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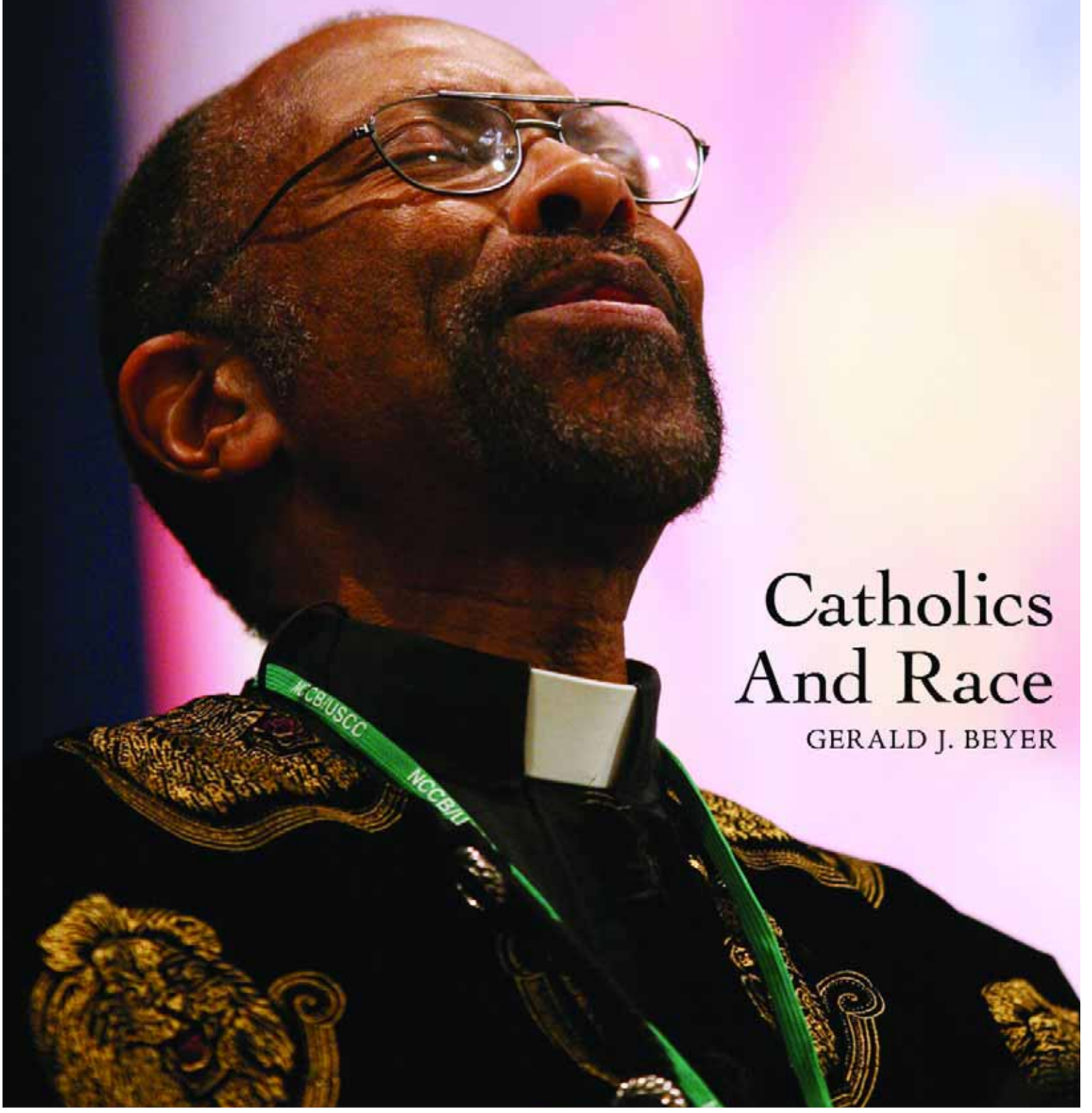

Catholics And Race

GERALD J. BEYER

OF MANY THINGS

I met Marian Anderson when I was a young teen and she was in her late 60s, and we spoke for a few sweet moments in her backstage dressing room. She had just finished performing at the Phoenix Union High School auditorium, one of many stops on her farewell tour, which began in Constitution Hall, from which she had once famously been barred, and ended in Carnegie Hall. After that tour, Anderson retired from singing.

Our brief encounter took place in the mid-1960s, during the struggle for civil rights that introduced my generation to the injustice of racial prejudice. I had not yet come of age politically, though I would soon. In the encounter with Ms. Anderson, I was childlike, unaware of the decades of discrimination this great singer had suffered, unaware that little white girls probably never came round after her every concerts to gush over her.

Ms. Anderson welcomed me warmly. I went over and hugged her neck. She took my hands in hers and held them as she asked me about myself. I recited what we had in common—facts I had just learned from the souvenir program: our fathers had both died, hers when she was 12, mine when I was an infant; we were both Baptists who sang in our church choirs; we were both altos who liked to sing spirituals. She sang "Twelve Gates Into the City" and "Ride on King Jesus" that night, as I recall, songs I have loved ever since. It is possible that my total lack of awareness of our differences struck Ms. Anderson as a sign of the changing times. I mentioned that this was the first professional concert I had ever attended. She autographed my program.

Truth is, before that week I, like most of the 70 students in our high school chorus, had never heard of the great Marian Anderson. Mr. Harris, our choir director and my favorite teacher, had told us about her, describing her voice and urging us to take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime occasion. He must have told us that she was a "Negro"; perhaps he even showed our class a film about her or played a recording. But I went to hear "the voice of the century," as my teacher (citing Arturo Toscanini) called hers, and to learn what a contralto was, exactly.

Today I am grateful for having once seen, heard and met Marian Anderson. For in doing so, I experienced firsthand her legendary serenity, grace and personal dignity on stage and understood intuitively that her own profound faith shaped the way she sang religious songs and communicated their meaning. I noticed the range of her voice (four octaves) and of her skill as she sang songs of different genres and in several languages. At my first concert I heard a world-class singer perform classical music, which set the bar high for every other performance I would attend. And in our brief meeting, I felt her touch, saw how she listened and looked directly at me, smiling and joyous, and experienced her kindness in taking time with an unknown teen when she likely needed some quiet, peaceful moments to herself. That night I also sensed the difference between a celebrity (rich and famous) and a person of accomplishment, character and significance.

Sixteen years after Anderson's death and 70 years after her Easter concert on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, that event is viewed as a turning point in changing racial attitudes in America. The singer once barred from Constitution Hall went on to sing there often; she had a major role at the Metropolitan Opera in New York and was awarded honorary doctorates, the Presidential Medal of Freedom and a Grammy for lifetime achievement. As her voice rang out over the radio this Easter in songs from the historic concert aired on National Public Radio, I wondered how many in this generation she would touch with her voice and her dignity.

KAREN SUE SMITH

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ON THE WEB

Robert Sullivan (right) talks about rats, swamps and Henry David Thoreau on our podcast. Plus, reviews of "Exit the King" and "Mary Stuart," and from the archives, John LaFarge, S.J., on Catholics and racial integration. All at americamagazine.org.

Mr. Potter's Progeny

When public ire was roused against executive jets for Detroit automakers, luxury retreats for AIG clients and bonuses for bailed-out bankers, populist discontent made headlines. Now that Wall Street bankers, thanks to the Obama economic team, are back in the driver's seat, purveyors of conventional wisdom belittle populism as a distracting obstacle to economic recovery. It is as if in a sequel to "It's a Wonderful Life," Mr. Potter has once more repossessed Bedford Falls, and George Bailey has been locked up as a vagrant. The nation's top bankers and their new regulators don't understand that without a change of ethos—without conversion—there will be no long-term economic recovery.

Banking must turn back to old-fashioned George Bailey-type values before firm footings can be built for the new economy. Greed (desire for excessive rewards) must be replaced by an expectation of a fair return; banking must serve the real economy of goods and services, not lead it, and short-term profitability produced by financial instruments of "brilliant" design must be checked by responsibility for consumers and the public good. Instead, while they continue to receive trillions from the Fed in quiet backdoor relief efforts, banks like JPMorgan Chase, Goldman Sachs and Bank of America want to return their TARP money to be free of government restrictions like limits on executive compensation. Already many large firms are setting aside for bonuses as much or more than they did in 2007. In the meantime, their lobbyists in Congress have defeated legislation that would have allowed judges to provide more favorable bankruptcy provisions for homeowners subject to foreclosure, and they threaten to block modest new limits on interest and fees for credit card usage. It is time to free George Bailey and spread the money around.

Whose Newman?

The Daily Telegraph of London reported last month that the Vatican has accepted the cure of a Massachusetts man who was "bent double," the result of a spinal stenosis, as a miracle attributable to the intercession of Cardinal John Henry Newman (1801-90). Jack Sullivan, a Catholic deacon, later described to The Boston Globe his (literally) overnight cure. Sullivan's healing would fulfill the requirement for Newman's beatification.

Newman would make a fascinating and somewhat controversial saint. On the one hand, he is beloved by traditionalist Catholics for his elegant apologias for Catholicism. He is also admired by progressive Catholics for his ideas on the "development of doctrine" as well as his resistance to the ultramontane tendencies of his time. And, ironically, many Catholics suspicious of clericalism often quote this prince of the church who quipped of the laity, "The church would look foolish without them."

Last year church officials attempted to unearth Newman's remains in order to "translate" them to a place more appropriate for public veneration, but diggers found little left of the cardinal. The exhumation itself was controversial: Newman had explicitly asked to be buried next to his lifelong friend, Ambrose St. John. As a result, he is beloved among some gay Catholics as well, who (rightly or wrongly) claim him as one of their own.

Venerable John Henry Newman: favorite of traditionalists, progressives, anti-clericalists and gays. Perhaps the lack of bodily remains is a reminder that in death, as in life, the saint resists being held or possessed by any one group.

The Uses of Torture

When President Barack Obama made public Justice Department memos developed during the George W. Bush administration that sought to justify the use of harsh methods of interrogation for Al Qaeda suspects, he touched off another round of debate about the usefulness and morality of torture. The president quickly made clear that he had no intention of investigating or prosecuting those responsible for such memos. He did, however, cite Winston Churchill's insistence, at a time of great peril for Britain, that to compromise the nation's moral standards would, in effect, be a form of surrender to the enemy.

Former Vice President Dick Cheney has already made it clear that he will not observe the discreet silence former administration officials have traditionally maintained. He called for an investigation into the efficacy of such interrogation techniques in support of his claim that in the "war on terror" moral scruples can be a dispensable luxury.

Veterans in the intelligence community, however, have challenged the reliability of information obtained from harsh interrogation. The prisoner under such pressure may simply tell questioners what he or she thinks they want to hear. A more skillful questioner will seek to establish a sympathetic bond with the prisoner, experts claim. The question of efficacy aside, however, when the questioner compromises his or her own integrity by resorting to dehumanizing techniques, the enemy has already achieved a different kind of victory.

EDITORIAL

Steering a New Course

President Barack Obama inherited in January a foreign policy almost as universally unpopular as the H1N1 virus. With few notable successes, such as his admirable effort to combat AIDS in Africa, Mr. Bush's bellicose foreign agenda, rooted in the dangerous delusion of American exceptionalism, had alienated most of the world. What the new administration needed to do immediately was change the tone, extend an open hand and proffer some plain old courtesy to a weary world. Mr. Obama has done this and more, adding substance to style with hints at meaningful, constructive changes in U.S. foreign policy.

In his first 100 days, the president aggressively pursued public diplomacy. Almost at once, he reached out to Iran through an unprecedented video message and with subtler, but more important signals, like referring to the country by its proper name, "The Islamic Republic of Iran," thus hinting that the United States may abandon its misguided goal of forced regime change in Tehran. Iran, for good or ill, is a democracy, albeit an unhealthy one. If the United States is to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran from causing a regional cataclysm, it must negotiate as one sovereign state to another.

At the G-20 Summit in London in April, President Obama met with Russia's President Dmitri M. Medvedev and began to mend that tattered relationship as well by indicating the possibility of compromise on such issues as the United States' unpopular (and unnecessary) missile defense system in eastern Europe. Unlike his predecessor, Mr. Obama realizes that the cold war is over and that if hot wars with countries like Iran are to be avoided, the United States will need a multistate diplomatic effort with the help of other leading nations like Russia.

