America

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Is God Back?

AUSTEN IVEREIGH INTERVIEWS JOHN MICKLETHWAIT

ALSO: FALL BOOKS I

OF MANY THINGS

People with what is sometimes called a late vocation are a curious lot. Being one myself, I sometimes compare notes with others who come my way. The most recent was Bryan Pipins, an energetic Australian Jesuit who walked about New York last winter in sockless, sandaled feet while ministering at a local parish. His tough constitution, tested by 13 years in the Australian army and several more with the Jesuit Refugee Service in Africa, has seen him through challenging situations on three continents. The idea of religious life crossed his mind even in primary school. A friend of his father's, however, advised him to work after high school before applying to enter, "to see if I really had a call," as Bryan put it. Odd jobs eventually led him to the Australian army and a three-year enrollment. The life suited him and he re-enlisted.

But throughout Bryan's military years, vocation thoughts remained, so a Jesuit pastor put him in touch with the order's vocation director. By then Bryan was in his 30s. His novice director sent him to a l'Arche community of adults with Down syndrome, and from there to a remote aboriginal community. In 1999 everything changed abruptly when East Timor "exploded" during its fight for independence. The resulting refugee situation led Bryan to ask and receive permission to work there with the Jesuit Refugee Service.

After Bryan's ordination, his provincial sent him to teach English as a second language in the Philippines. But given his instinctive desire for contact with the materially poor (an instinct he and I share), he also spent time as a parish priest, attending to people in Manila's huge garbage dump, which is home to 70,000 of the country's poorest. Picking through the dump, they scratched out a precarious existence. "The people were mostly from rural areas, and living in the dump they suffered from respiratory infections that shortened their lives along with the lives of their children," he said.

Finally, Bryan was assigned to work with J.R.S. in East Africa, training adults as teachers of basic literacy skills who could carry on the work after J.R.S. moved on. "When I first visited, after the program had already begun, I found over 50 people in one small room waiting for lessons. 'There are too many people here!' I said, but they insisted, 'We want to learn!' One woman cried out; 'Why do I have to wait till I'm 75 to learn to read and write?'" And learn they joyfully did, he said.

J.R.S. next sent him to northern Uganda for further refugee involvement. Did he ever have a day off? No, he replied, "but I was doing so many different things that each task meant tapping into a different source of energy." Five days a week he was a school administrator, but weekends saw him as a priest in various parts of the huge camp with tens of thousands of refugees. Many died of cholera, he explained, partly because as rural people they were not accustomed to living in close quarters, where sanitary precautions became essential.

Thus far Bryan had enjoyed good health, but then he himself fell ill with typhoid. Now back in Australia, he is serving in a rural Jesuit parish founded for Catholics fleeing persecution in Germany during the 1840s. Two Jesuits accompanied these early religious refugees, so Bryan continues to serve, if not refugees, at least their Australian descendants.

Our stories are vastly different, but we both learned that God's call can never come too late, whether to religious life—or to lay people who may also be searching to respond to a call of their own. Each person has a vocation. The challenge is to discover what it is and then to live it out.

GEORGE M. ANDERSON, S.J.

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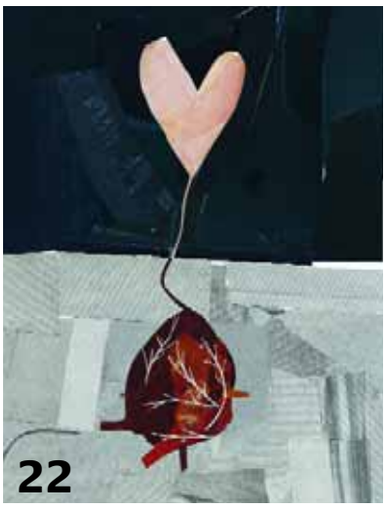

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ON THE WEB

Rev. Robert E. Lauder compares **Alice McDermott** (right) to Graham Greene, and Susan Windley-Daoust reflects on **birth and the spiritual life** on our podcast. Plus, Rev. Stephen Joseph Fichter on priests who leave the church for **Protestant ministry**. All at americamagazine.org.

Natural Treasures at Risk

Madagascar's extraordinary biodiversity is suffering increased assaults because of a political power vacuum. Last March the millionaire mayor of the country's capital, Antananarivo, with the support of the military, overthrew Madagascar's president, Marc Ravalomanana. Many of the country's plant and animal species exist nowhere else in the world. There is now little protection in areas where some species now face extinction. Political turmoil has especially jeopardized the island's lemurs, small monkey-like animals with large eyes. Unimpeded, poachers now trap and slaughter them as "bushmeat" for luxury restaurants.

Illegal logging, along with slash-and-burn agriculture by subsistence farmers, has already damaged much of Madagascar's unique environment. Mining brings another form of environmental degradation, as foreign companies dig up forests for the mineral ilmenite, which is valuable for the production of titanium dioxide, a white pigment used in paper, paint and plastics. Since Madagascar relies heavily on ecotourism, some commentators regard the ecological losses as killing the goose that lays the golden egg. But the environmental losses also make clear what can happen when political chaos reduces a country's ability to protect its most fragile natural treasures. Efforts are underway to reach a power-sharing agreement between Madagascar's ousted elected president and the upstart media magnate Andry Rajoelina. In the meantime, however, environmental destruction of the island's rare flora and fauna continues.

The Passing Of the Green Revolution

The father of the Green Revolution, Norman E. Borlaug, died on Sept. 12. Borlaug, an Iowan, was a plant scientist whose tireless work has been credited with saving hundreds of millions of lives. When Mexico and the nations of the Asian subcontinent faced famine, Borlaug helped create sturdy, high-yielding varieties of rice and other grains that have literally fed the world during the last five decades.

His passing offers an opportunity not only to acknowledge his accomplishments but also to re-evaluate the high-tech, input-reliant food production model to which they led. We may already be near the "peak yield" years of the Green Revolution, and some of its drawbacks are becoming more evident. Soil depletion and environmental damage result from large-scale irrigation and the overuse of fertilizer and pesticides. Worth considering, too, has been the impact on farmers, the foot soldiers of this revolution, and their families and communities. We are only now attempting to gauge the effect of persistent exposure to pesticides on agricultural communities. The toll may be high.

Borlaug's goal, to rid the world permanently of the misery of widespread hunger, has not been achieved. Hunger persists, even in the world of food plenty that Borlaug helped to create. Thanks to Borlaug's genius and inspiration, there is more food, but people remain too poor to buy it. Across Africa and Central America, in wealthy and poor societies alike, people are hungry—not because of drought but because of indifference, a famine of solidarity. As brilliant as he was, Norman Borlaug probably had no idea how to respond to that particularly human calamity.

Master of None

Most people would agree that motorists and train operators should not use cellphones or send text messages while driving. Such multitasking has resulted in crashes and deaths.

But what about other kinds of multitasking? Can people do several things at once and do them well? An expectation that they can and should underlies the help-wanted ads that specify "must be able to multitask." Multitasking has become something of an ideal in our fast-paced society—a model of success and efficiency often aided by technology and sleek electronic gadgets.

It turns out, however, that the "competent multitasker" may be more fable than fact. In August researchers at Stanford University reported results of a study of media multitasking in The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. After testing 100 college students, researchers found that on virtually every measure the students most persistent at multitasking performed worse than those who seldom attempted more than one task at a time. Multitaskers lacked focus, were easily distracted, could not switch smoothly from one task to another and did not organize information well. When tested on content, they showed confusion rather than comprehension. Both the researchers and the students were surprised by the findings, an indication of just how appealing the myth of the "competent multitasker" has become.

If further studies corroborate the ineffectiveness of multitasking, then we ought to drop it as an unattainable ideal. Why not elevate focus, concentration, analysis and reflection instead?

EDITORIAL

Siege Mentality

Allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity capped a five-month investigation by the United Nations into the conduct of the Israel Defense Forces during their incursion into Gaza last winter. The report, released on Sept. 15 and named after its lead investigator, the international jurist Richard J. Goldstone, also condemns the indiscriminate missile attacks by Hamas into southern Israel that provoked the bloody conflict, but it reserves its harshest assessment for the I.D.F.'s brutal conduct of the war.

Judge Goldstone, a South African, was the chief prosecutor for the U.N.'s international criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda. His credentials are impeccable and his reputation previously unassailable. Now he is the target of character assassination in Israel, where the report has been received with outrage. In the United States the report has been described as "unfair" by the Obama administration, which appears to be laying the political foundation for dismissing it.

