows and points of view shift repeatedly throughout the narrative. Each character, suffering from issues of abandonment, betrayal or loss, represents an unsavory part of America's past.

One of the novel's great strengths is the way in which Morrison allows each character to tell his or her portion of the story, creating a chorus of individuals attempting (with varying degrees of success or indifference) to reach out to one another. Florens's mother, whose act of mercy sets the sequence of events in motion, is allowed the last narrative to explain—and defend—her choice to send her daughter away.

A Mercy proves yet again that Morrison's extraordinary storytelling abilities have not diminished. She has consistently produced powerful work that resonates with readers of both literary and popular fiction. Heart-wrenching and evocative, *A Mercy* proposes that love and grief are permanently intertwined in human DNA and that only through storytelling can that love and grief combine to create redemption in the human spirit.

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

Peter Heinegg

ALAS, POOR JULIAN

NOTHING TO BE FRIGHTENED OF

By Julian Barnes
Knopf. 256p $24.95
ISBN 9780307269638

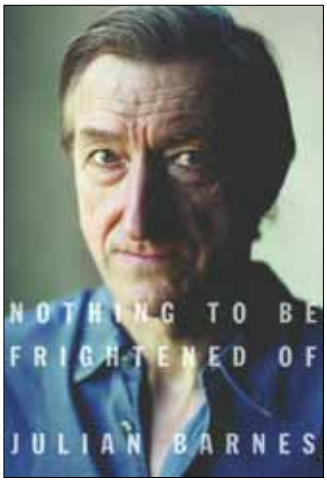
What a great book cover. Gazing ruefully out at us is the somber, skeptical face of Julian Barnes, distinguished novelist, sophisticated Francophile and death-obsessed soliloquist, his long nose lending him a remarkable resemblance to Margaret Hamilton as the Wicked Witch of the West. Barnes, one assumes, would not mind the comparison, for in these whirling-swirling meditations on the permanence of death he never loses his self-mocking humor or his steely sense of the absurd.

The fine photo, by Paul Stuart, of Barnes at 60—trim, barely wrinkled, a healthy head of dark hair, so what the devil is he complaining about?—makes a perfect, all-but-inevitable cover, because this is not a book on death in general, death in modern literature or death as a philosophical-theological conundrum, though all these topics come up and come in for some gripping treatment. This is about Barnes's own near-crazed concern with his own death, the kind of violent emotional distress that makes him wake up screaming in the middle of the night.

Since there is no logical way to quiet this fear (none at least that he can accept), his thoughts about it are presented in no particular order. As with Barnes's hero Montaigne, who maintained a calm resignation beyond anything his pupil can muster, the brooding consciousness of the author holds everything together. Still, Barnes is a storyteller, so he embeds his fragmented confessions into the framework of family history, especially the deaths of his parents, and tales of the rendezvous with mortality of a colorful crew,

famous or otherwise, of writers and acquaintances, all now or soon to be dead. Finally, as it happens, Barnes's elder brother Jonathan, the only person alive with whom he can swap and check and give semi-reliable shape to his family memories, is a professor of philosophy, an expert on Aristotle and quite a different character: across-the-board rational, not much disturbed by death and, perhaps critically, a man with children and grandchildren (Barnes has none).

Reviewers have rightly made a big deal of Barnes's opening line: "I don't believe in God, but I miss Him," a statement Jonathan Barnes considers "soppy." But this is no ordinary apostate's nostalgia, because Barnes had practically no religious upbringing. His father was an agnostic, his mother an atheist (both were teachers); and in his early teens, when vague intimations of God started to interfere with his masturbating, he shucked them off. At 20, Barnes described himself as "a happy atheist"; but with the coming of middle age he began to find hard-core atheism repellent—he also strongly preferred his gentle, unassuming father to his aggressive, self-centered mother—and he drifted into his current baffled malaise.