Closer to home, Mr. Obama's trip to the Summit of the Americas signaled to a skeptical Latin America that the United States may finally put its gunboats into drydock. The president announced the repeal of overly punitive regulations regarding travel and remissions to Cuba. His choice to greet Venezuela's Hugo Chávez at the summit with common courtesy was appropriate, though it inevitably drew the fire of the right wing commentariat. Former Vice President Dick Cheney, refusing to fade away gracefully, said that it made the United States look weak. Pat Buchanan charged the president with selling out the interests of the United States. Mr. Obama's reply? "Venezuela is a country whose defense budget is probably 1/600th of the United States.... It's unlikely that as a consequence of me shaking hands or having a polite conversation with Mr. Chávez that we are endangering the strategic interests of the United States."

Mr. Obama's gestures are welcome. The president has introduced a note of civil but meaningful engagement that has been missing from U.S. diplomacy. This is a practical necessity. It is plain that the alternative approach of all stick and no carrot, which has characterized much of American foreign policy in recent years, has yielded little more than a world full of enemies. Yet this style of diplomacy also has a moral dimension. As Pope John XXIII wrote in *Pacem in Terris*: "By establishing contact with one another and by a policy of negotiation, nations will come to a better recognition of the natural ties that bind them together as men. We are hopeful, too, that they will come to a fairer realization of one of the cardinal duties deriving from our common nature: namely, that love, not fear, must dominate the relationships between individuals and between nations."

It is clear, however, that Mr. Obama will need to match his style with greater substance: real, game-changing moves that will assure the world that the United States has settled on a different, more cooperative form of leadership that has a greater chance of effecting a truly peaceful world. We still await meaningful changes, like lifting the Cuban embargo and allowing the free flow of trade and people between the two countries in the hope of opening up Cuba's political system. We also look to the president to begin a credible and vigorous attempt to restore the nuclear nonproliferation regime. And we anxiously await Mr. Obama's responses to a range of pressing and deadly serious challenges abroad, including the collapse of the six-party talks on North Korea, the humanitarian and political crises in Africa and the daily growing mortal threat of all-out war and loose nukes in Pakistan. Mr. Obama's diplomatic mettle will be especially tested in the Middle East. Israel's implicit threat to disarm Iran through bombing and the Israeli government's morally and legally questionable policies toward the Palestinians represent an existential threat to the U.S./Israel relationship and the peace of the region.

For now, however, Mr. Obama is off to a good start, especially for a president who also happens to be dealing with the greatest economic crisis in four generations.

RUSSIA/UNITED STATES

Arms Reduction Offer Draws Wide Support


Russia's President Dmitri Medvedev meets Barack Obama in London in April.

President Barack Obama's recent proposal to open a new round of nuclear arms reduction talks with Russia represents the best opportunity in a quarter-century to make meaningful cuts in the world's nuclear weapons stockpiles, according to disarmament advocates. Speaking in Prague on April 5, the president called for a new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty to replace Start I, which will expire on Dec. 5, 2009.

Mr. Obama said he and Russia's President Dmitri M. Medvedev discussed the subject during the G-20 economic summit in April and that he and Mr. Medvedev agreed to seek a treaty by the end of the year that is "legally binding and sufficiently bold." According to experts, both sides are eyeing steep reductions in their arsenals, from approximately 6,000 warheads each to perhaps as few as 1,000 warheads each. "It means [Obama] is serious about his goal about eliminating nuclear weapons," said Ronald E. Powaski, who has written on arms control topics for three decades. "Start is one of the key pillars of the whole international effort to control, first of all, and then eliminate nuclear weapons."

Longstanding nuclear disarmament proponents, like Pax Christi International and its affiliate, Pax Christi USA, as well as the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, are embracing Mr. Obama's proposal. Bishop Howard J. Hubbard of Albany, N.Y., chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on International Justice and Peace, said the U.S. Catholic bishops welcome Obama's commitment. "The president's initiative announced in Prague is an important first step in his administration and [there is] hope it will move the ball forward. It's not the ultimate goal we would like to see [full nuclear disarmament], but it is a positive step in the right direction."

David Cortright, a research fellow at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame, said momentum for strong arms control agreements has been building for more than two years. He cited two influential opinion pieces by a bipartisan group of former foreign affairs and defense officials, including George P. Schultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn, that appeared in The Wall Street Journal starting in 2007. The former cold warriors called on the United States to seek significant reductions in strategic arms in partnership with Russia. This type of bipartisan agreement, says Cortright, shows that those who oppose significant nuclear disarmament are a shrinking minority. "I think there's a decent chance that there could be sufficient Republican support" for a new Start, said Cortright, who also is co-chairman of Faithful Security, a pro-disarmament group based in Goshen, Ind.

In addition to nuclear weapons reductions, President Obama has called for limits on the production of nuclear weapons-grade chemicals and other materials and for the development of stringent steps to prevent nuclear materials from being traded on the global black market, policies he proposes to implement within four years. To assist emerging countries, Mr. Obama has called for the creation of an international atomic fuel bank that would allow nations to develop nuclear power for civilian uses without increasing the risks of nuclear weapons proliferation.

As the expected negotiations unfold this year, Marie Dennis, co-president of Pax Christi International, said it would be the work of grass-roots organizations to build the political will across the country so that the U.S. Senate will quickly ratify any arms control treaty once it is signed by both nations. In the same vein, Bishop Hubbard expressed his hope that the U.S. bishops will promote programs stressing the church's position on nuclear disarmament. "We're encour-

aging bishops within their dioceses to make known the bishops' teaching on nuclear war and to help people understand the importance of what the president is proposing," he said.

THE ECONOMY

California Coalition Helps Homeowners

Soon after becoming pastor at Mary Immaculate Church in Pacoima, Calif., John Lasseigne, O.M.I., discovered that many of his parishioners were on the verge of losing their homes. The parish in the northeast San Fernando Valley, where home values have dropped by hundreds of thousands of dollars from just a few years ago, is in a working-class, predominantly Latino immigrant area. More than 8,000 homeowners in the region are in default or foreclosure proceedings. "It dawned on all of us that this was going to hit crisis proportions, and fast. We had to act quickly," said Father Lasseigne.

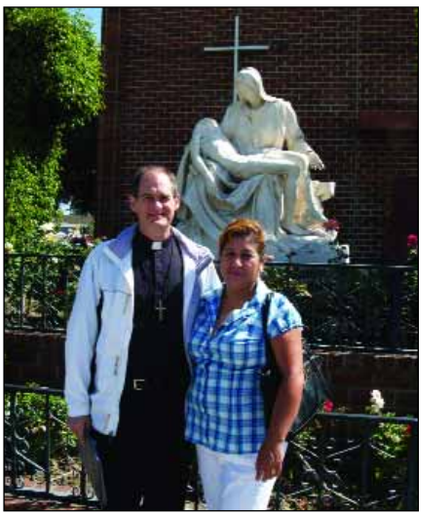
Contrary to those who argue that those facing foreclosure deserve their fate because they took out risky loans or knowingly bought houses they could not afford, Father Lasseigne says the majority of distressed homeowners he has met these past few months are "very humble, hard-working, honest residents, many of them citizens…."

"Something we discovered early on, which we've tried to convey in every meeting we've had with banks and elected officials, is that these mostly Latino homeowners in the San Fernando Valley were targeted by the banking industry," said Father Lasseigne, who added that many of the borrowers did not understand the risks involved in the subprime loans pushed by aggressive lenders.

In response to the crisis, Father Lasseigne helped form a unique partnership between area parishes and the community-organizing group One-LA, which set out to organize families in default into groups that would negotiate with the banks. Homeowners attended training sessions where they were educated about the basics of mortgages and foreclosures and were put in touch with housing counselors. Approximately 105 homeowners met with banking representatives, including officials from Bank of America, Chase Bank and Wells Fargo. "The banks paid more attention [to homeowners] when we pulled them together," said Father Lasseigne, but he added that the banks were still offering only "very tiny adjustments" to the mortgages that would provide only short-term help.

California homeowners carrying loans worth more than the current value of their homes, said One-LA housing lawyers, would likely default again when loan modifications, such as temporary principal deferment, ended and interest rates started climbing again. So the coalition presented a plan with a three-pronged approach: get banks to lower the principal on mortgages to reflect the current market value of homes; fix interest rates close to the current market rate; and provide homeowners with small government loans to lower the principal, which would not have to be paid back until the home is sold or the mortgage paid in full. In February the Los Angeles City Council unanimously agreed to provide $1.5 million to fund government loans to 30 homeowners whose lender banks will agree to lower their mortgage loan principal and fix interest rates.

"What we want that pilot project to show is that this plan of reducing principal and fixing interest rates actually produces greater stability in the hous-



John Lasseigne, O.M.I., stands with Juana Rodriguez, whose home was saved from foreclosure.

ing market [resulting in] lower rates of re-default," said Father Lasseigne. "It's really [about] showing people that this works. If every party gets involved, it can be done."

Causes of Nigerian Violence Debated


John Onaiyekan

Even though the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom named Nigeria a "country of particular concern" on May 1, Catholic Archbishop John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan of Abuja, has said that the so-called religious violence between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria is not, in fact, about religion—a view that has been endorsed by the Sultan of Sokoto, one of Nigeria's leading Muslims. These "are matters between groups with special interests," the archbishop said during a meeting with members of the commission. Archbishop Onaiyekan attributed the conflicts to the corruption of politicians. Nigeria is an example of how opinions about religious freedom in a country can differ widely between international activists and a country's native clergy. According to the commission, a country is designated as a country of concern when its government has "engaged in or tolerated systematic and egregious violations of the universal right to freedom of religion or belief."

Pew: Half of Americans Changed Religions

According to a new report released in April by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, half of Americans have changed religions at some point in their lives. This figure was arrived at by adding the number of people who currently practice a different faith than they did in their childhoods to the number of people who have moved around among religions or denominations but currently practice the same faith as they did in their childhood.

Among people who have changed religions, the study concluded, those who left the Catholic Church were more likely than those who left Protestant denominations to have done so because they no longer believed in the teachings of the church. The study also showed that those who were actively involved in their churches as children and teens were more likely to stick with their churches as adults. Also, across the board, the vast majority of people who changed churches, who stopped being affiliated with any faith or who transitioned from being "unaffiliated" with a religion to belonging to a church, did so before the age of 24.

NEWS BRIEFS

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended on May 1 that President Obama consider **Venezuela and Cuba** among the countries that should be monitored closely for violations of religious freedom. ✦ Preparing to **visit the Holy Land**, Pope Benedict XVI on May 3 asked for prayers for his trip, for peace in the region and for the suffering Palestinian people. ✦ The University of Notre Dame announced on April 30 that it will not award the **Laetare Medal** during its May 17 commencement ceremony. Mary Ann Glendon, former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, was to receive the medal but declined the honor in the wake of controversy over the university's decision to grant an honorary degree to President Barack Obama. The 1984 recipient of the medal, Judge John T. Noonan Jr., will speak at the commencement. ✦ President Barack Obama said on April 29 that the **Freedom of Choice Act** is not an important legislative priority and that he is instead focusing on reducing unwanted pregnancies.

Further Delays for Chinese Bishops

Catholic bishops elected by several mainland Chinese dioceses will have to be subjected to further scrutiny before they are consecrated, said a leader of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. Anthony Liu Bainian, vice chairman of the government-sanctioned association, has said that five dioceses over the last year or more have reported the results of their elections to the Bishops' Conference of the Catholic Church in China for its approval. While one of the dioceses has two retired bishops, both approved by the Vatican, the other four dioceses are without bishops. Liu said it would be difficult to say if the candidates would be approved and installed this year. "There is no need to ordain a bishop right after his election [according to government-approved regulations]," he added.

From CNS and other sources.

MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE

Religious Right

One of my greatest privileges is praying with my children. Each has his or her own spiritual style. Our 9-month-old baby girl takes the "make a joyful noise" approach, enthusiastically clapping, cooing and screeching in her attempts to sing along with the hymns at church and at home, with a zeal that is not always appreciated by other congregants or family members.