That would be regrettable. The report's findings offer a depressing collection of cautionary tales that deserve a hearing in the United States as it pursues Al Qaeda targets in Afghanistan, Iraq and around the world. According to the investigation, the behavior of the I.D.F. in Gaza was objectionable in a distressing number of incidents: missile attacks on Gaza police that began the operation; artillery attacks on U.N. compounds and schools; the use of white phosphorus ordnance over civilian targets; and far too lax rules of engagement, which led to the killing of many Gazans who were doing nothing worse than running for shelter or seeking food or clean water for their families during the brutal three-week campaign.

By the end of Operation Cast Lead, 1,400 Palestinians had been killed and 5,500 wounded. According to a report from the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, 773 of the Palestinians killed in the assault did not take part in the hostilities, including 320 minors and 109 women over the age of 18. During the period of the conflict, Hamas rockets and fighters killed nine Israelis, including three civilians, and four I.D.F. soldiers were killed by friendly fire.

It is hard to believe that the Israeli strategy, as the report notes, did not reflect a deliberate if unspoken intention among Israeli hardliners to inflict collective punishment on the entrapped Gazan community in retribution for its support of Hamas. Subsequently, Israeli public opinion appears to be drifting toward a disheartening acceptance of collective punishment as a legitimate means for diminishing or even liquidating Hamas. It is therefore crucial now for the government of Israel to acknowledge its obligations under international law to protect noncombatants in combat zones.

The U.S. public likewise has rights and responsibilities in this region. Our ongoing military and economic support for Israel makes the United States complicit in Israel's strategic decisions. The welfare of the Palestinian people, owing to their unique and vulnerable status, remains the responsibility of the international community. If collective punishment is to be the ongoing policy of the Israeli government, officially or otherwise, the U.S. public should understand the implications of such a position and press for an appropriate adjustment of U.S. foreign policy.

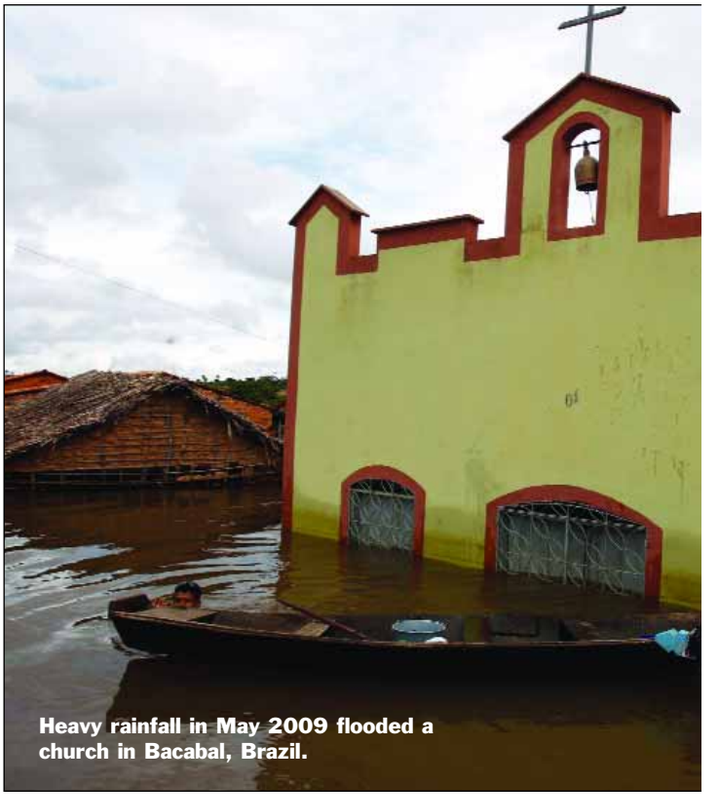
It is possible in this instance both to agree that Israel has the right to defend itself against such attacks and to insist that this right does not give a green light to unlimited use of force. The I.D.F. faces a difficult fight with an elusive opponent, but it also confronts a civilian population in no position to defend itself from the I.D.F. and its American-made hardware and no practical way to escape from its ferocious path. Even in the heat of battle, the I.D.F. cannot escape its responsibility to distinguish between civilians and militants.

Israel's own traditions require it to do better. As the Mishneh Torah's Laws of Kings and Their Wars (6:7) puts it: "When a city is under siege, the blockade should not include all four sides. One side should be left open to allow the inhabitants to flee for their lives." In Gaza last winter, no such quarter was offered the unfortunate inhabitants.

Israel has a long history of ignoring U.N. resolutions, and the I.D.F. has a similarly poor history of investigating the excesses of its troops. Nine Israeli human rights organizations are calling for a thorough investigation of the Goldstone Report's charges. The Obama administration, which will be under extreme pressure to neutralize the report at the United Nations, should instead join them in insisting that a truly independent body revisit the bloodletting in Gaza. If Israel refuses, the United States should support the report's recommendation to bring the matter before the International Criminal Court. A good friend stands by his friend; a really good friend knows when to stand up to him as well.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Climate Change Delegation Urges Attention to the Poor


Heavy rainfall in May 2009 flooded a church in Bacabal, Brazil.

A coalition of Catholic leaders and development agencies urged world leaders gathered in New York for a meeting on climate change to ease the burden environmental changes place on the planet's poorest and most vulnerable people.

"I think climate change is another situation where the poor of the world are being made to suffer more and more because of the habits of the first world," said Cardinal Keith O'Brien of St. Andrews and Edinburgh, Scotland, a member of a 15-person delegation that traveled to the U.N. headquarters for the meeting on Sept. 22. "[The poor] haven't caused the problems," he said, "and yet they're paying for it." Cardinal O'Brien cited U.N. estimates that between the years 2000 and 2004, climate-related disasters affected 262 million people.

The Catholic delegation was assembled by Cidse, a Belgium-based international alliance of leading Catholic development agencies, and Caritas Internationalis, a network representing 164 Catholic aid organizations around the world.

Another member of the Catholic delegation was Archbishop John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan of Abuja, Nigeria, former president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria.

"I know from direct experience that a fair and effective climate deal is crucial to avoid further misery for southern communities," Archbishop Onaiyekan said. Citing as an example the way residents of his country are adversely affected by climate change, he observed: "The process of desertification in the northern fringes of our country has made it impossible for cattle rearers to make a living in their traditional grazing grounds, forcing them to move elsewhere."

"Developed countries must take the lead by making significant reductions in their greenhouse gas emissions and supporting developing countries in adapting to a changing climate and developing a low-carbon economy," the archbishop concluded.

Convened by U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, the meeting on Sept. 22 was intended to build momentum for a major meeting on climate change to be held in Copenhagen, Denmark, from Dec. 7 to 18. The December meeting is viewed as pivotal to the campaign to reverse the causes of climate change, in large part because the Kyoto Protocol, which sets binding targets for 37 industrialized countries and the European Community for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, expires in 2012.

Observers stress that the delegates in Copenhagen must address four issues: 1) set meaningful emission-reduction targets for developed countries, 2) take steps to ease the effects of climate change on developing countries, 3) build financial and technological support to help countries adapt to and mitigate the impact of climate change and 4) develop an effective institutional framework that addresses the needs of developing countries.

Cardinal O'Brien spoke about the pressing need to address climate change at a Mass in New York on Sept. 20 in advance of the climate meeting.

Society "seems to have become immune to what is urgent," the cardinal said. "When banks go bust, as they did in your country and mine last year, governments seem able to mobilize extraordinary energy and efforts as well as unconscionably large sums of money to bail them out," the cardinal said. "This response stands in stark contrast to the ponderous efforts to address poverty and climate change."

Quoting Martin Luther King Jr., the cardinal said: "Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. We are faced now with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now."

POLITICS

Survey Examines Profiles of Religious Activists

A groundbreaking survey comparing the activities, demographics and motivations of "religious activists" involved in politics has found that activists on both ends of the political spectrum are deeply religious, though their religious and political profiles are dramatically different.

The results of the 2009 Religious Progressive and Conservative Activist Surveys were released by the Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron, Ohio, and Public Religion Research of Washington, D.C., on Sept. 15. The researchers divided the activists surveyed into "conservative" or "progressive" groups and posed slightly different questions to each group.

Regarding political priorities, a large majority of the conservative group listed just two issues as "most important" for religious people to focus on: abortion, cited by 83 percent, and same-sex marriage, cited by 65 percent. No other issue was categorized as "most important" by more than 26 percent of the group.