Like a classic Victorian unbeliever, Barnes has a keen sense of loss, of irrecoverable feelings, as he explains in a paragraph that he might have borrowed from Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human* (1886):

> Missing God is focused for me by missing the underlying sense of purpose and belief when confronted by religious art. It is one of the haunting hypotheticals for the unbeliever: what would it be like "if it were true".... Imagine hearing the Mozart "Requiem" in a great cathedral—or, for that matter, Poulenc's "Fishermen's Mass" in a clifftop chapel damp from salt spray—and taking the text as gospel; imagine reading Giotto's holy strip-cartoon in the chapel at Padua as nonfiction; imagine looking on a Donatello as the actual face of the suffering Christ or the weeping Magdalene. It would—to put it mildly—add a bit of extra oomph, wouldn't it?

The answer—and the deprivation—is obvious.

Denying that "oomph," Barnes goes off in search of thanatological wisdom, if not comfort, from his family. Bad idea—apart from displaying a half-comic, half-pathetic English coldness to one another (Grandma views Grandpa's corpse and announces, "Doesn't he look awful?"; Pa's last words to Ma are, "I think you're my wife"). Worse yet, both parents suffered strokes and lived on as broken bits of themselves before finally expiring, he first, she five years later.

Faute de mieux, Barnes can, like Montaigne, garner the wisdom of (mostly modern) sages or, like a godless T. S. Eliot, shore various fragments against his ruins: sardonic anecdotes—e.g., about cryogenically preserved cadavers defrosting—and, above all, acidly realistic comments on dying, death, eternity and so on. It takes real talent to do this sort of thing well, and Barnes has it. He orchestrates a rich, often dissonant chorus of people: Sir Thomas

Song on the Feast of the Epiphany

Be bold
like the
Magi.

Do not
tarry,
settling

into
your comfort,
but rather

set out
keeping
the star

in your
vision.
It will lead

you
to the place
you are

most
in need of
the place

where
God is.
And if

an angel
warns you
in a dream

not to
return
by the old

way,
please
listen.

CHRISTINE RODGERS

CHRISTINE RODGERS, *an actor and poet, lives in San Francisco. Her Advent/Christmas collection,* Upon a Luminous Night, *is available from tallpilgrim12@hotmail.com.*

Browne, Stendhal, Flaubert, the Goncourt Brothers, Jules (a partial namesake) Renard, Somerset Maugham, Philip Larkin, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, Sherwin Nuland and many of his friends, each indicated by a single initial. It's a brilliant, bitter feast.

Barnes also engages not just with writers, but with philosophers as well. Here he tends to concede the match early on. He will admit, for example, that old humanistic staples like freedom of the will or the coherent individual character look a little dubious in the light of modern empiricism, neo-Darwinian materialism and so forth. But then he will proceed to smuggle them back into his narrative métier, because he cannot do without them.

Similarly, Barnes will spin out various alternative scenarios to the stark either/or of death as complete extinction versus traditional pictures of the afterlife. All right, he speculates, so there is no life after death *now*, but maybe there will be much, much later. He enjoys imagining the dismay of the "resurrected atheist," who discovers he has gotten it all wrong. Purely as a plot line, any chronicle of the human race that begins with a random bubble in the primordial soup and ends in a total, terminal *pffft* is not simply grim and depressing; it's an aesthetic catastrophe. Left to his own devices, Barnes would never have written that sort of script.

ON THE WEB
A review of Conor McPherson's play "The Seafarer."
americamagazine.org.

Unfortunately, such seems to be the text he is faced with; so what can he do about it, or about the fear that has him by the throat and won't let go? Not bloody much. (Barnes likes to indulge in bursts of emphatic profanity.) He can describe his wretched condition with unrelenting honesty, clarity and wit. He can laugh at absolutely everything, especially himself and his fumbling efforts to figure it all out. Like Hamlet, he does a sensational graveyard scene. On the edge of the tomb, eloquence may not be much; but it is better than nothing.

PETER HEINEGG *is a professor of English at Union College in Schenectady, N.Y.*

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Translator

SPANISH TRANSLATOR, Luis Baudry, specialized in Catholic matters (Bible, spirituality, ministry, etc.). Books, articles and Web sites. Ph: (646) 257-4165, or luisbaudrysimon@gmail.com

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LETTERS

Going to the Source

Re David Gibson's article on Catholics and biblical literacy ("A Literate Church," 12/8): As a Catholic who frequently takes part in text study with Jewish communities, I find it depressing how rare it is to find Catholics (either priests or laity) who make an effort to read Scripture in the original languages. Because understanding Hebrew is so central to Jewish observance, when Jewish communities examine the Torah, they are more likely to see the implications of actual word choices.