Our 2-year-old is also a fervent cantor (with more accurate pitch), but he also prefers kinetic prayer. No matter how distant or awkward the angle from his high chair to the next person at the table, he is intent on holding hands and making (sometimes confused) signs of the cross at meal times.

And our five-year-old is a dedicated practitioner of petitionary and thanksgiving prayer. Her lists of thanks (including each teacher and student in her preschool) and petitions are legendary and have been known to cool many a meal and delay many a bedtime. I learn much from my children as I observe their varied spiritual selves. And I am humbled in my attempts to explain what is inexplicable to them: how governments and rebels can block worship and prayer.

Our five-year-old saw newspaper pictures of the recent spate of mosque bombings in Iraq, and the questions began. Why is that woman crying? Why would anyone hurt a church? Where in the world are people not allowed to pray? I attempted a few brief, age-appropriate explanations, to which she responded, "This is unacceptable. People don't get it. No one can stop people from talking to God."

This year the State Department will issue its 10th annual report on international religious freedom, detailing restrictions on religious liberty from China, Burma and Sudan to Iraq and Afghanistan. Critics of this yearly ritual argue the report is toothless. The Chinese government, for example, has been listed as one of the worst offenders, a "country of particular concern" in every report, yet this does not stop the United States from engaging in extensive trade and financial relations with China. The May 1 report of the independent U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom cites countries of concern that the State Department omits for political reasons, such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iraq.

> In some ways the United States still doesn't get religion.

Defenders note that religious freedom benefits from transparency and attention to abuses, both of which the report offers. It is one tool among others to help advance the principles that religious liberty is "a foundational human right, that restrictions on faith and practice are an affront to human dignity."

While the United States leads in promoting international religious liberty abroad, in some ways we still "don't get it." U.S. officials in diplomacy, development and defense are not trained in the religious dimensions of international affairs; academic international relations programs marginalize the study of religion, and U.S. government recruitment efforts do not reach out to religious studies programs. The Center for Strategic and International Studies report *Mixed Blessings* describes in detail the many ways in which the U.S. government does not engage or understand religious actors and dynamics. The Obama administration, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Defense Secretary Robert Gates have vowed to hire more and better trained civilians to deploy into hotspots around the world, like Afghanistan and Iraq. But without a nuanced understanding of religious actors and dynamics, U.S. policies in those countries and elsewhere will be ineffective and self-defeating. Obama has yet to appoint an ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom.

The Immigration and Customs Enforcement bureau "doesn't get it," as it has failed to provide access to religious services and professional chaplains for refugees in U.S. detention, particularly at local, state and contractor facilities. Refugees held in U.S. detention centers have less access to religious services than jailed U.S. prisoners. Few Iraqi refugees are allowed into the United States, even though half of the Iraqi Christian population has been either killed or forced to flee, according to the U.S.C.I.R.F. report.

Congress must protect refugees' religious freedom and practices, because the I.C.E. has been unresponsive to these concerns.

When our family goes to church, we fear that our three young children may disrupt the Mass. We do not fear we will be prevented from worshipping, nor do we fear for our lives. As Congress and the administration change U.S. foreign policy and institutions, "getting religion" would be a good place to start.

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

PHOTO: CNS PHOTO/GREGORY A. SHEMITZ, LONG ISLAND CATHOLIC

CATHOLICS AND THE RISE OF BARACK OBAMA

Why Race Still Matters

BY GERALD J. BEYER

The election of the first African-American president undoubtedly represents a milestone along the road to Martin Luther King Jr.'s "beloved community." Yet we must not be tempted to think that racism and discrimination no longer preclude many people from full participation in American society.

Some pundits are hastily proclaiming that President Barack Obama's victory proves that we are a "post-racial" nation, one in which race no longer matters. The election results are encouraging. More whites, including more young white voters and more poor white voters, voted for Barack Obama in 2008 than voted for John Kerry in 2004. But John McCain, the G.O.P. nominee, garnered 55 percent of the vote among all whites, and some whites openly declared they would not vote for a black candidate. The election of the first black president, although a cause for joy, did not dismantle racism in one fell swoop. Even if the scope of the problem has diminished, no one should deny that our nation has yet to confront fully its legacy of racism.

The Catholic Response

Catholics are not immune from the need to address racism in the United States. Barack Obama's thoughtful, carefully nuanced speech delivered in Philadelphia on March 18, 2008, should have sparked long-overdue discussions on race in Roman Catholic parishes, schools, institutions and families across America. Yet this did not happen widely, and most parishes still do not recognize racism for the threat that it is to the unity of the people of God. Instead of a meaningful conversation about race among Catholics in the final months of the campaign, disheartening reports

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were published in the media about Catholics who would not vote for any black presidential candidate. To be clear, Catholics of good conscience could certainly find legitimate reasons not to vote for Obama. As Bishop Blase Cupich prophetically declared in these pages, however, "to allow racism to reign in our hearts and to determine our choice in this solemn moment for our nation is to cooperate with one of the great evils that has afflicted our society" (**Am.**, 10/27/08).

In recent decades the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, organizations like Catholic Charities USA and contemporary Roman Catholic theologians have produced important works on racism. Barack Obama's assessment of race and American life and his proposals to remedy its problems strikingly resemble those of the bishops and other Catholic thinkers. Given this convergence, Catholics should heed President Obama's call to overcome our nation's painful past and its persistent racism and discrimination.

Most parishes still do not recognize racism for the threat that it is to the unity of the people of God.

The Evil of Racism: The Status Quo

Barack Obama's description of the state of affairs in the United States echoes what the U.S. bishops stated in their pastoral letter *Brothers and Sisters to Us* (1979) and reiterated in a research report on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of that letter. President Obama recognizes that much progress has been made over the last several decades. He believes that the uniqueness and greatness of the United States has allowed Americans of African descent like himself to succeed. Yet he maintains that injustices against African-Americans and other minorities perdure and that much work remains to be done to make the American dream possible for all Americans. In Obama's view, the educational achievement gap between black and white students stems from the inferior schools that many African-Americans were and still are forced to attend. The wealth and income gap between blacks and whites can be attributed to the numerous forms of discrimination that blacks historically experienced, like lack of access to loans and mortgages for African-American business owners and families and systemic exclusion from employment and unions.

Today, many African-Americans lack economic opportunities, which places a strain on their families and communities. Many black communities are without basic services and amenities like parks and police protection that most middle-class Americans take for granted. Obama also contends that the racially charged events in Jena, La., in 2008 revealed "glaring inequalities in our justice system," including unfairly harsh penalties for first-time nonviolent offenders. Obama implied in a speech at Howard University in 2007 that these unjust sentences are disproportionately meted out to minorities. He also decried racial profiling and the attempt by the Justice Department under George W. Bush to eliminate affirmative action programs at American institutions of higher learning. Mr. Obama concluded that "profound institutional barriers" preclude many Americans from among all races from having equal access to good schools, productive jobs and health care.

The U.S. Catholic bishops' assessment is similar. In 1979 the bishops wrote that racism is an evil that "endures in our society and in our church." They called for a number of measures to be taken within the church and more broadly in American society to combat racism. They urged all Catholics, for example, to reflect on their personal racial biases and to do everything in their power to eliminate this "radical evil" that generates unjust and oppressive social structures.

Unfortunately, the bishops' own update and report in 2004 revealed that racism is still not being discussed in the church. Only 36 percent of Roman Catholics in the United States reported that they had heard a homily that addressed racism, and only 18 percent of bishops have issued statements in their dioceses concerning racism. The report also found white Catholics more opposed to public policies designed to attenuate racial inequality than they were in the past. The report expressed concern that while blacks were increasingly represented in leadership positions within the church, more effort had to be made to boost minority representation among staff at all levels of church ministries. This remains a particularly urgent task, given that many of the church's social ministries serve groups made up predominantly of minorities.

In pastoral letters and statements, some individual bishops have unequivocally condemned the sin of racism. In 1998, for example, Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua of Philadelphia published a pastoral letter, *Healing Racism through Faith and Truth*, in which he referred to racism as an "intrinsic evil" that impedes one's ability to love God, since one cannot love God if one does not love all of God's children. The cardinal leveled a stinging critique: "Our American history from its inception, tragically, has been influenced by the historical circumstance that an exception was made. The flawed concept that 'all men except' was

adopted in practice. Some among us were not to be considered equal. A distinction based on race was set in motion in American life. This distinction in many and varied guises has remained a sin deeply rooted in American life."

Cardinal Francis George of Chicago has described the entrenched forms of racism that characterize contemporary American life. In his 2001 pastoral letter *Dwell in My Love*, he addresses primarily four types. *Spatial racism* is the creation of "patterns of metropolitan development" by whites through which they cordon themselves off in affluent suburbs or gentrified urban areas far removed from blighted neighborhoods where mostly poor African-Americans and other minorities reside. *Institutional racism* manifests itself in institutions created by whites; it privileges a white Anglo-American cultural and racial perspective and "ignores the contributions of other peoples and cultures." Like Barack Obama, Cardinal George and his brother bishops are concerned that minorities "are often treated more harshly than other citizens in their encounters with the criminal justice system." The dearth of minority leaders and the devaluation of their cultures in American institutions often give rise to the third type of contemporary racism, according to George: *internalized racism*. This occurs when members of minority groups adopt the negative stereotypes about themselves that have been perpetuated by the majority. Finally, *individual racism* is a conscious, personal bias that infects the hearts of people who perpetuate racist attitudes through racial slurs, hate crimes and other more subtle means.

Barack Obama's words and the bishops' teaching on the persistence of racism in the United States largely mirror one another, and their analyses are confirmed by statistics. Catholic Charities USA recently released a study titled *Poverty and Racism: Overlapping Threats to the Common Good*, which contends that Hurricane Katrina unveiled the too-frequently disguised poor in the United States, who remain largely unnoticed as a result of racism. The catastrophe also spotlighted the historic injustices that "advance the welfare of white Americans and impede the opportunities of persons of color," including institutionalized slavery, the "separate but equal doctrine," which created inferior educational institutions, the legal exclusion of African-Americans from unions and "redlining." Redlining, in which the Federal Housing Administration engaged during the 1940s and 1950s, granted 98 percent of mortgage loans to whites, denying blacks one of the primary means of generating wealth in this country.

These and other racial injustices led to the "state-sanctioned unjust impoverishment" of blacks and other minorities, which continues. Today 33 percent of African-American children live in poverty, 28 percent of Latino children and 27 percent of Native American children; by contrast, 10 percent of white children live in poverty. The most

extreme poverty afflicts geographic areas populated mainly by minorities. White families possess on average 10 times more wealth than do families of color. This "wealth gap" has grown since 1998, with white families enjoying a 20 percent boost in their net worth, while African-American families have seen their wealth decrease. This stems in part from inequalities in the workplace, where white males occupy more than 90 percent of executive corporate positions. As the Catholic ethicist Barbara Hilkert Andolsen has noted, unemployment rates rose among blacks during the economic recovery from 2001 to 2005—some of the rise attributable to overt racism. Studies show that job candidates with "names that sounded black, such as Lakisha Washington or Jamal Jones" are 50 percent less likely to be given a job interview than are white candidates with similar credentials.

ON THE WEB
From 1940, John LaFarge, S.J., on Catholics and racial justice.
americamagazine.org/pages

Dismantling Racism, Building the Kingdom

Although President Obama has lamented the failure of Americans to eradicate many of the injustices African-Americans still face in the United States, he distanced himself from his pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, with what is called in Christian theology a "strong" doctrine of grace. In his speech in Philadelphia, Obama maintained that Rev. Wright had erred in claiming that racism is endemic to the United States in the sense that the incorrigibility of white oppressors will continue to breed racial oppression because they and the system they dominate cannot change. In theological terms, this is tantamount to stating that God's grace cannot overcome the propensity of white oppressors to keep their black brothers and sisters down.

In Obama's view, however, some of the shackles of prejudice have already been broken. Theologically, he appears to see God's grace already at work in the conversion of many whites and in the gradual improvement of society. Obama maintains the hope that racism will eventually be purged from America. Anyone who reads his speeches or books, however, understands that Obama knows this will be an arduous task. The president has proposed measures to move us toward this goal. Among them are more vigorous enforcement of civil rights by the Department of Justice, rectifying inequities caused by pay discrimination, ensuring that children of minorities and the poor have good educational opportunities, the elimination of racial disparities in the judicial system and fair access to credit for minorities.