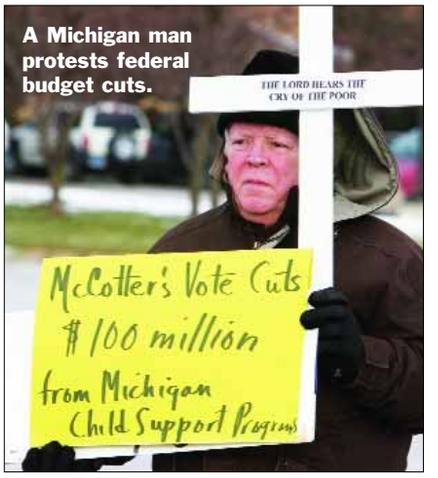
The responses by progressive activists were more diverse, with five different issues being identified as "most important" on a five-point scale measuring each of eight issues. Seventy-four percent of progressives identified poverty as most important; 67 percent identified health; 56 percent marked the environment; 48 percent listed jobs/economy; and 45 percent, the war in Iraq. The only issue for which the two groups gave similar rankings was immigration, which 21 percent of progressives and 26 percent of conservatives marked as most important.

Pope Prays for Afghan Troops and Civilians

After praying the Angelus on Sept. 20, Pope Benedict XVI offered his prayers for civilians caught in the world's conflicts and foreign troops working to promote peace and development. Speaking from the papal summer residence in Castel Gandolfo, Pope Benedict XVI said that he was deeply saddened to hear of the roadside bombing in Kabul, Afghanistan, that killed 10 Afghan civilians and six Italian soldiers on Sept. 17.

The deaths and injuries resulting from violence around the world "are facts we can never grow accustomed to and that incur strong reprimand and dismay in communities that hold peace and civil coexistence close to heart," the pope said. While he had special prayers for the families of the Italian casualities, the pope said he was also pained by the deaths of members of other international contingents "who work to promote peace and the development of institutions necessary for human coexistence."

Pope Benedict said he prayed to God "with a special thought for the dear civilian population," and he appealed to all parties to oppose "the logic of violence and death by fostering justice, reconciliation and peace and supporting the development of people, starting with love and mutual understanding." The pope also sent a telegram that was read during the state funeral for the six Italian soldiers at St. Paul's Outside the Walls on Sept. 21.



A Michigan man protests federal budget cuts.

North Africans Critique Synod Paper

As preparations continue for the Synod of Bishops for Africa in October, some portions of the African church are concerned that their experiences are not reflected in the synod's *instrumentum laboris*, or working document. Bishops, clergy and pastoral workers in North Africa say that the Vatican does not seem to recognize that they face different challenges than sub-Saharan Africa. Among those concerned are Catholics in Africa's Maghreb region, which includes Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, as well as Catholics in Libya and Mauritania. According to Bishop Maroun Lahham of Tunisia, the North African bishops' conference had sent a letter to the synod planners urging them to take into account the unique situation of the church in the north. Yet when Bishop Lahham read the working paper for the synod, he said, "I have to say I didn't find myself or this church" reflected in them.

Bishop Seeks End To Honduran Crisis

A Honduran bishop has said he will launch an effort to resolve the ongoing political crisis in the Central American country. Bishop Luis Santos Villeda of Santa Rosa de Copán said on Sept. 16 that he would see whether dialogue is possible between "the Resistance," Hondurans who oppose the government installed in a coup on June 28, "and the economically powerful who are behind the coup." Bishop Santos said that dialogue is important, "because if the armed forces and the police continue killing the people of the Resistance…this could provoke widespread resentment that could evolve into a civil war." Bishop Santos has celebrated Mass at two public demonstrations organized by the Resistance, but he denies that he is a member of the political movement. "It's the people who are in the Resistance, not me," he said. "My task is to provide pastoral accompaniment."

Vatican Approves Catechism Revision

The Vatican Congregation for Clergy has approved a small change in the *U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults* clarifying teaching about God's covenant with the Jewish people. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops announced in late August that the Vatican had granted its *recognitio* to a one-sentence revision of the catechism that was approved by the U.S. bishops at their meeting in June 2008. The revised sentence reads: "To the Jewish people, whom God first chose to hear his word, 'belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ.'" The original sentence read: "Thus the covenant that God made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them." In a statement, the bishops' conference said that "the clarification reflects the teaching of the church that all previous covenants that God made with the Jewish people are fulfilled in Jesus Christ through the new covenant established through his sacrificial death on the cross."

From CNS and other sources.

NEWS BRIEFS

Maria Odom

Pope Benedict XVI announced plans for a **Synod of Bishops for the Middle East** in October 2010 to address the trials of the Christian populations in the region. ✦ After a series of meetings with House and Senate leaders on Sept. 17, a delegation of **Hispanic bishops** expressed concern that immigrants would be left out of health care reform. ✦ Maria Odom, an immigration attorney in Georgia, has been named executive director of the **Catholic Legal Immigration Network**, known as Clinic. ✦ The Rev. Larry Snyder of Catholic Charities cited the **economic downturn** as a principal reason for a reported 10 percent increase in aid services nationwide from 2007 to 2008. ✦ The Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, the newly elected general secretary of the **World Council of Churches**, said on Vatican Radio on Aug. 28 that he believes it is important to cooperate with the Catholic Church to address common challenges. ✦ Rick Curry, S.J., the founder of the **National Theatre Workshop of the Handicapped** was ordained to the priesthood on Sept. 13 in Washington, D.C., after serving many years as a Jesuit brother.

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MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE

Classrooms for Peace

Peace and schools are returning to southern Sudan. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in January 2005 is holding. Landmines have been removed from key highways, and mine-removal work progresses on farmland. Along the border with Uganda, the Eastern Equatoria district used to be a corridor of conflict between the Sudanese and Ugandan civil wars. Now 1,000 refugees are returning to this corner of southern Sudan each month, according to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. Forty thousand refugees and internally displaced persons returned in the past year, with another 27,000 expected in 2009.

Challenges remain. Returning refugee children need permanent school buildings, trained and paid teachers, textbooks and school supplies, and girls need the chance to go to school. In the town of Lobone, only 10 percent of teachers have any sort of professional teacher training, and 95 percent of teachers lack books and the most basic school supplies.

Jesuit Refugee Service/USA and JRS/East Africa are accompanying and schooling these refugees on their journey home. The director of JRS/USA, Kenneth J. Gavin, S.J., describes the situation this way:

> It is amazing to see brand new primary schools appear in Sudanese communities where previously poorly constructed schools of mud and thatch were unusable during the long rainy seasons. For me, these schools are nothing less than gifts of hope to young children and their families, who suffered so deeply throughout the war years.

Similar refugee education programs are underway in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the Katanga Province, the D.R.C. government has delegated responsibilities for primary education to the local Catholic diocese. Returning refugees, who call themselves the New Hope Project, have created a new town and, in coalition with the local church and J.R.S., are constructing schools to help build the peace in the country.

> Are we serving the poor as they seek to educate themselves?

In the developed world, debates rage about the nature of Catholic education. Is Catholic education marked by the display of crucifixes in the classrooms, distinctive policies about which speakers are permitted to appear and the presence of theology faculty members with an ecclesiastical *mandatum*?

In impoverished and war-torn areas of the world, the Catholic contribution to education means something different. In places like southern Sudan and the Congo, where people have suffered devastating atrocities, the church builds peace and hope, restoring war-torn communities one schoolhouse at a time. These returning refugees dare to imagine and build a future where war ends and education begins.

As a new school year unfolds, Catholic educators wrestle with plans to better integrate concerns for justice, peace and global solidarity across our curricula. Yet too often we fail to tell stories of how our own church around the world is serving as a powerful force for justice, peace and global solidarity with the world's most vulnerable people.

Efforts are underway to help change that. Materials made available through a campaign of C.R.S. and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/globalpoverty), include inspiring stories of responses to pressing global challenges. C.R.S. (at CRSCollege.org) offers additional compelling stories and resources concerning church work for peace and justice. The Global Solidarity Network brings C.R.S. staff into interaction with students. The JRS/USA Web site (http://www.jrsusa.org) covers refugee stories and news of J.R.S. activities around the world, along with monthly reflections called "Praying With Refugees" and a new education module. The Catholic Peacebuilding Network likewise highlights church peacebuilding efforts (http://cpn.nd.edu/).