I have only a minimal knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, but I have found it immensely satisfying to look at a particular passage using one of the available tools that allow a reader to see what Hebrew and Greek words are being used. This was possible with lexicons in book form in the past, but is now vastly easier with the many Bible software programs available.

I am not quarreling with those who just want to meditate on Scripture without trying to know much more about it, but it would be wonderful if more Catholics could realize that their meditation would be much deeper and richer if they put in the effort to know more about the text.

PATRICIA GROSS
Arlington, Mass.

Faith and Fiction

Plaudits to the Rev. Andrew Greeley for his essay on Jon Hassler ("The Last Catholic Novelist," 11/3). For years Greeley has called our attention to the importance and uniqueness of the Catholic or analogical or sacramental imagination, expressed simply and beautifully in the opening line of the poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J.: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God."

Greeley argues persuasively not only that Jon Hassler's novels are a special gift to the Catholic community, but that Catholic novels should be present on the campuses and in the classrooms of Catholic colleges and universities.

In an adult course on the Catholic novel, my students and I have read 100 Catholic novels over the past 15 years, including five of Hassler's. Greeley is right that Hassler's novels are a treasure; he is also right to wonder if the question is not whether theology and literature can be taught at the same time, but whether it is even possible to teach them separately.

(REV.) ROBERT E. LAUDER
Queens, N.Y.

Infallible Argument

The commentary on the politics of abortion by John F. Kavanaugh, S.J. ("Abortion Absolutists," 12/15) is the first cogent comment I have seen on this subject. All of the extremists on both sides of this issue are so utterly convinced of the infallibility of their own positions that they are unwilling to listen to counterarguments or comments. Abortion in this country did not start with Roe v. Wade, nor will it end if Roe v. Wade is overturned. Let us do what we can by way of education and discourse at least to reduce the number of abortions in this country.

MICHAEL COLLINS
Myersville, Md.

Justice and Charity

Thank you for your commentary on the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (Current Comment, 12/8). Five years ago I researched a number of C.C.H.D. projects for a book. Across the country, I listened to the hope given to poor people by such efforts. Moreover, I saw Catholic parishes animated and energized by their own commitment to the goal of C.C.H.D.—helping poor people to help themselves. Where C.C.H.D. projects were supported and implemented, parishes came alive in worship, learning and service. The linkage of the Eucharist to justice and charity was palpable. That linkage bore fruit in the application of Catholic social teaching to faith-based community organization. Far from being the church's "best kept secret," in such circumstances Catholic social teaching came alive (and got teeth).

In over a year researching C.C.H.D. projects, I never once heard mention of abortion, much less support for it. But I did hear clearly the thin voice of the poor—standing up and standing out—like grass through concrete.

It is sad that your magazine should have to defend C.C.H.D., seemingly even to some bishops. The bishops should be proud of this effort. It is ironic that in this economic recession, our bishops seem to be leaning toward pulling the rug out from under not only the poor, but themselves as well.

JOHN P. HOGAN
Washington, D.C.

Mothers and Children First

I was much impressed with Maryann Cusimano Love's article about care for women during pregnancy and childbirth ("Woman and Child," 12/8). I was appalled at the statistics that show how many women in many poor countries do not receive the care they need, care that is neither expensive nor extensive. Even our own country has a dismal record.

For about three decades, we have heard from our church of the need to be pro-life. This message is certainly an important, even vital one. But too often it has meant little more than being anti-abortion. I would suggest to every group fighting legalized abortion that they turn their attention to the larger issue of protecting women giving birth and to their children. Instead of just railing against abortion, let us invest an equal amount of energy and money into making sure that women can give birth safely and that healthy children will be born.

Our church has every reason to be a leader in this. We revere Mary, the Mother of God, and by association all mothers. We need to keep our eyes on those mothers who need our help simply for the survival of their babies and themselves.