Obama's hopeful stance on racism resembles the best thinking in Catholic theology on the powerful presence of sin in the world and the ability of God's grace to overcome it through the action of the Holy Spirit, working in and through God's children. This teaching is beautifully expressed in the "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et Spes*). Here the bishops of the Second Vatican Council describe human activity infected by sin but "purified and perfected by the power of Christ's Cross and Resurrection." They contend that creating a more just and peaceful society contributes to the building of the kingdom of God. In other words, with the aid of God's grace, "we shall overcome."

The U.S. bishops also translate this Catholic optimism into specific policies, resembling those of Obama. Cardinal George, for example, urged fair access to decent housing and credit for minorities, good schools, "equal pay and employment for women and minorities," an equitable justice system and "voting for public officials committed to racial and systemic justice." And Archbishop Harry Flynn of St. Paul and Minneapolis argued in 2003 that we can and must address the many "root causes" of racism and promote the economic and social rights of the poor, thereby enabling minorities to participate fully in society. Succinctly stated, both Obama and the bishops believe in the power of humans to be instruments of change, aided by God's grace. Would that all Americans recognize the work that still needs to be done and affirm our ability to do it. A

Our Mother, Our Advocate

The many journeys of Mary of Nazareth

BY DEIRDRE CORNELL

During the three years my husband and I worked in Oaxaca, Mexico, our children, who proved more adaptable than we in our new setting, introduced us to many cross-cultural insights. Our son's best friend (a bright and personable little girl) mentioned early in their friendship that her older brother had died in New York. Her mother explained that the young man died, at age 21, in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center.

A high school graduate who wanted to make something of his life, Fernando Jiménez Molinar had hoped to earn money in order to start his own business. He crossed the border and headed north, becoming an undocumented worker in Manhattan. Within two years, he had paid off his passage and had begun to accumulate savings, while maintaining contact with his family by telephone. When on the night of Sept. 11, 2001, Fernando did not come home to the apartment he shared with other migrants, his mother suspected the worst. She learned that he had set out that morning to make a delivery—and never returned.

This brave mother managed to travel to New York, where she retraced the last days of Fernando. The owner of the deli that employed her son told her Fernando had been a good worker, and then he turned away to hide his tears. With no corpse to identify and no legal witnesses, the whole incident seemed unreal and unnatural. His co-workers promised to testify in court, but when the deli owner refused to do so because he was afraid of being penalized for hiring undocumented immigrants, Fernando's co-workers also declined.

Fernando's mother camped out in an acquaintance's living room, spending sleepless nights and frustrating days attempting to unravel the dilemma in which she and other families found themselves entangled. A new burden was added to her grief: the duty of not allowing her son's memory to be erased. Although his death entitled her to a generous monetary compensation, Fernando's mother looked for something with more meaning. What haunted her, she confided, was that there had been no death certificate, no civil record, no formal recognition of his passing. It was as if Fernando had never existed; not only was there no record of his passing, there was no sign that he had ever lived.

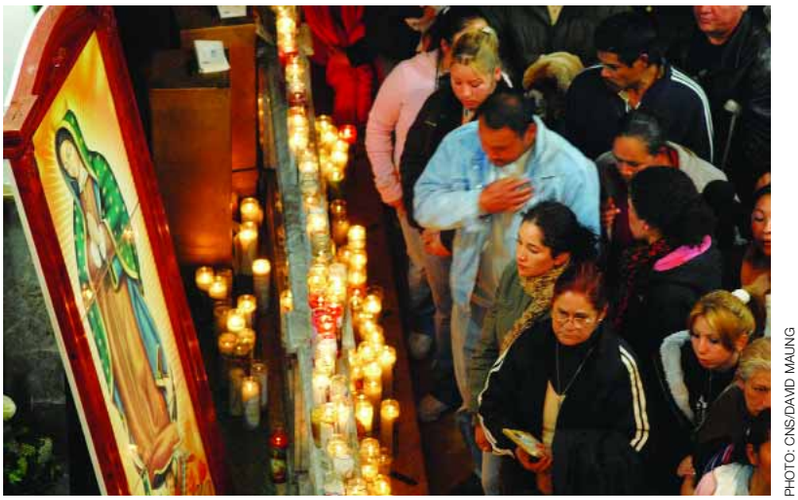

PHOTO: CNS/DAVID MAUNG

It might seem obvious that a young man's mother would be intent on preserving the memory of her son's life; cultural anthropologists, however, have long demonstrated that while birth is a physical event, parenthood is a socially constructed phenomenon. The image of a mother waiting up at home for her children, praying for their well-being, comes readily to mind; but the image of a mother seeking a lost child in public records breaks sentimental stereotypes.

Especially in May, a month during which Catholics honor Mary (and during which many countries celebrate Mother's Day), I marvel at the maternity of the Mother of God.

Images of Mary

In the Gospels, the Virgin Mary's motherhood is portrayed as anything but conventional. Matthew's Gospel opens with a recounting of Jesus' genealogy that places Mary in the

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dubious company of women who were faithful to the covenant in unexpected ways. Luke's Gospel has Mary break the conventions of the annunciation genre by daring to voice her assent. In biblical texts, Mary questions; she pursues her son; she goes to parties; she gives orders; and—my favorite—she travels. A lot. In fact, Scriptural references about Mary are framed by journeys. From that first journey, when she "set out and went with haste" to visit Elizabeth, to the definitive pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the final mention of her in the Acts of the Apostles, Mary's story is characterized by movement, by passages from one moment of meaning to another. At Pentecost, her motherhood comes full circle, as she receives once again the Spirit that breathes life into the believing community and sends them forth on mission.

Two Mexican images of the Virgin Mary reveal her continuing maternity.

Many popular traditions about the Virgin Mary are characterized by this same sense of vigor and resilience. Unlike the usual cult of martyrs or local saints, veneration of the Virgin Mary in the early church was not limited to specific geographical locations. The Assumption, which inspired the Christian imagination as early as the second century, also meant that honor given to the Mother of God could be attached to a particular place but not monopolized, not exhausted by a single commemoration site. By crossing that ultimate border in body and soul, she became, paradoxically, free to enter deeply into Christianity's myriad cultures, attending to the generations of believers who were committed to her care, according to John's Gospel, at the foot of the cross.

Two Mexican images of the Virgin Mary, one quite well known, the other little-studied, reveal the Mother of God's continuing maternity. As Mary once collaborated in humanity's salvation, she now extends her protection and patronage in a special way to its most vulnerable members.

Juquila and Guadalupe

In Oaxaca, the diminutive Virgin of Juquila (a tiny image representing Mary's Immaculate Conception) attracts some two million devotees each year. Travelers from all over the Mexican republic, as well as migrants returning from the North, gather in the sanctuary of a small rural town after bicycling, walking or driving dangerous roads through the mountains for hours, days or even weeks. This figure of the Virgin became beloved during the conquest of Mexico for her solicitous care of the native people, whom she visited in the form of a foot-high statue carried from place to place by a Dominican missionary. Once the statue was settled in the village of Amialtepec, indigenous converts flocked to her thatched hut. Saved miraculously from a fire that razed the village, the statue's hair was singed, its face and hands darkened by smoke: now the Virgin Mary truly looked like the people who loved her.

Toward the end of the 17th century, her growing popularity, as well as competition for clerical control, led to the moving of the statue to the parish seat at Juquila (hence the name by which the image is now known.) For an extended period of time, however, in popular devotion, the Virgin kept "returning" to the humble straw hut. Even today, the Virgin of Juquila is said to wander the mountains of Oaxaca.

This itinerant pattern confirms the image of the Virgin as the unofficial patroness of the emigrants from Mexico's southern states. Pilgrims make the grueling trip to her sanctuary in order to pass underneath a dusty lace mantle stretching from her tiny shoulders—an act that symbolizes her intercession during the trials they face in their journeys.

The second representation, Our Lady of Guadalupe, is remarkable for the way her trademark iconography crosses borders. Beginning with the export of copies of the image from colonial Mexico to the Philippines, Puerto Rico, other parts of New Spain and to Italy, this Mexican version of the Mother of God (which shares a name with the Virgin of Guadalupe in the Spanish region of Extremadura) shows an amazing propensity for mobility. More recently, the devotion has grown at an extraordinary rate in the United States with the influx of *guadalupanos*, Guadalupan devotees, to areas previously unacquainted with this image.

The Virgin of Guadalupe commands the devout loyalty of her constituents; in popular devotion, however, she functions not so much as an empress of the Americas and the Philippines, but as their mother. Her image has traveled thousands of miles, to the farms of upstate New York, the orchards of rural Georgia and the meat-packing plants of Minnesota, carried by migrants and immigrants who find in her figure an intimate witness to their daily struggles: a fitting repository for personal and collective memory.

The earliest foundation of the Guadalupan story was preserved in oral tradition by indigenous Christians around Tepeyac; the narrative finds its most detailed retelling in the *Nican Mopohua* (ca. 1556), an account of the Virgin's original appearances. It places at its center the recently arrived Virgin Mary, in dialogue with a native evangelizer, St. Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin. Intercepting his steps as he walks, the Virgin Mary speaks to him in Nahuatl and entrusts him with her message: that she ardently desires a hermitage, a chapel, a church (three different words are used in progressive order) to be built on the site she has chosen. There she promises to bestow her love, protection, comfort and healing as the mother "of all who live in this land" and "all who love [her], as well."

That Tepeyac was recorded by the 16th-century ethnographer Fray Bernardino de Sahagún as a pilgrimage site in pre-Hispanic religiosity is not surprising, since much of evangelization in the Americas took place through building churches over the ruins of native temples; more important is the fact that indigenous converts to Christianity called this representation of Mary "Tonantzin," "Our dear Mother."

It is remarkable that while the image has specific meaning, it escapes the strictures of history. The *tilma*, a cloak on which the image appears, has remained intact for over four centuries, but scientists and historians alike have not yet identified its mysterious origin. What has become clear through contemporary renewed interest in the *tilma* is that this figure of the Virgin Mary (with its mixture of Spanish and native motifs) holds rich symbolism for adherents to the Guadalupan devotion. Through the narrative and the image, the Virgin of Guadalupe represents a Mary who *seeks her children*—much as Fernando's mother retraced his last footsteps in New York.

Mothers hold an unparalleled position of privilege when it comes to memory; indeed, one of the many unacknowledged maternal roles is precisely that of witness to their children's and grandchildren's individual histories. The elders of both genders pass along the knowledge of previous generations, inducting the young into a collective identity; but mothers, particularly, preserve their children's stories. In families where a child is lost to tragedy or sickness, mothers attend to the loss so that it will not be forgotten by the family or community.

Christians remember Mary because she remembers us. When we forget that we are sons and daughters of God, Mary reminds us of our true identity: we are children of God's own mother.

The Virgin Mary still extends her famous mantle over believers. The remembrance of Mary, a rural woman who traveled beyond village boundaries to give birth to God-among-us and to serve as witness to his salvific death, is rich with imagery that she longs to share with us as inspiration for our own journeys. In ceaseless prayer on the other side of that final border, Mary is our advocate in a maternity that both embodies our particular cultures and transcends our limits of time and geography. She gives us her blessing, to carry us safely over the thresholds of our lives.

As undocumented workers and their families of diverse faith backgrounds wait for a breakthrough in immigration policies under a new administration, these Mexican images of the Mother of God, with their roots in past centuries, are resonant today with passionate intensity in the devotional lives of "all who love her." A

ON THE WEB

From the archives, Elizabeth A. Johnson, C.S.J., on Mary of Nazareth.
americamagazine.org/pages

A Death in the Family

A Catholic community mourns a fallen soldier.

BY DAVID O'BRIEN

Jonathan Roberge, age 22, died in Mosul, Iraq, on Feb. 9. Along with three other soldiers and their Iraqi interpreter, he died when an explosive device blew up the truck he was driving. Roberge had been in Iraq less than two months and in the Army a little over a year. In that year, his family reported, he learned Army skills, toughened up his body, rejoiced in the comradeship of his unit and took pride in serving his country. He is remembered as a funny young person with a huge smile, who loved his family and friends and wanted in some way to serve people. He had thought about becoming a policeman. To everyone's surprise, he decided instead to join the Army, and there he found his place.