When discussing Catholic identity in education, we should include reflections on how well our institutions serve the poor and vulnerable. Are we accompanying and serving the poor as they seek to educate themselves? In solidarity, we are all enriched as we work to build God's kingdom.

MARYANN CUSIMANO LOVE, *during her sabbatical from the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., is a fellow at the Commission on International Religious Freedom.*

God Makes a Comeback

An interview with The Economist's John Micklethwait

BY AUSTEN IVEREIGH

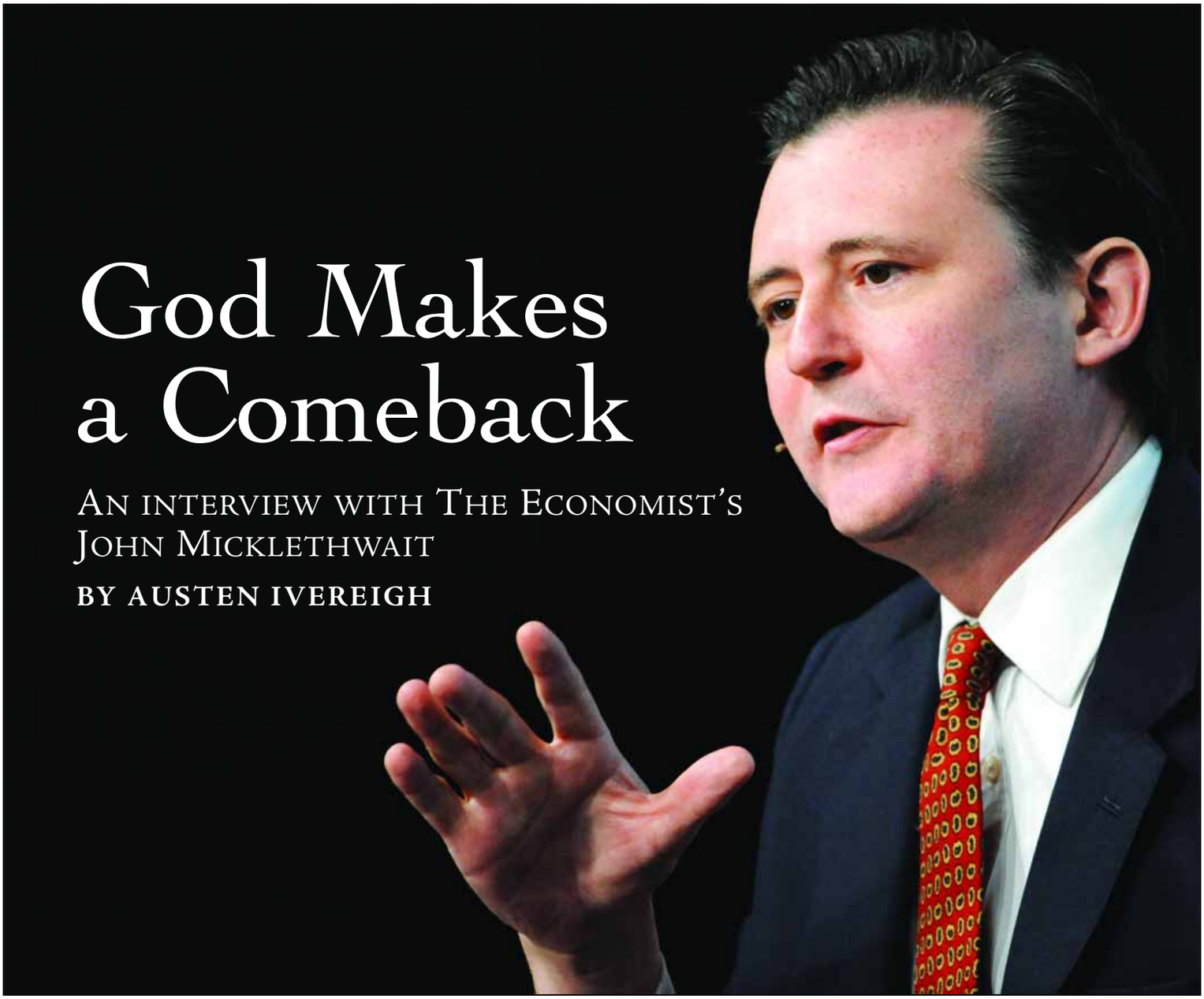

PHOTO: REUTERS/PHIL MCCARTEN

John Micklethwait, editor of The Economist, has about him the excited air of a man who has made a considerable discovery in a place people said he was crazy even to look. It turns out that religion, whose gradual disappearance has for a long time been an article of faith in European university circles, is making a major comeback, and in precisely the way that the experts have long insisted it could not—as an adjunct of modernity. The book Micklethwait co-authored with his colleague Adrian Wooldridge, *God Is Back: How the Global Revival of Faith Is Changing the World* (Penguin, 2009), has come to bury the secularization thesis. According to the authors, it is not true that as the world becomes more modern it becomes less believing. It was never true of the United States—a rather large exception—but now it turns out not to be true almost everywhere.

When we meet at Micklethwait's spacious house near London's Victoria Station, we are both a little excited about this discovery. For when we were students at Benedictine board-

AUSTEN IVEREIGH *is a journalist and former adviser to Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor.*

ing schools in the 1970s and 80s, it was commonly assumed that religion was in retreat and that the monks who taught us were doing something quaint and anachronistic, like the dance of a jungle tribe whose ancestral land was about to make way for a freeway.

"You now look back at the 1970s and you think, actually something happened," says Micklethwait. "By the end of the decade, in retrospect—definitely in retrospect—something big had happened in terms of religion and politics. God was back in there."

In retrospect, "the evidence for secularization not happening was in front of everyone's eyes," he says, citing the Iranian revolution, the rise of the moral majority in the United States and the Bharatiya Janata Party in India, and the global impact of Pope John Paul II. Yet the news took a long time to reach academe. In the late 1980s, about the time Micklethwait was beginning at The Economist after two years at Chase Manhattan Bank, the prevailing orthodoxy at Oxford, where I was doing my doctorate, was that that faith was epiphenomenal—a byproduct of something else. Therefore it did not merit proper study, except as a retrograde and authoritarian thing, a flight from modernity.

The academic error, Micklethwait thinks, was to have extrapolated a universal law from the retreat of the church from the public sphere in 19th-century Europe. Because the study of religion and the world fell between sociology and theology, academics missed the evidence. "What happened was that the sociology profession carried on writing books that took as their starting point that the world was becoming more secular," Micklethwait says. "They set out to examine the consequences of that, rather than examine the premise."

He and Wooldridge, Micklethwait said, "sort of stumbled upon" the untruth of the secularization thesis in 2004, when they were planning a follow-up to their successful book on America's conservative culture, *Right Nation: How Conservatism Won*. (Micklethwait knows America well. He was U.S. editor of The Economist prior to his appointment as editor in chief in 2006 and ran its New York bureau for two years.) They planned a book on faith from the usual standpoint of American exceptionalism. But "when we came to look at religion we discovered that that America was not so exceptional," he recalls. "We suddenly began to look at the rest of the world and ask why it wasn't going the way that it should have been. We thought: there's something big here."

Faith Thrives in Modernity

God Is Back is a brilliant survey of how America's model of Christianity—Protestant, elected, market-sensitive; the world of megachurches, "pastorpreneurs" and house churches—is booming at home and abroad. There are now 500 million renewalists (a category that includes both Pentecostals and charismatics), a quarter of the world's Christians, and they are expanding twice as fast as Catholics. The authors are occasionally horrified, but mostly impressed by the renewalists' energy, organizational genius and sensitivity to demand. But what most interests them is that behind this growth is modernity, evident in greater pluralism and individual choice—the very factors that the secularization thesis tells us should be undermining adherence to faith. The same forces vivifying American religion are bolstering it in the developing world, where 60 percent of all Christians now live.

That does not mean people of faith are at ease with modernity; religions reject much of what capitalism produces, even as they benefit from its fruits. Religion is both a critique and a counterbalance to global capitalism. People search for community in a world dislocated by the same forces that alienate them; they long for givens in a world where almost everything is reduced to choice; people yearn for God-given worth in a world where they are valued instead for what they produce and consume.