LUCY FUCHS
Brandon, Fla.

What the Dickens

Thank you to Michael Timko for his review of the Christianity of Charles Dickens ("No Scrooge He," 12/22). Charles Dickens's great contemporary, Cardinal Henry Manning, once called the novelist's works "a complete course in moral theology." And so God bless us, every one!

FRANCIS MANION
Bardstown, Ky.

Morgan's Tears

Your editorial on the financial crisis ("Morgan Would Weep," 12/8) was well intentioned, partially correct and a little confused.

J. P. Morgan did not weep in 1907. Instead, he locked a number of leading bankers inside his library in the middle of the night until they came up with a solution to save the failing banks. Today, there is no one banker like Morgan with the power, prestige, resources or incentive to do what Morgan accomplished in 1895 and 1907.

It is worth remembering that Morgan made a bundle on the 1907 rescue effort. Today's bankers are well compensated, win or lose, and so do not have the same incentive Morgan did. Any rescue or bailout is now principally the responsibility of the chairman of the Federal Reserve and the Treasury secretary.

The editorial was dead right on the question of the inordinate compensation ratio between workers (whose pay is based on results) and senior executives (who are often paid irrespective of performance). But it is not market conditions so much as the incestuous relationship between management, compensation committees and lax and sympathetic boards that caused this problem of inflated compensation. The shareholders are left out of the loop, and therefore the problem is systemic.

Ronald Reagan's catchy but thoughtless phrase, "The government isn't the solution, the government is the problem," is part of what has gone awry. Capitalism usually works well in the marketplace, but it has no venue in the moral realm. Enlightened regulation is the only answer.

Only when Adam's fall is repealed will business leaders themselves take responsibility for the past—and the future, as your editorial suggests.

ERNEST C. RASKAUSKAS SR.
Potomac, Md.

All or Nothing

In his article on the Catholic Church's defense of human rights ("An Advocate for All," 12/1), David Hollenbach, S.J., is correct when he says that the church has exercised leadership on issues like torture, genocide and religious freedom. But the Catholic hierarchy's advocacy does not extend to "all," as we have seen little progress in the Vatican's attitude toward the human rights of women, gay men and lesbians. For example, the Vatican recently opposed a U.N. declaration condemning discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

We can all appreciate the strides the Catholic hierarchy has made in terms of human rights. But we also need to recognize the long way the church has yet to come in fully embracing the rights afforded by the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its progeny.

Active respect and advocacy by Catholic leaders for all people's human rights—women, gay men, lesbian women and even those people with whom the hierarchy disagrees—could only advance a commitment to the common good, and would position the church as a prophetic leader and defender of human rights.

JON O'BRIEN
Washington, D.C.

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America (ISSN 0002-7049) is published weekly (except for 12 combined issues: Jan. 5-12, 19-26, March 30-April 6, May 25-June 1, June 8-15, 22-29, July 6-13, 20-27, Aug. 3-10, 17-24, Aug. 31-Sept. 7, Dec. 21-28) 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.

Whispers of Love

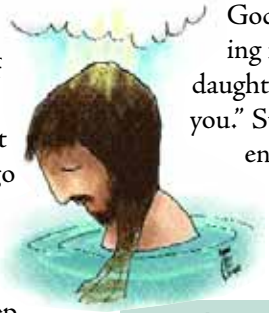
THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD (B), JAN. 11, 2009

Readings: Is 42:1-4, 6-7; Ps 29:1-2, 3-4, 3, 9-10; Acts 10:34-38; Mk 1:7-11

"With you I am well pleased" (Mk 1:11)

With today's feast, the Christmas cycle ends and we return to Ordinary Time. The readings in these first weeks focus on stories of those called to discipleship. The stories tell not only how specially chosen persons played important roles in the unfolding drama of salvation history, but also how ordinary persons (like all of us) are called to play an extraordinary part by continuing God's creative and healing work in the power of the Spirit.