The Army provided the dominant theme as Roberge's family and community mourned his loss. He loved the Army, his dad told me, and he died doing what he most loved. And as far as his family and friends are concerned, the Army loved Jonathan Roberge. Not for one minute after his death was he alone: military personnel were with his body always, from Iraq to Leominster, Mass. There were so many bidding for a place in the honor guard, we were told, that shifts were down to 15 minutes. For three days in Leominster veterans and active-duty soldiers stood by in silent witness. Everyone who cared, and that meant everybody who heard about his death, took comfort in knowing that this soldier loved the Army and the Army loved him back.

A Known Ritual

Americans know something about ritual. The people of Leominster gathered for a candlelight vigil one night; the next day the Roberge family joined military leaders on the tarmac of a nearby airbase. Residents gathered in silence on city streets as his body came home. The next day lines stretched for hours around city blocks as people waited patiently in a snowfall to pass by the coffin and greet the family. For hour after hour, Roberge's parents embraced friends and strangers, reassuring them, even as everyone held back tears, imagining the pain of their loss. Our own wonderful daughter-in-law is Jonathan Roberge's cousin; her grief-stricken family warmly greeted us in our awkward effort to express sympathy. The room in the old city hall where he lay was filled with (can we say it?) love. It seemed like church.

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Religion, a friend once said, is about "what matters." The next morning the community gathered for another remarkable ritual, a very American Catholic funeral. St. Cecilia's tower defines Leominster. You can see it for miles before you enter the old mill town. Empty mills, abandoned storefronts, a closed Catholic school and a convent that houses offices for Catholic Charities also define the town. On this day the church was full, the sun streaming through two tiers of stained glass windows, the bottom tier with scenes from the life of Christ, the larger upper tier with saints from Leo the Great and Joan of Arc to Elizabeth Seton. Over 1,000 people knelt quietly inside. Others stood outside, flags everywhere: veterans and Gold Star moms, uniformed military people with buzz cuts and berets and that unique blend of defiant pride and profound sorrow that marks military funerals.

A Catholic funeral for this Catholic, mostly French Canadian community followed. Everyone could take heart from the comforting realization that Jonathan Roberge's baptism in that church promised mercy, forgiveness and eternal life. Those who loved him would see him again, because his love for life and for each of them marked the way to salvation. The excellent homilist, Msgr. James Moroney, was personal and pastoral; his words fit the place and moment like a glove. He spoke of services across America and in Iraq for Roberge's fallen comrades, who had joined with him in protecting us from the "bad guys" and now joined him in the ultimate sacrifice. The funeral was an American moment to the full but here, in this place, also a Catholic moment, carefully noted as such. As Bishop Robert McManus said at the end of the service, Catholic Christians have that special gift of faith that eases our pain and secures our hope even now, awaiting a day when all will be reunited with one another and with our loving God. As the Mass drew to a close, military officers came forward to make presentations to the parents with a mournful singing of the national anthem. Then an honor guard of pallbearers carried the casket to a caisson for a slow procession to the cemetery.

What personal and community reflections do we carry away from such powerful experiences of what we too easily call "faithful citizenship"? One is surely solidarity. In our encounter with Jonathan Roberge and his family, we in central Massachusetts are reminded that we are one people and that the bonds of family and community and nation are real

sacramental experiences of a unity God intends for all people everywhere. They are sacramental because they bring forth for a moment a "real presence" of that unity, taught to Christians in doctrines of common creation, redemption and destiny, taught to Americans as *e pluribus unum*, one nation under God. If a few words in moments of prayer and in the homily reassured Catholics that eternity awaited them, any hint of denominational exclusiveness was swallowed up in the congregation's experience of being at one with each other, with this young man and with all those he loved.

Pauline and John Roberge at a vigil for their son in Leominster, Mass.

A more political reflection is that when men and women like him come forward to serve in the military, to follow the "warrior" creed posted at one of the shrines at city hall, they do so on our behalf. They risk death and they learn to kill, not for President Bush or President Obama but for you and me. Iraq was never "Bush's war" but our war, and with the war in Afghanistan it remains our shared responsibility. We debate about these wars, but we decide together to make war; unless we refuse to serve or pay, we remain responsible as our sons and daughters fight for us. In that same Army creed our soldiers pledge to pursue their mission in all circumstances, so we had best be sure that their mission is reasonable. This is an altogether religious responsibility, because, as we learn while standing in silence before such sacrifice, America really matters.

A Defeat for Humanity

A third message is harder, best stated by Pope John Paul II: "War is always a defeat for humanity." We Americans are prepared when necessary to use force, and we Christians are obliged in some circumstances to share responsibility for war. But from the unending slaughter in the trenches of World War I and the saturation bombing of World War II to the unending cycles of violence in the Middle East and much of Africa and Asia, to a roadside explosive device or a suicide bomber on a narrow road in Mosul where Jonathan died, war is a contradiction of the truth of solidarity. We are one people and one earth, and our bitter, often blood-drenched divisions are sins against our common humanity.

Even when we are in the right, Monsignor Moroney said in his homily, we must ask why. Did we do enough to find alternatives to war? Did we provide our troops with the leadership and resources they deserve? Do we ask questions about what we expect to achieve and whether war is the best way to achieve those objectives? Do we wonder about the "bad guys" and seek partners in the common work of building security? In our churches, our powerful symbols of faith lend legitimacy to just wars. But do we allow them to push us to translate those powerful Gospel commands about peacemaking and our own promise, "peace be with you," into personal and political practice?

Jonathan Roberge and his fallen comrades, 4,225 in Iraq and another 840 in Afghanistan at the end of January, gave their lives so we could live in a secure peace. We would do well to honor their sacrifice by getting smarter and tougher about what security and peace require. This is a matter of religion because America matters, and so do we. As John F. Kennedy told us years ago, "high standards of strength and sacrifice" are expected of all "citizens of America" and "citizens of the world." Jonathan Roberge met those standards. And while we pray that his sacrifice will serve the cause of a just peace, we must know with J.F.K. that "here on earth God's work must truly be our own." A

PHOTO: WORCESTER TELEGRAM AND GAZETTE

IDEAS | ROBERT E. LAUDER

SANCTITY AND THE SECULAR

Have contemporary artists lost the idea of holiness?

When a revival of Robert Bolt's marvelous play "A Man for All Seasons" opened on Broadway last October, the New York Times critic Ben Brantley, usually reliable for intelligent insights into theater and serious reflection on dramatic themes, wrote a strange review. Brantley seemed uncomfortable with the saintliness of the main character, Thomas More—namely a singlemindedness that involved a heroic commitment to Christ and led to a martyr's death. What I can only describe as the critic's uncustomary myopia set me thinking about a number of plays, films and novels that since the "secular 60s" either successfully or unsuccessfully have attempted to depict holiness. Those that failed have lacked an essential component: a character whose life is centered on God.

Some artistic creations have confused sanctity with a loss of sanity. The classic example is Peter Shaffer's play, "Equus," which enjoyed a revival at the same time as Bolt's play. In "Equus" a psychiatrist (a contemporary secular man no longer showing any passion for his profession or indeed for anything) envies the passion and excitement of an extremely neurotic, perhaps psychotic, young man who has gouged out the eyes of several horses, confusedly identifying them with a "divine stare" that viewed his sin of fornication in the stables. The horses' gaze is like a Sartrian stare that provokes guilt without absolution.

The psychiatrist is emotionally and spiritually dead. He has no purpose or cause to give his life significance. One of T. S. Eliot's "hollow men," he lacks enthusiasm for his vocation, not believing that he has been called by an Other.

Daniel Radcliffe in "Equus."

PHOTO: CNS/CAROL ROSEGG, COURTESY OF BROADHURST THEATRE

Jealous of the young man's passion, which will disappear once he cures him, the psychiatrist in a closing soliloquy says: "In an ultimate sense I cannot know what I do in this place—yet I do ultimate things. Essentially I cannot know what I do—yet I do essential things. Irreversible, terminal things. I stand with a pick in my hand, striking at heads…. I need—more desperately than my children need me—a way of seeing in the dark. What way is this?... What dark is this?... I cannot call it ordained of God; I can't get that far."

That contemporary artists have difficulty depicting sanctity should not be surprising. There is much testimony, both scholarly and anecdotal, that we live in a thoroughly secular time. Charles Taylor's weighty tome, *A Secular Age*, is one of the more recent studies tracing the loss of a sense of the divine. Years ago in his study of existentialism, *Irrational Man*, William Barrett noted that even if there were a genius in the contemporary world the equal of Dante, he or she could not write *The Divine Comedy*, because the intellectual atmosphere in which the world is looked on as sacramental no longer exists to nurture such a creation.

A few years ago I attended a memorial for a well-known Broadway director. Producers, writers and actors extolled the extraordinary talents of the deceased. What came across to me was the director's sense of mystery, his almost mystical relationship with the theater. Yet in all the talks at the memorial, the word "God" was never spoken, nor did anyone make a reference to a life beyond the grave. When the ceremony ended, I said to my companion, an actress, "Am I mistaken, or have all these people substituted art for religion?" Without a second's hesitation she replied, "Yes, of course."

In his recent book, *Do You Believe?*, which contains interviews with 18 celebrities influential in our culture, Antonio Monda asked two questions: Do you believe in God? and Do you believe in a life beyond the grave? Though some articulated a vague notion of the divine, almost none indicated that any religion attracted them. Most amazing was that some were surprised that Monda, who is a practicing Catholic, found the two questions important.

On PBS not long ago, Salman Rushdie, being interviewed by Bill Moyers, stated emphatically, "I am an atheist," yet Rushdie found religious music moving and perhaps a provider of something more, though he seemed at a loss to speak further on what that "more" might be.

The novelists Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy were very aware of the danger in our culture of writing stories with a religious dimension for fear that even critics, supposed experts, might not detect that dimension. O'Connor described her remedy, by for creating religious stories with the sacred at their center: "You have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures."

O'Connor followed her own dictum. In the short story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," she creates perhaps the strangest Christ-figure in all of literature, a psychotic murderer aptly called "The Misfit." Just before he shoots one of his victims he responds to her plea for mercy:

> Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead…and He shouldn't have done it. He thrown everything off balance. If He did what he said, then it's nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow Him, and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can—by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other

meanness to him. No pleasure but meanness.

Each of us may be able to think of a play, film or novel that successfully portrays holiness. I think of the film "Evelyn" (2002), the only film in the history of cinema whose plot solution relied on the theology of the Trinity. Ron Hansen's *Mariette in Ecstasy* (1991) and Mark Salzman's *Lying Awake* (2000) beautifully contrast the extraordinary happenings in the spiritual life like the stigmata and mystical visions with the less dramatic, but no less deep, dedication to God's will.

ON THE WEB
Reviews of "Gomorra," "Exit the King" and "Mary Stuart."
americamagazine.org/culture

Perhaps as a guide for artistic depictions of the saintly, the best path is offered by Bolt, an agnostic, in a line of dialogue he gives St. Thomas More. In response to family pleas that he act reasonably and sign the oath of succession to recognize King Henry VIII as the head of the church, even though this will violate the saint's conscience and his commitment to Christ, More says, "Well…finally…it isn't a matter of reason; it's a matter of love."

REV. ROBERT E. LAUDER, *professor of philosophy at St. John's University in New York, is the author of* Magnetized by God: Religious Encounters Through Film, Theater, Literature and Painting *(2004)*.

NEW MEDIA | JAKE MARTIN

FACEBOOKED

A critique of a cultural phenomenon

My mother recently told me that when I was in my teens and early 20s she was concerned that I would be lured into joining a religious cult. "You are highly suggestible," she remarked, as she turned up the volume on the television to hear about Oprah's latest spiritual breakthrough. "You are a follower, not a leader." Thanks, Mom!

But she had a point. Ultimately I joined the Jesuits, which some might consider a cult of sorts. In truth, I have always been one to jump on a bandwagon. I wore parachute pants in the 1980s, flannel in the 1990s and was unemployed in the 2000s. So when everyone around me seemed to be Facebook-ing, it made perfect sense for me to do the same.