The key element connecting modernity and religious revival is pluralism. "A country can be modern and religious at the same time (or modern and irreligious)," write the authors. "But it is exceedingly difficult to be modern without being pluralistic." Religion is increasingly crafted, not inherited; it is "a seeking rather than a dwelling," the authors explain in a striking phrase. Take the United States, where an amazing 44 percent of people belong to a religion other than the one in which they were raised: Barack Obama, the rootless young man "choosing" his church in Chicago's South Side, is paradigmatic. Where religion has adapted to that cultural shift, it does best.

Do Liberty and Pluralism Foster Faith?

Does Micklethwait see a connection between the prospering of religion in a climate of liberty and the nature of God? Is God such that, where society supports the freedom to choose him, faith thrives? This is too theological a question for the author of a socioeconomic survey of religion; but he is delighted, because only days before, a British newspaper review (by a Catholic) had asked what a theological version of *God Is Back* might look like. "I think what you're suggesting is what it would say," he ventures.

God Is Back is evangelical about pluralism. For the flourishing of faith, the authors advocate the same freedom from subsidies and state control that Adam Smith proposed for the economy in *The Wealth of Nations*. They think the separation of church and state in the United States, with encouragement of religion, has proved the most fertile field for faith; and they think American foreign policy should be

more ambitious in promoting it. This may mean "a more customer-driven religion," acknowledges Micklethwait, but he does not think it means that non-Protestant faiths fare poorly. American Catholicism—described in the book as "arguably the most striking Evangelical success story of the second half of the nineteenth century"—has competed quite happily, he points out, without losing any of its basic characteristics.

But where religion fails to adapt to this model, its decline is marked. This is especially true of churches bound up with culture even if not subsidized by the state, as with the Church of England or Scandinavian Lutheranism; or separate from the state but subsidized by it, as with the churches in Germany. Tradition and habit are no substitutes for choice and commitment.

Religion in The Economist

The Economist, one of the most successful global British brands, with weekly sales of 1.4 million copies around the world, famously eschews bylines. Its editors fly, if not under the radar, at the edge of the screen. So it feels like a treat to meet this tall, formidably clever man, who shares his insights in that hesitant, self-deprecating way that afflicts products of English boarding schools. Micklethwait, 46, has asked not to be quizzed on his Catholic faith, but he admits to it in the introduction to the book along with his co-author's atheism.

Micklethwait is not responsible for appointing the magazine's first religion correspondent in those heady days after 2001, when the media discovered religion. Around that time Reuters decided to do the same, and the BBC appointed a committed Catholic as its director general. But Micklethwait's editorship since 2006 has coincided with The Economist's taking a new interest in faith, introducing a new international section that is the natural home, he says, for reporting on the Catholic Church and Islam. The change was marked by the weekly's "Religion Special Report" in November 2007, of which *God Is Back* is in many ways an expanded version. The report stepped forward to repent of the magazine's former blind spot about religion, and with a convert's zeal saw faith breaking out everywhere.

For those who like the magazine's crisp, witty, effortlessly magisterial style, *God Is Back* is a treat. It surveys the ups and downs of the faith market, leading to big conclusions checked by frequent caveats. But the risk of this business-survey approach when applied to faith is obvious: Isn't it better to be faithful than successful? Micklethwait agrees that it is but worries that this justifies man-made decline. He is amazed, for example, by the level of defeatism among Anglicans and thinks the Church of England is increasingly recognizing that establishment is a golden noose around its

neck. Pope Benedict XVI recognizes the same of the German church tax, according to Micklethwait, which is an enormous funding engine that eviscerates churches as much as it keeps them afloat. "I gather that there's one bit of Pope Benedict which wants to chuck that," reckons Micklethwait, "but another group around him says you just can't do that; this is worth billions of euros every year."

Does Micklethwait conclude that faith is at its most vigorous (which must mean more than successful; we are talking here of its transformative, binding power) when it is planted in plurality and freedom? The short answer is yes. But "there are millions of holy people who have inherited a faith and kept at it," he points out, adding that some evangelical churches unreasonably demand a past of addiction and promiscuity as proof of salvation. "But in general, in terms of fervency, on the whole the choice-based places, where people have made a choice and sought to direct their lives around it, those tend to be the places going best."

Catholicism's Competitive Edge

In all of these areas Micklethwait has surveyed, Catholicism "starts from an incredible advantage," he says. Its brand, even if overworked and tarnished by recent scandals, is the strongest. It is the first multinational, "the General Electric of the religious world"; it is omnipresent. In conflict zones, Catholic missionaries are the constant ones who know everyone, he found.

So while Rome remains a reactive player rather than a market leader or innovator, brand loyalty and ubiquitousness remain vital comparative advantages. Megachurches might grow dizzily, but they are more consumer-dependent and vulnerable to market fluctuations. Catholicism has absorbed the "acids of modernity" best of all, Micklethwait says. "If modernity is something you have to come to terms with, Catholicism is at one end and Islam at the other." Micklethwait thinks it is possible that as people "get used to religion being there," some of the depth you get with Catholics "might count for things."

But without forsaking what is best in the brand, Catholicism must respond to the consumer. That is something American Catholicism understands better than its European counterpart. "If you were a management consultant looking at Catholicism, looking at the church as a business," says Micklethwait, "you could argue that it has sometimes or too often mistaken the means of delivery for theology, so it has inherently clung onto things which aren't terribly useful." You might have the best light bulbs in the world, he says, but if you choose to sell them only through corner shops, there is a risk people will prefer the supermarket versions. A

A Fiery Gift

A meditation on birth and the spiritual life

BY SUSAN WINDLEY-DAOUST

All the adorable clothes for infants, jokes about pickles and ice cream, and debates about appropriate names for children occupy the expectant woman's mind like sitting-room company sharing a pleasant tea—until labor begins. In a flash, your visitors leave, their cooling teacups half-empty. Alone, or with a trusted companion, you may wait out the beginning contractions by reading a book or watching a movie, but you know as you have never known in your life what the main event is. Birth is the rock of motherhood. It does not easily allow diversions; it is more glorious and messy, more trying and transformative than a person might suspect. Basically, it is a lot like prayer.

If you are an average American, that last sentence may have come as a shock. But it is no groundbreaking metaphor to claim that the spiritual life is like a birth (Jn 3:3). Still, few people look seriously at the physical reality of giving birth as akin to the spiritual struggle of prayer. When I was struggling through a wonder-filled but challenging prayer period recently, a sentence settled within me: *This is a lot like giving birth; it feels as if something is trying to be born.* And it was not that I was looking toward a positive end—holding the baby—although at some level I was. Rather, it felt "existentially" like giving birth: a clearing of the mind, an expectant and somewhat painful waiting, the sense that my life is changing here and now. There was a concrete moment in my prayer when I thought, with surprise and gratitude, *I've been here before.*

One reason that few people take seriously the physical reality of giving birth as a teaching ground for receiving grace is that sanitized hospital births, with epidurals at the ready, change the experience of giving birth from a gift received to an event managed. When my husband and I discovered I was pregnant with our first child, we stumbled upon a method of giving birth naturally called the Bradley method. Despite the fact that a vast majority of women worldwide give birth in such a manner, this method is seen as the province of hippies by most American medical establishments. The Bradley method encourages couples to understand what is happening and then to cooperate by embracing the situation and "relaxing your muscles" into birth, which, as an incentive, makes it much less painful. I found that to be true: the pain was doable if I could concentrate on relaxing. But when I slipped from my relaxation practices—all the deep breathing, going limp at contractions, imagining muscles stretching and staying calm by repeating "this is good, this is normal, this is getting me to birth"—the difference was radical. I would get distracted, the pain of the contraction would begin, I would succumb to fear and resist by freezing my muscles, then the pain would shoot up dramatically, and I was gone.

All this is like the interior life. I am not referring to births that are horrifically complicated or have tragic ends: I will let those women tell their own stories; they are not mine to tell. But just as John Paul II reflected upon sexual union in his "theology of the body" as a sign pointing toward the ultimate union of God with the human being, a medically uncomplicated "good birth" points toward how all souls, pregnant with the Holy Spirit, are transformed by cooper-

ART: STEFANIE AUGUSTINE

SUSAN WINDLEY-DAOUST *is an assistant professor of theology at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, Winona campus. She also teaches in Saint Mary's Institute in Pastoral Ministries and is training to be a spiritual director.*

ating with the Spirit, letting God make all things new. And while every moment may not be what you wished for, even in that, it resembles the soul's journey to God.