We do not know who was the chosen "servant" of whom Isaiah speaks. It may be that this figure represents the whole people of Israel. Some think it refers to a faithful remnant. It may have been an individual, even the prophet himself, or a past prophet or king. Alternatively, it may refer to a future messianic figure. There are strong parallels between this servant and Jesus. Both know how pleased God is with them; both are empowered by the divine Spirit. Both work for universal justice, not by commanding or imposing it, but by teaching everyone, by healing blindness and by freeing people from whatever confines them (Is 42:4, 7). Neither one brings justice with a billy club; that would break one who is already bruised and would quench the smoldering wick of hope. Rather, it is with the gentle persuasion of love, with its healing power, by which the Isaian servant and the beloved Son unleash the forces of good.



Mark describes what empowers Jesus to go about "doing good" (Acts 10:38): the unshakeable knowledge and the experience deep within that God loves him utterly and takes great delight in him. This kind of love washes away sin and its effects. It has always been hard to understand why Jesus asked for John's "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mk 1:4). It is possible that, while Jesus had committed no personal sins, he was aware that he was part of a sinful world in need of pardon, and thus requested John's baptism. What is clear in the Gospel is that this is a defining moment for Jesus. A colorful metaphor, "the heavens being torn open," conveys that there is no separation between God and Jesus. The Gospel invites us also to recall those touchstone moments in our lives in which we have sensed God's powerful presence, whispering in our ear: "You are my beloved daughter/son; I am so delighted in you." Such moments are the ones that energize us to continue the divine creating and healing mission entrusted to us through Jesus and empowered by the Spirit.

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Recall a time in which you were aware of God's great delight in you.
- As you savor that experience in prayer, how are you empowered to share that love?
- Pray for the openness to regard all others as beloved daughters and sons of God, who "shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34).

BARBARA E. REID, O.P., *is a professor of New Testament Studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Ill.*

The Chain of Discipleship

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), JAN. 18, 2009

Readings: 1 Sm 3:3b-10, 19; Ps 40:2, 4, 7-10; 1 Cor 6:13c-15a, 17-20; Jn 1:35-42

"Where are you staying?" (Jn 1:38)

Unlike the other three Gospels, the Gospel of John does not depict Jesus calling the first disciples while walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is John the Baptist who points two of his disciples toward "the Lamb of God." As in the other Gospels, they take heed and follow Jesus. But there is a different dynamic in John's Gospel. Jesus has not called these two, and seeing them follow, he turns and asks them, "What are you looking for?" Their reply might seem odd to us at first: "Where are you staying?" Here the Evangelist introduces one of the key theological emphases of this Gospel: abiding, or staying with Jesus. The Greek verb *menein*, "to abide," is repeated twice more, as the two went "and saw where Jesus was stay-

ing (*menei*), and they stayed (*emeinan*) with him." Later, in John 15, the image of the vine and branches helps us envision what it means to be intimately connected to and abide in Jesus and the One who sent him.

In the Fourth Gospel the call to discipleship comes through the witness of someone else. John the Baptist brings Andrew and another unnamed disciple to Jesus. Andrew then brings his brother, Simon Peter, to Jesus (notice that Peter is not the first follower in John's Gospel). Later, Philip brings Nathanael to Jesus (1:45-51), and the Samaritan woman brings her townspeople to him (4:29-42). Today's readings show the diverse ways in which the call to discipleship can come. Samuel has a direct experience of God and, with the help of a more experienced companion, is able to understand what God is asking. In the Gospel, the call comes through the mediation of another's witness.

In whatever way the call to discipleship comes, Paul reminds us that we do not encounter the Holy as disembodied spirits. Rather, our bodies are sacred, "temples of the Holy Spirit." That Jesus took on human flesh and that God raised him bodily underscore the importance of the body. A corporeal spirituality helps us counter any exploitation of the body: in the sex trade, or overexposure in the manner of dress, or the battering of bodies with abuse or torture, or the devaluing of aging bodies. It is through our bodies that we experience godliness, and it is in them that we glorify God.

BARBARA E. REID

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Who was instrumental in bringing you to Jesus? Pray in thanksgiving for them.
- Who do you bring to Jesus?
- Give thanks for your body, through which you glorify God.