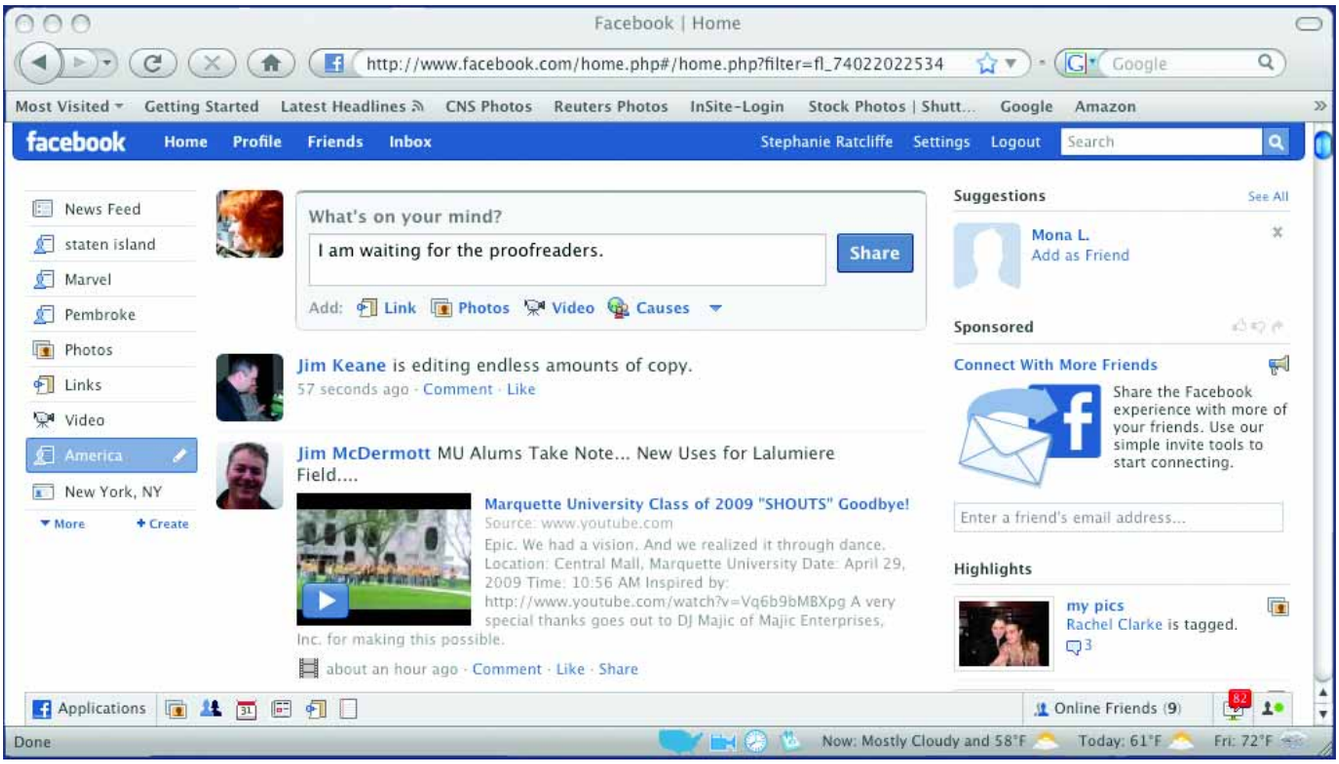
Facebook is a cyber phenomenon that began as a networking tool for college students. It was opened up to the general public approximately two years ago, and since then its popularity has skyrocketed. (I should preface my Facebook story by saying that I joined its predecessor, MySpace, at the same time, not knowing the difference between the two.) Fairly ignorant of the advances made in cyberspace over the past couple of years, I had contented myself with reading blogs and arguing with perfect strangers on tennis message boards. As it turned out, MySpace is a gigantic moment of spiritual desolation, as St. Ignatius Loyola might say; it screams seedy underbelly. After about 15 minutes and seven "friend" requests all beginning with the word, "Lonely?" I decided that MySpace might not, in fact, be the space for me.

Facebook, by contrast, is a land of rarefied air, all cool whites and airy blues. Simple fonts, without gaudy serifs, do not spoil its intentional simplicity. It is a gorgeous model of technological beauty. If it were a country, the trains would always run on time.

There is a lot to love about Facebook. It has proven to be a wonderful way to catch up with old friends from high school and college. It is also an easy way to keep up with those people in your life you just do not have the time to call or e-mail regularly. You can post quick messages on your friend's "wall," a sort of cyber bulletin board, and post pictures of yourself and your friends that can subsequently be organized into albums. You can also use your various pictures to change your profile picture, the image that serves to project the message you want to send out to the universe, a sort of a cyber tattoo, if you will. This is your opportunity to show the world who you are, your existential moment; it is right there for everyone to see.

So what is the problem with Facebook? All of the above. Not to be brutal, but there is a good reason I am not in touch with friends from high school: I am not the same person I was then, which is a good thing for all the people in my life now. I do not want to relive my high school angst; that is why God invented the sacrament of confession, so I can kneel in a dark closet-like space and spill out the secrets of my past, leave them there, and never, ever, deal with them again.

Yet every time I log on to Facebook there is someone like Dmitri Perivoliotis "friending" me (why do all new cultural phenomena have to turn nouns into verbs?) and sending me notes like, "Remember how Mike Rogers would launch spitballs at you during Mr. Fowler's class?" Thanks, Dmitri, for reminding me how I had to sit through the whole of ninth-period algebra with spitballs resting atop my coarse mop of curls, tears rolling down my acne-laden cheeks. Mr. Fowler, who had his own problems, what with being 112 years old, took no notice of my misery, nor of the fact that there



were other students in the classroom.

The other big problem with Facebook is that it's boring. Anyone with whom I would communicate by e-mail or phone, I would communicate with by e-mail or phone. And any person I would not communicate with by e-mail or phone—well, I would not communicate with them at all.

So Facebook has, for all intents and purposes, become a way for me to acquire as many "friends" as possible with whom I will never have to communicate again. The creators must have realized that the acquisition of friends was about the only thing that was going to keep people coming back. For the most part, there really is not much to do once you have posted all of your likes, dislikes and your relationship status, and once you've tried the special applications that have about as much chance of keeping your interest as 99 percent of the programming aired on EWTN. The layout is designed so that you are continually reminded of the numerical count of your friends. This can only lead to feelings of inadequacy, especially since it is so easy to keep track of how many "friends" your "friends" have. This sort of thing brings out the competitor in me. I want to win and will do whatever it takes to have more "friends" than anyone else, just so long as I don't ever have to be in contact with them.

Ultimately, Facebook is just another way of giving people the illusion that they are participating in the world without having to leave the isolated confines of their cubicle, office or bedroom. Promoted as a networking tool, it serves primarily as a sort of existential device that allows people to categorize their life experience and interests while simultaneously shutting them off from the very life they are trying to present to the world.

JAKE MARTIN, S.J., *is a Jesuit scholastic studying at Fordham University, New York.*

BOOKS | ED GAFFNEY

A DARING VISION

FAITHFUL WITNESS

On Reconciliation and Peace in the Holy Land

By Michel Sabbah
Edited by Drew Christiansen, S.J., and Saliba Sarsar
New City Press. 208p $24.95
ISBN 9781565483071

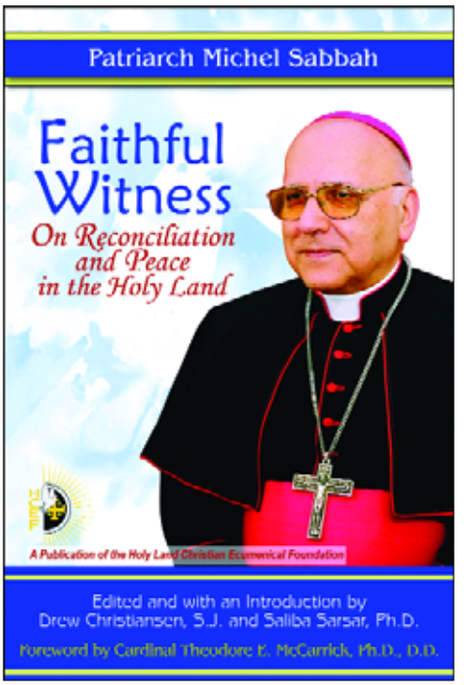
Michel Sabbah served as the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem from 1988 to 2008. The title of this selection of his pastoral letters, sermons and addresses underscores that these writings are deeply grounded in Sabbah's commitment to the Gospel. He also provides reliable testimony about events in the Middle East for the past two decades. The subtitle indicates the principal goal of the patriarch's labors: "reconciliation and peace in the Holy Land."

Patriarch Sabbah writes for a broad

Christian audience. He encourages pilgrimage to the Holy Land, not just to see the holy sites, but also to encounter the "living stones": our brothers and sisters in the faith who live under military occupation, just as Jesus did in the first century. These Christians—a dwindling community—do not enjoy the basic human right to free exercise of their religious convictions, including free access to the holy sites. Because of the belligerent Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Christians in Jerusalem are regularly impeded from going to Bethlehem for Christmas. Nor may Bethlehemites go to Jerusalem for Holy Week and Easter or Pentecost.

The author also writes of his engagement in interreligious dialogue with Jews and Muslims, and encourages Christians all over the world to do likewise. His concerns, moreover, are not just theological, but also those of practical daily life. He describes with blunt clarity the "economic and social strangulation" of Palestinian Christians and Muslims: "collective punishment…general siege on towns and villages…demolition of access roads…hundreds of military checkpoints…curfews impeding all movements inside the town…assassination of Palestinian leaders and activists…shelling and demolishing of houses and agricultural structures." But he is not a partisan advocate of victory of one side over the other. On the contrary, he rejects as immoral all uses for terrorist military power, whether from F-16s and Apache helicopters in Gaza, or from Palestinian rockets aimed at civilians in Siderot and Eshkalon.

The patriarch addresses all the children of Abraham when he vigorously repudiates the misuse of religion by Jews, Christians or Muslims to justify their acts of violence: "A 'holy war' is a contradiction in terms.… God cannot and does not want to oppress anyone, individuals or peoples, nor can God command that. His love for one people cannot become oppression for another people. Therefore, no one today has the right to invoke the name of this God who is just, kind, and who loves humankind, to justify one's own human violence, whatever the supposed interest or good, of religion or of the nation."



Faithful Witness bears an important message for all—whether religious believers or not—who care about the morality and legality of the use of force in general, or who yearn for a nonviolent, negotiated resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular.

Though penned over the course of two decades, Sabbah's writings remain relevant to the present moment for distinct, yet related reasons. Two current realities are the source, respectively, of profound sadness and deep hope. Sadness is prompted by the atrocity of the most recent violence in Gaza, which has claimed over 1,300 Palestinians and 13 Israelis dead, thousands injured, massive homelessness in a zone densely populated by refugees of prior wars, and severe damage to the infrastructure in a territory long under siege and in grave humanitarian crisis. If anyone heeds the message of Sabbah, none of this devastation was necessary or justifiable.

There is hope because of the dawn of a new day in American foreign policy. President Barack Obama recently named Senator George Mitchell as his special envoy to the Middle East. Mitchell's experience in negotiating an end to violence in Northern Ireland makes him well suited to achieve a similar breakthrough where half-hearted or misguided efforts have failed in the past. He believes, as Patriarch Sabbah does, that there is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and that "there is no such thing as a conflict that cannot be resolved."

Sabbah expressly cautions against confusing hope with reliance on military power. "Military victories by themselves do not bring about security. Only peace, built on justice and the respect of human rights, can bring about security." He knows from bitter experience the horror and futility of war. Born in Nazareth in 1938, he grew up under British military occupation. He was a teenager during the events of 1947 to 1949, described by Israelis as their "War for Independence" and by Palestinians as the *Nakba* (the Arabic term for "catastrophe"): dispossession and displacement of over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and homeland. He was a young priest when the 1967 war dispossessed Palestinians for a second time. Hence he knows that the refugee issue is crucial for any final status negotiation.