Living in Reality

The spiritual path and the path to birth both begin with deciding to live in reality: the reality of your life and the reality of God. Just as we do not initiate prayer, but the Holy Spirit calls us to pray, so pregnant women are called to give birth. When that reality is fully realized, we respond. Jean Pierre de Caussade, S.J., in the spiritual classic *Abandonment to Divine Providence*, speaks of this response to God's call as the duty—even the sacrament—of the present moment:

> In the state of abandonment the only rule is the duty of the present moment. In this the soul is light as a feather, liquid as water, simple as a child, active as a ball in receiving and following the inspirations of grace. Such souls have no more consistence and rigidity than molten metal…so these souls are pliant and easily receptive of any form that God chooses to give them.

How different it would be if we saw childbirth as something to receive, rather than something to soldier through.

The calling of the present moment is a mystery. We do not control or manage the present; instead, we find ourselves within it. The present is the only place where we can make the choice to yield to God's will, to receive and yield to birth, yet we resist. We resist reality all the time; it is called self-deception. We see the narrow path but look for the wide road.

It is striking that the language de Caussade uses for spiritual transformation is some of the same relaxation language used by Bradley method teachers in responding to labor contractions: imagine yourself as liquid, imagine riding a wave, receive the birth of your child and allow it to happen. One of the keys to natural childbirth is learning to embrace what is happening to you: specifically, that your muscles are stretching and pushing in ways that may be unprecedented in your body, but it is what they were created to do. The worst physical pain comes in resisting. When you constrict your muscles—trying to avoid the stretching—you increase the pain. After all, you are fighting against your body. You have to learn to keep your muscles as calm as possible so they can stretch into something new.

ON THE WEB
An interview with Susan Windley-Daoust.
americamagazine.org/podcast

How different it would be if we saw childbirth as something to receive, a fiery gift, rather than as something to resist or soldier through. We receive a vocation as well: our own motherhood. True, at the moment of conception, you become a mother, whether that child lives or dies before birth. But there is something about the yielding and cooperating with an ultimate Power greater than your own that is the road to every vocation. God wants this child to be born, and for you to be a mother, now.

In Weakness, Strength

Another of the fiery gifts of birth is being forced to love our weakness. St. Francis de Sales speaks to the need to love our weakness, which he calls self-abjection, in order to recognize and magnify the glory of Christ. Many would prefer the term "weakness" to "abjection." But to be abject—desperately aware of one's utter poverty—describes exactly how most women feel at some point in a natural childbirth. No word better expresses the painful transition from contractions to pushing than "abject." St. Paul knew something of that abjectness himself (2 Cor 12:10), and expressed it using the language of birth in his Letter to the Romans (8:22-3, 26):

> We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now, and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.…In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings.

When we cede our illusion of control and consent to our weakness by allowing others to help, we are at our most human. Stripped of all artifice, we are left with our most radical relationships: God, our child and the person helping us to give birth. That sacrament of the present moment is a window into the interior life.

God does not always perceptibly lead in the birth process. Sometimes women must schedule their births for medical reasons or hasten them with medication. Occasionally that may be in the best interests of the child and the mother and therefore "a good birth." But when an

overwhelming majority of women in the United States have unnecessarily scheduled or medically augmented births, we must ask: Do we lose a window to God? A window to the interior life? When the Holy Spirit initiates a spiritual birth to something greater within us, will any of us be able to say, "I've been here before"?

Pointing Beyond

It was only after I gave birth three times—one by Caesarean section and two vaginal births after the Caesarean—that I read up on the theology of the body: that sex within marriage is a participation in the life of the Trinity, a covenantal union pointing analogically to an ultimate union with God. It is evocative teaching.

But I wonder why we do not think of childbirth in a similar way: a gift, a bodily experience that points beyond ourselves, that echoes our ultimate transformation in the Holy Spirit. Perhaps it is for many of the same reasons that, according to John Paul II, sex is experienced in such a twisted manner after the Fall. If the Evil One works through lies and deception, disordering what is created good, then there must be fruitful ground in twisting the original experience of childbirth.

Today, doctors routinely treat pregnancy like a disease. Many workplaces regard parental leave as "unpaid sick time." And our medical system fears malpractice litigation to such an extent that the U.S. Caesarean rate is at 31 percent, breaking records every year. This medical culture teaches women to dread the event that brings them face to face with their children. Still, something in our bones, our muscles and our spirits says that childbirth is greater than all that. It is a transformative experience, the edge of life and death, the play of wind and breath, the shock of pain and joy. It is where a woman is given a new gift: a new relationship with God, her husband and their child—practice in receiving grace.

I'll be candid: I cannot claim any mystical experience in any of my childbirths. Whether sad, frightening, silly or joyful, much of the work was rooted in a physical reality that kept me firmly on the ground. But my husband remains convinced of a mystical moment in my last childbirth. After a difficult transition, I collapsed on the bed and was able to rest about two minutes before pushing. Everyone in the room became instantly quiet, and there was this moment, he says, a hushed silence, God's peace present like the eye of the birthing storm. All I remember is that I was beyond thought, exhausted in every possible degree, and taking pleasure in breathing. I didn't hear any angels. But then, the urge to push came. And you have to respond "Here I am, Lord," like an ancient prophet, and allow God to push, push through you as you push along. That is the spiritual life. Birth is like that. A

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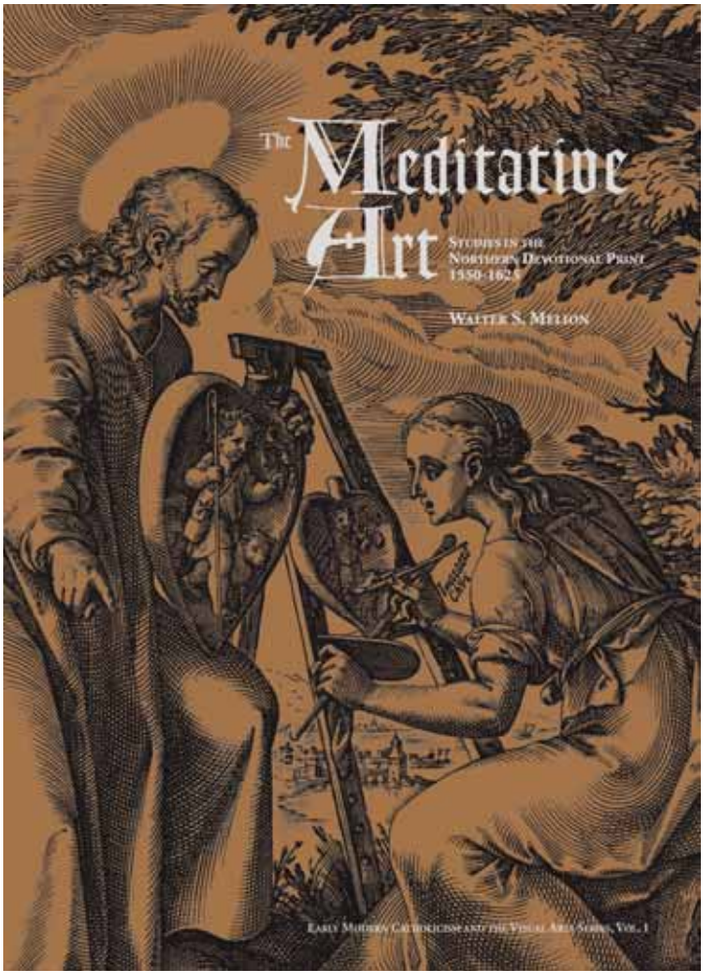

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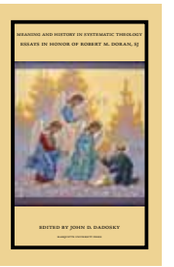

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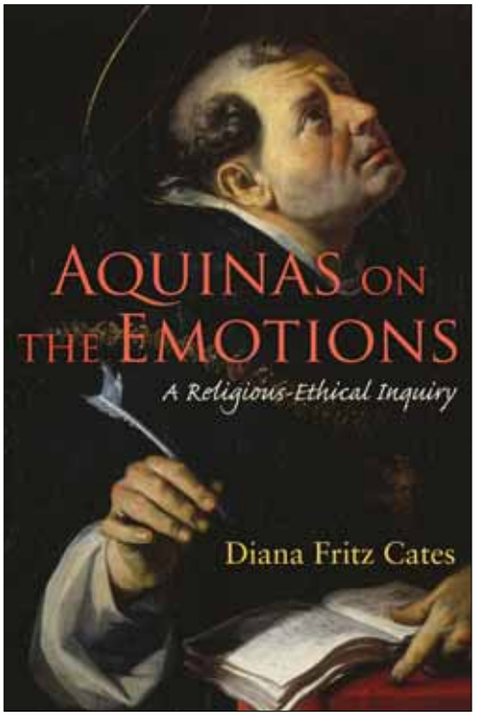