He feels with great compassion the intense pain of the current situation, but does not indulge in jeremiads. Unlike the Prince of Verona in Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," Sabbah does not stride into the public square to denounce the two rival families in the Holy Land, or to invoke a curse or "a plague on both your hous-

es." He offers not a curse, but a blessing and a great challenge to both communities: to forgive each other for the horrible mistakes of the past, and to live with deep mutual respect for each other as neighbors destined to share a land deemed holy by three major faiths, but desecrated by sporadic, dysfunctional outbursts of violence.

Sabbah identifies the root cause of the violence and grasps the interconnection between the deepest hopes of both Israelis and Palestinians: "If we want to stop violence and terrorism, we have to put an end to military occupation. Palestinians must be given back their freedom and independence.... Only then will Israeli security be reached and fear will disappear from their lives."

Both the failed peace negotiations at Camp David in 2000 and the subsequent "Clinton parameters" illustrate that the status of Jerusalem is crucial. All of us should heed the perspective of Sabbah on this matter: "Exclusivism from any side, whether political or religious, will harm the identity of [Jerusalem] and threaten the harmony among all concerned, all its sons and daughters." Three appendices to this volume document a profound ecumenical accord on Jerusalem among all heads of the Christian churches in the City of Peace.

All of us—religious or secular, Israelis or Palestinians, Americans or citizens of the world—can profit from the truthful voice of Patriarch Sabbah, who remains an eloquent and faithful witness to the urgent need for reconciliation and peace in the Holy Land.

ED GAFFNEY *teaches international law and the use of force at Valparaiso University, and is the producer-director of "Holy Land: Common Ground," a documentary film on Israeli and Palestinian peacebuilders.*

KELLY CHERRY

FINAL MOMENTS

SOON

Tales from Hospice

By A. G. Mojtabai

Zoland Books. 224p $22
ISBN 9780944072912

Now that the baby boom generation is reaching retirement age, its members must come to terms with death's new proximity. Parents are dying; cherished friends are dying. The public figures who loomed so large for so many years are dying.

Not that this is a surprise. The World Population Clock tells us that 107 deaths occur every minute. Over 154,000 people die every day. There are no escape clauses, no detours around the end point; there is no way to drop out of the race. Yes, we already knew this, but did we know how it feels to die?

Soon, a collection of 17 short stories by A. G. Mojtabai, lets us know:

> The legs are lost first, then the arms and the neck. Everything sags near the end: the earlobes flatten, lie close along the skull, the jaw goes slack, the head lolls, too heavy to lift; secretions pool and thicken in the throat; the fingers, before this so restlessly seeking, fold in, and are still. It's a relentless letting go... ("Zone").

More important, do we know how it feels to be a young man dying of AIDS? Michael is disturbed by the metal crucifix on the wall, the fig leaf that covers Christ's nakedness. "The nakedness is important; for this particular shame, Michael feels sure of it, was also a wound, not the least of his wounds" ("Isolation").

Or an older woman desperately using the last of her strength to write letters to relatives? Or Abe Farley, a reserved and dignified but mentally confused country man, whose wife preceded him in death?

We learn these things, too. Published over 10 years ago but still undiscovered by many, *Soon* is essential reading for our lives today. It is never too late to review a book this smart, this observant and understanding. Mojtabai, author of seven novels and a nonfiction book, *Blessed Assurance*, and recipient of impressive awards and grants, is nevertheless not as well known as she should be. In her preface to *Soon*, she tells us that she volunteered at a Catholic hospice in Amarillo, Tex.—partly in an attempt to deal with her own fear of dying. When she began to write about her experience, "I was not privy to family histories, or medical histories, so I was forced to invent. All I had were glimpses.... I noticed a woman in a turban, sitting up in bed, writing one letter after another. What was in them? I had to write those letters myself in order to find out; they are brought together in 'Last Things.'"

The imaginative intelligence here is remarkable. We become involved with the patients, the priests, the nurses, the volunteers and housekeeping staff—a world that is inhabited, like our own, with people arriving and leaving. It is a world as detailed as our own, with orchids and a silk rose, dirty

linen, three kinds of acceptable hugs ("the side-to-side, the A-frame, and the full body front-to-front—this last one only if you've been very close. And it's meant to be taken slow and easy," from "Leaning"), broken crayons and a dump truck, "the smell of sage in wet ditches" ("I'm Still Here"), a one-legged man wearing a single snakeskin boot.

In "Sightings," a full-time creative writing teacher, wanting to give back to her community, adds to her course load by taking on a continuing-education night class for adults. Mary Owen, older than Sue and the other students, has enrolled in this class year after year, never learning how to write any better, always writing only about "porch swings and summer romance" or the equivalent. When she stops coming to class, and Sue learns that she is in hospice, Sue begins to visit her on Wednesday nights, despite, one week, hammering winds. At the hospice she encounters handmade signs, each with an "A" for "Alert"—tornado alert. Even in Mary's quiet and impervious room, Sue thinks she can still hear the wind blowing outside like "a giant bird circling overhead, wings flailing." Mary asks Sue if she has seen the posted signs and goes on to explain that "they're telling us the angels are here."

Sue does not believe in angels. She believes that poets have made great poems about angels, but not that angels actually exist.

Mary begs to differ. She believes the angels are there and that they are, furthermore, mischievous, sometimes annoyingly so, and occasionally downright "unfriendly." If they play harps, none has played a harp for her. "Sometimes all I can make out are shimmers of wavy air, like you see around a jet plane," she says. "What I see mostly is feet, flashes of feet." Sue struggles to make sense of what Mary has said. Mary concludes: "And so I know...the spirit yearns to put down feet."

Like Sue, we do not have to believe in angels to appreciate Mary's odd and real sense of them. Mary, whose creative endeavors have been irremediably jejune, has somehow been graced in her final days with the true poetry of her own soul.

In her preface, Mojtabai discusses the derivation of the word "hospice." "Hospice (practice and place)," she tells us, "is about hospitality to strangers." Her stories are themselves small hospices, accommodating and attentive to their wide range of characters. Before we find ourselves at death's door, this book is both a vestibule and a blessing.

KELLY CHERRY *is the author of 17 books of fiction, nonfiction and poetry, the most recent of which is* Hazard and Prospect: New and Selected Poems *(Louisiana State Univ. Press, 2007).*

PETER HEINEGG

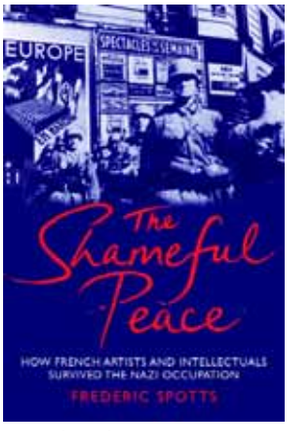
CRIMINAL CONSENT?

THE SHAMEFUL PEACE

How French Artists and Intellectuals Survived the Nazi Occupation

By Frederick Spotts
Yale Univ. Press. 288p $35
ISBN 9780300132908

Covering this topic is like writing about the 1936 Berlin Olympics: by now the participants are all dead; and anyhow none but a handful of stars (Jesse Owens, Pablo Picasso) are known outside the "fan base." Like track and field events, the doings of painters, actors and writers seem rather trivial alongside the world-shaking traumas and cataclysms of 1936-1945. In any case, history has long since rendered its verdict on both the Olympics and the Occupation: they were, as Frederick Spotts says, borrowing a phrase from the slippery, compromised Jean Cocteau, "shameful."



Spotts is fittingly described by his publisher as "an independent scholar" who lives in France and has written about Hitler. He takes upon himself the more or less thankless task of surveying a large group of French men and women, some famous but most not, who reacted to their country's catastrophic defeat in familiar and predictable ways. A relative few (Yves Tanguy, Max Ernst, Marc Chagall, Fernand Léger, Piet Mondrian) fled the country altogether. Another minority, the despised *collabos* (Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Robert Brasillach, Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, Alfred Cortot) eagerly welcomed the Germans. But the majority of those surveyed lay low, hoping to continue their creative work more or less as usual. After all, the war was elsewhere, and the Germans wanted to keep France's artistic life humming along to distract the conquered population and maintain an atmosphere of normalcy. Of course, on the broad fringes of the latter body lived a variety of ambiguous types: art-dealers, movie directors, booksellers, theater and opera producers, and some well-known artistes (Maurice Chevalier, Edith Piaf, Fernandel, Marcel Pagnol) who

were willing to play along, occasionally or often, with the Vichy regime or the German occupiers.

There were no heroes to be found in this crowd—anyone so inclined could always have gone off to join Malraux, Camus or Saint-Exupéry in the Resistance (some of whose members liked to bathe, after the war, in a mythopoetic glow). Otherwise, they had to be *attentistes* and wait for the storm to pass, perhaps taking comfort in the presumed humanistic value of their paintings, poems, plays, songs, stories and shows. There was an underground press; and every now and then, a phrase might slip through the censors, as in the character Garcin's immortal dictum in *No Exit* (1944), "Hell is other people"—the Germans did not realize that "les autres" was also a code-phrase for their hated selves. But by definition there was no protest art; and, in a culminating twist, while Paris during the war had a busier collection of artists than any other capital city, in the postwar period it lost its world leadership. Served them right?

Unfortunately for Frederick Spotts, none of this qualifies as searing drama; and even the *épuration*, the trials and punishment of artist-collaborators after the Liberation, was a botched affair. Sentences were often arbitrary, with the well-connected, like Maurice Vlaminck or Sacha Guitry or Georges Simenon, getting off easy (they generally claimed to have done a little good on the side, like protect Jews or help to get French P.O.W.s released), while the unlucky, like the soprano Germaine Lubin, who was a personal friend of Péand and had sung for Hitler, were slammed. And some, like Brasillach, were shot. But the legal logic behind the de-Nazification of the artists was never articulated. How could *collabos* be put to death, when they had never personally caused death or serious harm to anyone—at least not in any measurable way? And, just as with the parallel and much more crucial process in Germany, after an initial burst of zeal, prosecutors decided that national unity, leaving the past behind and fighting Communism were more important; so the spineless or worse (fascist, defeatist, anti-Semitic) artists were pardoned. Eventually, visitors might well get the impression that out of the 40 million people in occupied France, practically nobody had been guilty of collaboration.

Spotts has to survey such a huge cast of characters, including many obscure ones (the leftist editor Jean Galtier-Boissièor, the poet-critic Jean Cassou), that he cannot spend much time on close-ups. He scans the lot deftly and fairly, though in his haste he sometimes slips up. (He calls Proust's mother "partly Jewish," when Jeanne Weil was all Jewish; and he labels Charles Péa a "freethinker," when he was, at least in his mature years, a devout Catholic.) He writes perky, slangy prose ("After exposing himself discreetly [the concert pianist] Cortot then did the full monty"), sprinkled with recherché terms like "rocambolesque," "maledicent," "alembicated" and "sanguineous." Oh well, why not?

In the end, the most interesting use of *The Shameful Peace* might be to provide a detailed frame of reference for philosphical questions. How do you map the murky borderland between culture and politics? In what ways is artistic silence criminal consent? (Picasso and Matisse basically ignored the war as painters.) When does one have to go into exile? And does any of this matter when physical survival is at stake? More than half a century later, the existential answers provided by many of the French do not look very convincing or appealing. But would we have done any better?

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

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LETTERS

Taste Test

Thank you for Kate Blake's "Animal Welfare" (3/23), as well as the "Church Writings on Nature" insert in the same issue and the cover of the issue itself, both of which supported Blake's position concerning our stewardship for animals and our place within creation. Vegetarianism is the logical outcome from any in-depth study of the conditions that can be found on "factory farms." Not only are animals subject to cruel and abusive treatment; the negative impact on the environment resulting from livestock agriculture has also been documented in various studies.

But with issues like respect for life, war, poverty, moral values, human relations and other issues remaining a priority, I am not surprised that people are still ingesting animals and processed foods with ingredient lists that can barely be pronounced. I think most folks just shrug and keep munching. Yes, Jesus probably ate meat and fish, but he didn't have the other nutritional means available that we have 2,000 years later.

We in industrialized societies have so many comforts available for convenience and enjoyment, including a vast array of grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts and more. There is really no justification for producing food from animals the way we do currently. "I like the taste" somehow does not suffice.

ROGER FELDMAN
Sterling Heights, Mich.

The Gift

The article by Leo O'Donovan, S.J., on Karl Rahner, S.J. ("Reading Karl Rahner," 3/30) was a real gift. It helped me refocus and reaffirm why

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this man has meant and still means so much to me. During my years of doctoral study with Rahner in Münster during the late 1960s, he was a towering theological intellect. In the ensuing years, he also became for me a kind of spiritual director into the experience of mystery that grounds Christian life and thought.

O'Donovan's "five guiding questions" for reading Rahner made it clear again what a gift Rahner was and remains for the church and the world.

PAUL F. KNITTER
New York, N.Y.

Parallel Problems

As I read "Then There Was One" (Daniel P. Sulmasy, O.F.M., 3/16), about the failures of the Catholic health care system in New York City, I kept thinking that we could have written virtually word for word (including the title) the same description of Catholic education in the northeastern United States.

Brother Sulmasy hit more than one nail on the head with his analysis. Perhaps we have forgotten the biblical injunction "Do not be afraid." It is hard to remember in a climate where one succeeds "not by one's accomplishments but by not making mistakes."

(REV.) DAN ARNOLD
Erie, Pa.

A Week Without Women

I agree that the Vatican's announced visitations of women's religious communities in the U.S. and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious appear suspect (Current Comment, 5/11). One of the purported reasons for the visitation of women's orders seems especially transparent: to assess why vocations have fallen among women religious. One would think the Vatican has plenty to do in assessing the decline of vocations to the priesthood.

Seeing how women religious have always been "second-class citizens" in the church, if the question is truly about declining vocations and not about doctrinal fidelity, one has to wonder why the Vatican cares that much. I have never considered myself a "women's libber," but I have lately begun to imagine a one-week strike of women, lay and religious, who work in any area of the church, just to see if an "aha!" moment would be experienced by the loads of men who have no idea how the work really gets accomplished.

KATHY PESTA
Wakefield, R.I.

Garden, Grow

Thank you for "Christ in the Garden," by Franco Mormando (4/20). As both a gardener and a Christian, I believe there is much truth in conceiving of Jesus as the cultivator of human hearts. Christ's work within us spans many seasons of life, much as the gardener's work is slow and steady, with both sunny and cloudy days.

My church is about to devote part of our gardens to raising vegetables. The fruits of this labor will feed hungry mouths and help remind us of the importance of local food sources. The metaphor of Jesus as gardener is also an appropriate one for this project. My prayer is that as we till the soil, that work will cultivate within us a spirit of service and stewardship, that the Holy Gardener will use this as an opportunity to grow hearts of faith and gratitude.

JON GELDERT
Boston, Mass.

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Taken Up

ASCENSION OF THE LORD (B), MAY 21, 2009

Readings: Acts 1:1-11; Ps 47:2-9; Eph 1:17-23; Mk 16:15-20

"You are to be my witnesses…to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8)

The opening verses of the Acts of the Apostles pick up the thread of the narrative from the ending of Luke's first volume (the Gospel of Luke). Both are addressed to Theophilus (Lk 1:3; Acts 1:1), whose name means "beloved of God" or "lover of God." The symbolic meaning of his name allows every hearer of the Lucan story to insert her- or himself into the role of the beloved to whom these words are addressed.

Luke resumes the story at the point where Jesus was "taken up." Like Elijah, who was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind by a fiery chariot (2 Kgs 2:11), and Moses, who was taken up in a cloud at the end of his earthly life (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 4.326), so Jesus' earthly sojourn is ended in the manner of these great figures. Luke narrates the ascension twice: at the conclusion of his first volume (Lk 24:50-53) and again at the beginning of the second (Acts 1:9-11). In the Gospel, the ascension takes place on Easter Sunday, while Acts speaks of a 40-day period of appearances between the resurrection and ascension. The number 40 is symbolic: Moses spent 40 days on Mount Sinai, and the Israelites wandered 40 years in the desert. Luke uses "40 days" to link the time Jesus spent in preparation for his public ministry after his baptism (Lk 4:1-12) with the preparation the disciples undergo before they are "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5) and begin their public witnessing to the resurrected Christ.

In the Gospel of John—the only other Gospel to mention the ascension (20:17)—the passion, resurrection, ascension, exaltation and giving of the Spirit all describe one moment, not separated in time and space (Jn 19:30; 20:17, 22); in God's time, all these transformations are instantaneous. Human reality is bound by time and space, and so Luke narrates these mysteries as separate episodes. Luke's time gaps allow us to reflect on how the mystery unfolds gradually for us, allowing us to be transformed step by step.

In Acts 1:6-8 questions are voiced that the early community needed to have answered in this in-between time. They want to know when will be the parousia and the end-time. They struggle to shift their expectations from a nationalistic messiah who would restore the sovereign reign of Israel, to one who would empower them to be witnesses of the gospel throughout the known world, not only to their own people.

Even though the disciples do not receive all the answers they seek and even though their transformation is incomplete, the ascension marks the point at which they must take up the mission begun by Jesus. There can be no idle looking up at the sky. Rather, as the two angelic messengers affirm, the time has come for them to go forth as witnesses "to the ends of the earth."

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Anointed in Truth

SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (B), MAY 24, 2009

Readings: Acts 1:15-17, 20a, 20c-26; Ps 103:1-2, 11-12, 19-20; 1 Jn 4:11-16; Jn 17:11b-19

"I protected them in your name" (Jn 17:12)

The reading from Acts is set in the upper room, where the disciples are gathered between the ascension and Pentecost. About 120 persons are there (1:15), a symbol for the full number of disciples. In the preceding verse, Luke lists as present the Twelve along with the women, presumably Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and the many others (Lk 8:1-3) who came up to Jerusalem and witnessed the crucifixion (Lk 23:49), saw Jesus laid in the tomb (Lk 23:55-56) and discovered it empty (Lk 24:1-9). Jesus' mother and his siblings are also there. All are present except Judas. We can hear the pain and disillusionment of the early community as the members struggled to explain how one who was "numbered among us and was allotted to share in this ministry" could have ended as the guide for those who arrested Jesus. As always, the Scriptures provide the assurance that God is not absent even during these most horrific moments, even if they do not fully explain such tragic happenings.

In the first chapter of Acts, Peter emerges as spokesperson for the community. It is a turbulent time of transition and they rely on the form of leadership with which they are familiar. This is the last time that the Twelve are reconstituted; a replacement is not chosen for James when he is killed by Herod (Acts 12:1). As the narrative progresses, the patterns of leadership shift. The Twelve disappear from the story after 6:2; Peter is not mentioned again after 15:7. James and the elders emerge as the leaders of the community in Jerusalem (12:17; 15:13; 21:18), and Paul takes center stage in the mission to the Gentiles.

In the Gospel, we have the middle section of Jesus' prayer during the Last Discourse. We are meant to overhear this intimate conversation between Jesus and the Father so that we can be encouraged by the legacy bequeathed to us. Jesus addresses God as "Father," the one who in a patriarchal culture is responsible for protecting the whole household. Jesus has embodied this protective care of his disciples. His strong arms enwrapped them, like a father who fends off all threats to his children's well-being, or a mother who enfolds her little ones, shielding them from all harm.

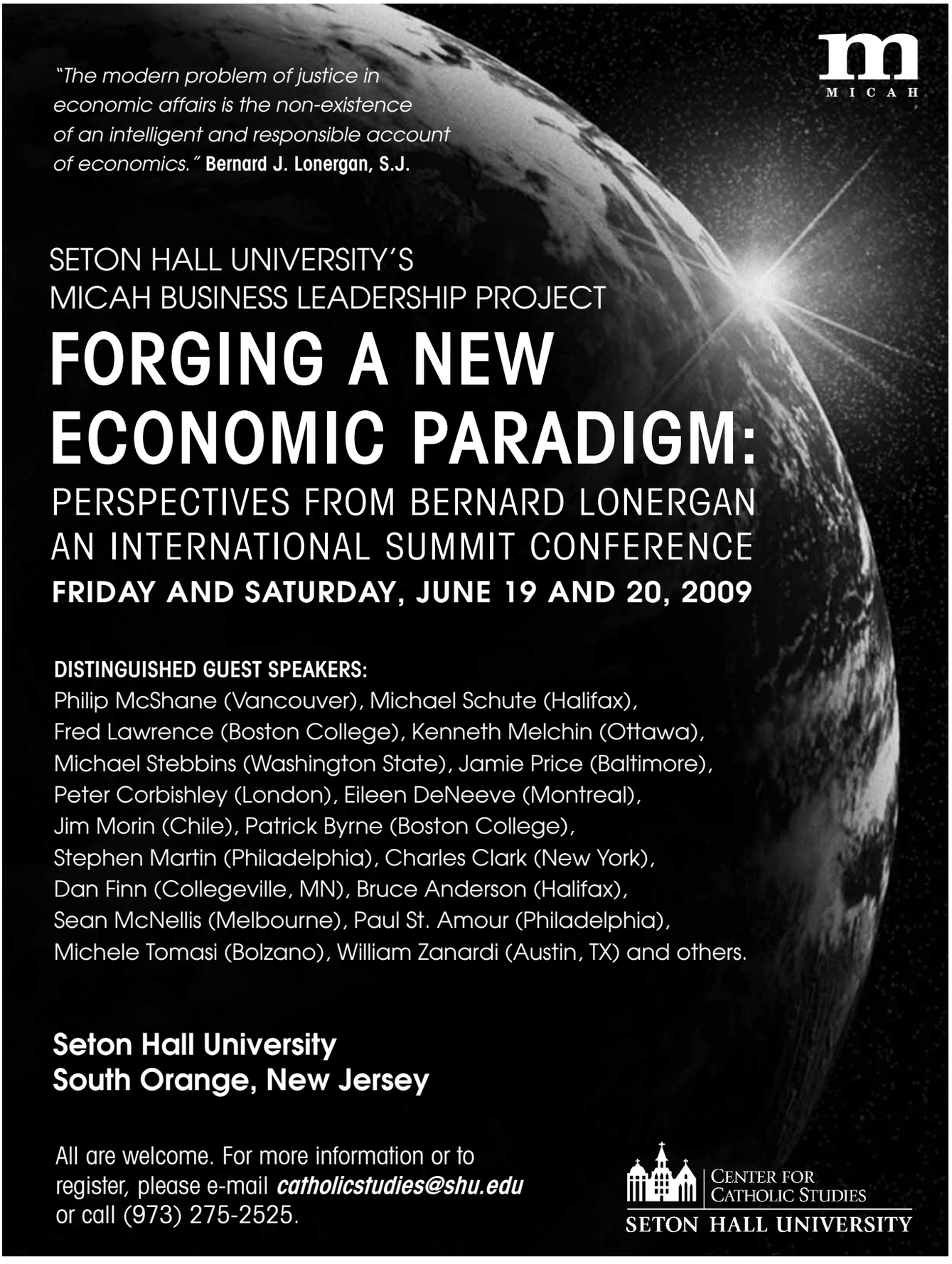
Just as Jesus has been consecrated for mission, so he prays for the consecration of his followers. "Consecrated" means to be anointed and set apart for mission, not in the manner of kings whose anointing separates them from the realities of ordinary people, but in the truth, which immerses Jesus' disciples into the heart of the struggles of all their fellow creatures in "the world." While kings are anointed on the head to great acclaim, disciples of Jesus are "anointed" in footwashing, set apart for self-surrender in love for one another, particularly those who would seem most unlovable. This is the oil of truth that flows over the heads of Jesus' disciples, consecrating them in the protective mantle of "the name" and "the word." Just as Jesus' anointing by Mary (12:1-11) strengthened him to face death, the consecration of his followers allows them to face hostility and hatred as the birthpangs that give way to complete joy in new life (17:13; 16:20-23).

BARBARA E. REID

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- How does your witness spread in ever widening circles "to the ends of the earth"?
- Pray that the Spirit continues to raise up leaders for the church in new patterns for changing times.
- Savor the experience of being "consecrated" for mission and protected by the name and the Word.

ART: TAD DUNNE



MICAH

"The modern problem of justice in economic affairs is the non-existence of an intelligent and responsible account of economics." **Bernard J. Lonergan, S.J.**

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