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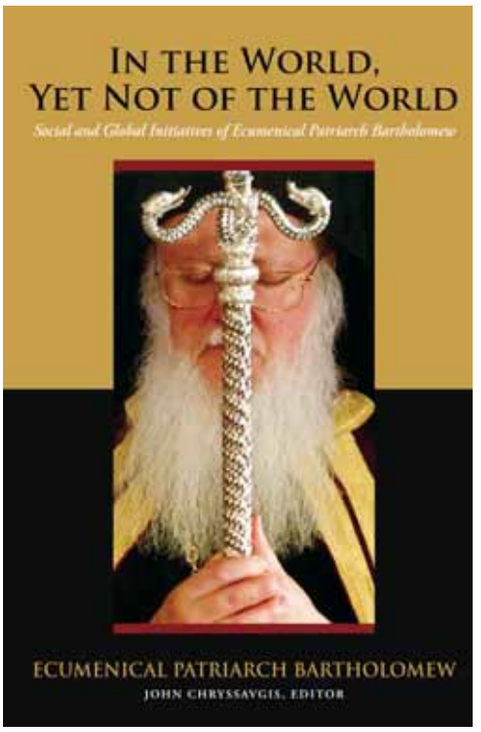

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Looking for Love

What does suffering say about God?

BY M. M. HUBELE

It was 4 a.m., and a new friend and I were finishing our third cup of French press coffee in a dusky room in downtown New York. Maybe it was the setting, maybe it was the caffeine, maybe it was the burgeoning friendship rising up in those wee morning hours, but I suddenly realized that our conversation was turning philosophical. He told me a big part of his life story: disillusioned by his divorced parents' hypocritical profession of Catholic ideals, he left in the dust the church, his faith and God. Then, inhaling deeply from the cigarette he was holding, he studied me keenly before remarking, "So you believe in God. Explain to me, what is faith? How can you believe?" His question hit me between my unsuspecting eyes, and hard as I tried to divine the answer in the coffee grounds at the bottom of my mug, I could not find a satisfying response. I thought of his childhood, of his justified doubt and fell into silence.

A few years later, among sloshing piles of papers to be written and books to be read, I opened a letter from my longtime pen pal. Her previous reflections on time spent in Amsterdam had revolved around revelations of living alone in a foreign country, images of riding her bike along the canals, questions about her future. But this e-mail broke from the typical. She spoke of her horror at seeing neo-Nazis chant outside her local temple, of her familial ache when she passed signs over roads leading to concentration camps, of her disgust at being frisked before she could enter temple for worship. But it was the concluding line—capitalized for emphasis—that still haunts me to this day: How could God have let the Holocaust happen? I closed my computer and turned to the papers, as I waited unsuccessfully for the divine revelation I needed to answer her question.

Then there is the dump. On a recent trip to Nicaragua I came face to face with pain as I had never known it. I was there to study the policy and history of this economically impoverished country. My weeklong experience culminated in a trip to Managua's nearly 70-acre dump, piled with cascading debris and lean-tos—homes constructed of salvage from the dump: brick, vending-machine siding and plain cardboard. Scattered among the families scrounging for valuables were the cattle owned by the dump's landlord. The animals were kept among the refuse to remind the people living in the dump that while they were squatters, the animals actually belonged on the grounds. Not a single person I saw at the dump would look me in the eye. How could they? They were kept lower than the cows.

I wept that night. If there is a loving God, how could that God let those people live in such squalor?

The problem is, I don't think anyone knows the answer to that question. The problem of pain, as C. S. Lewis so eloquently labels it, is a problem every believer must face at some point. It is the issue that validates doubt, that reverberates in more questions, that tempts faith. More than any other human experience, it is suffering that makes a case for atheism and shadows agnosticism. When we lovingly point a finger to the God who saves, the God who loves, that same finger can become a tool for blame because it seems evident that not all are saved, not all are loved. Given the suffering in our world, in our history and in ourselves, few attest unwaveringly that God is present in all that misery.

Denial or Optimism

It is easier to believe God does not exist. But being resilient, we are not willing to give up a hope for better things. We look in the mirror and remind ourselves that we are not going to sit by and watch the world tear itself apart. We will live good lives, lives that alleviate the pain we see. So we join humanitarian aid campaigns, volunteer at the local soup kitchen and visit the sick. Prayers to a gracious God have become concrete moral acts that help our neighbor. We leave behind churches to lend a hand to addicts. God will not help, perhaps, but we certainly will.

Such a philosophical stance is not original. Take the work of Ludwig Feuerbach, the 19th-century author of *The Essence of Christianity* and an inspirer of Karl Marx. His book urged everyday people to take on what once was God's role. Feuerbach wrote, "To will, to love, to think, are the highest powers, are the absolute nature of man as man, and the basis of his existence." Not monopolized by God, these characteristics come to define humanity. We become, if we choose to take up our responsibility, perfected people no longer beholden to God for salvation. We have mistaken our own power for the power of a phantom God. It is not

M. M. HUBELE, *of Phoenix, Ariz., is a freelance writer with a background in interreligious dialogue.*

that God failed us. It is that we failed ourselves. We can come to realize that "the divine activity is not distinct from the human."

His is a beautiful thought. If the divine activity is not distinct from the human, then what humans do can have the same characteristics as the divine, namely perfect reason, love, force of will. But few could attribute the Holocaust to such divine attributes. If humanity perfected is what we have erroneously labeled divine, then the question is not how God could have let that happen but how we could.

There's the rub. Isn't it intriguing that much of the pain we see is inflicted by one human on another? And we are supposed to be the true possessors of perfect reason, love and will. No, we are not perfect creatures maturing into our divine powers. Since Feuerbach's optimistic proclamation of "holy" perfection in humanity, we have seen whole segments of humanity tumbling down into worse and worse conditions. One could argue that we, the generations after Feuerbach, have proved him wrong.

ART: STEFANIE AUGUSTINE

Selfless Love

Yet a humanity-saving, selfless love—even between strangers—does exist in our world. How is that? Knowing the worst we are capable of, whether genocidal camps or weapons of mass destruction, we should not ask, How can God watch so much pain and stand by? but rather, Why is that *we* don't just stand by? What is it inside us that makes us denounce pain and suffering and work to prevent and overcome it? There is selflessness in such empathy. It is a selflessness that does not come from the same creative place within humanity that dreamed up poison gas, torture or ways to dehumanize the poor. Knowing the worst humanity is capable of, we must admit that such uncharacteristic selflessness seems to come from something other than human. Something apart, beyond. Call it what you will. I call it God.

This case for God is not new. The writer of the First Letter of John tells us that God is love. It is not just a poetic metaphor for God. It is a case.

There is a difference between a proof and a case. While a proof can be laid out and argued over with some movement toward rationality, a case tends to speak beyond the merely intellectual. It speaks to experiences, to emotions, to those unarticulated whispers resting just behind your right ear. And while many good cases are built on sturdy proof, some are relegated to the abyss between reason and intuition. Stirring up sediments of dismissed reflections, these cases challenge us to explore new pathways into territories we might otherwise have sealed off.

St. John the Evangelist wields his one-word description as a case. And the best I can do in the face of suffering is to turn back to that beautiful and enigmatic case: God is love. It is only when I ask challenging questions and let them bounce off that particular description of God that I can begin to reach a glimmer of understanding. The problem of pain and suffering does not disappear, but the problem of love does. We may still have to face challenges from friends and from life itself, but at least now we face them from within this case. And who knows? Love just may be the strongest case we have. A

A Life Freely Given

The ministry of a Catholic sister and physician

BY PATRICIA TALONE

As a child with a vivid and rich Catholic imagination, I was both fascinated and repelled by the notion of martyrdom. Over the years I have often been drawn in prayer to ponder the meaning of Jn 15:13: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friend." Does it mean that the Christian must embrace martyrdom out of love for Christ? Are we called to pour out our lives in far-off lands, to labor among the destitute in the world's slums? Or do the words of the Gospel call us to give ourselves wholeheartedly instead to family, co-workers and parishioners? Ultimately, of course, there are many ways to lay down one's life. Perhaps no one has embodied this for me more than my friend and colleague, Dr. Mary Christine Reyelt, who passed away last year.

We met in the summer of 1988 at a gathering of what was later to become the National Catholic AIDS Network. Two of the times Reyelt spoke at the meeting remain fixed in my memory. First, she pointed out that the epidemic we faced was not only a gay disease. Based on her experience in northern New Jersey, where the disease was rapidly spreading, AIDS affected women and men, gay and straight, citizen and immigrant. Persons of color, the poor and the disenfranchised were increasingly being diagnosed with the disease, and precisely for this reason, she noted, the church should extend its healing ministry to the AIDS community.

Reyelt's second point concerned what was then a widely held fear, even among health care professionals, that one might inadvertently receive a needle stick, and thus fall prey to AIDS. With her trademark humor, Reyelt observed that statistically she stood a greater chance of being killed by a car on the New Jersey Turnpike than of acquiring H.I.V. from a needle stick. But she confessed, presciently, that the transmission of hepatitis frightened her far more, because of its prevalence among the population she treated.

Fighting Disease

Mary Christine Reyelt died on June 1, 2008 because she was fully committed to her beliefs. A Sister of Charity of Saint Elizabeth (Convent Station, N.J.), she graduated from Georgetown Medical School and completed a residency at Bellevue/Veterans' Administration, specializing in infectious diseases just as AIDS, a terrifying and then-unnamed disease, was being reported by physicians on both coasts.

Once I asked her why she chose this specialty. She fixed me with her direct gaze, looking at me as if I had asked a really strange question: "Because the poor are disproportionately affected by infectious disease," she said. "That is where a Sister of Charity should be." That was her primary motivation, her passion.

ART: STEFANIE AUGUSTINE

PATRICIA TALONE, R.S.M., *is vice president for mission services of the Catholic Health Association, St. Louis, Mo.*

As a scientist and scholar, Reyelt approached each person living with H.I.V. as a fellow human traveler; she also welcomed the intellectual and scientific challenge to understand, address and beat this devastating disease. She brought her considerable spiritual, social and scientific skills to bear upon the medical reality of each patient she met.

In the early 1990s Reyelt's fear was realized when she received a needle stick while treating a patient, an IV-drug user. Although she followed all the medically prescribed precautions, Reyelt ultimately became so sick with hepatitis that her liver function failed. Facing certain death without a new liver and convinced that her work for the sick and dying was not finished, Reyelt underwent a transplant.

The transplantation process was not smooth, and Reyelt faced disheartening challenges. Yet she was back at her practice as soon as she was able. She never missed a Catholic AIDS Network meeting. Over the years the AIDS network met in many American cities, always on a shoe-string budget, sometimes in less than desirable venues.

Never did I hear her complain of the medications she had to take or the edema she frequently experienced. She joked about "moving slowly," especially in the morning. But that did not stop her from attending every international AIDS conference over a 20-year period. She traveled to Russia, Thailand and Africa to seek the best combinations of medicine to treat her patients. She took pride in the fact that some of her poorest patients lived with the disease for many years. And she thrilled in the knowledge that her female patients gave birth to healthy babies and were able to provide for their beloved children.

Caring for poor persons living with H.I.V. and ministering to patients who ultimately die of AIDS is a heavy burden for any doctor. Yet Reyelt never

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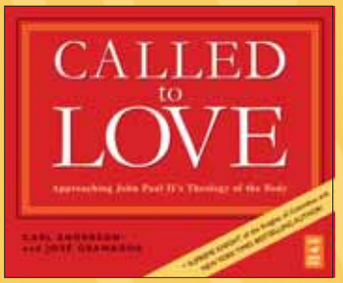

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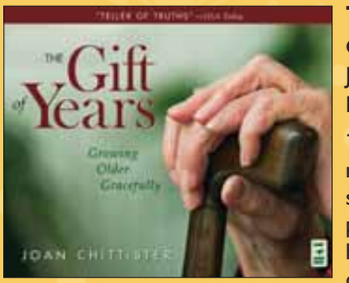

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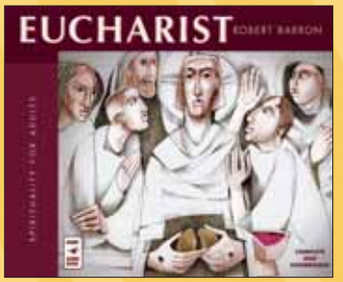

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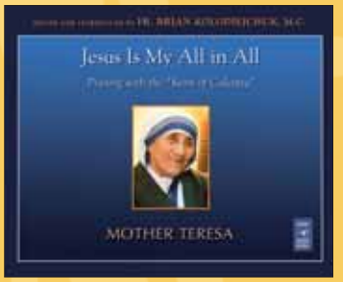

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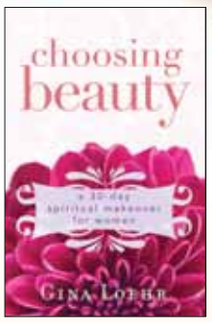

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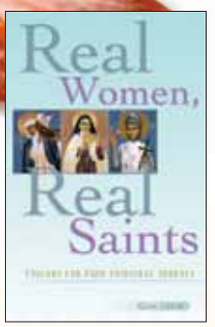

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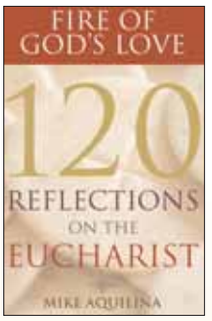

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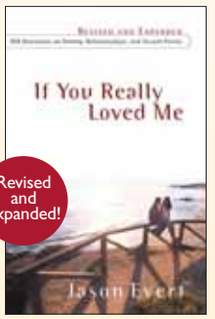

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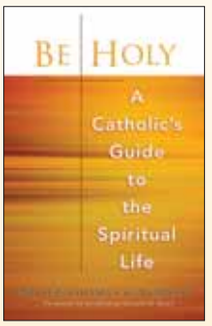

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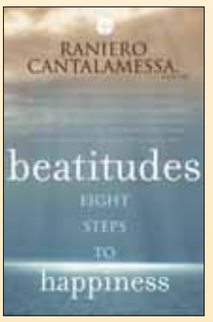

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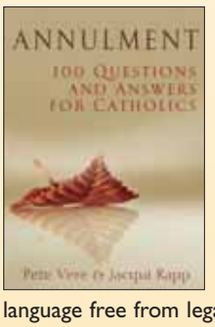

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seemed overwhelmed or depressed. She was sustained by a deep faith in the Gospel message and a sense of humor that gave her a light grasp on life. She did not take herself too seriously, nor was she impressed with pedantic pomposity in other professionals. Reyelt's eyes would often dance with glee as she silently made note of some humorous remark or a situation ripe with irony. Careful not to give offense, she would hold her wry remarks for a private moment, allowing herself to indulge in mirth that embraced the whole human family.

Sister Christine, Doctor Reyelt

While Reyelt was a physician par excellence, she was first and foremost a Sister of Charity. Her mother got it right when she would introduce her only child, saying, "I'd like you to meet my daughter, Sister Christine, Doctor Reyelt." Reyelt's loving religious community gave her the support to work in often trying circumstances. Her sisters provided the grounding, balance and impetus she needed to meet daily challenges. She relished her time apart with them—times of retreat and celebration.

Reyelt's transplanted liver, the gift of a generous, anonymous donor, served her well for 14 years. It permitted her to treat countless patients, to rack up thousands of frequent flyer miles, to pray and laugh and to be present to her fellow religious.

In February 2008, we met for the last time. Reyelt had a troubling, persistent cough. As a physician she knew that her immune system was severely compromised and that a common cold could lead to systemic illness. Ultimately, infection was the immediate cause of her death, yet her life was not taken from her because of a needle stick. Rather, she gave it fully and freely because of her commitment to Jesus and to the poor and the sick he inspired her to love.

On a misty June afternoon, Christine Reyelt's worlds—medicine, the state and national boards on which she served, and her religious community—came together in the chapel at Convent Station. Her sisters came to celebrate and thank God for her vocation and dedication; for her prayerfulness, playfulness and humor; and for the way she lived out St. Vincent de Paul's instruction that "you are the servant of the poor, always smiling and good humored." Most touching to me was the steady stream of persons, many living with AIDS, and others, family members of those who had died of the disease, who processed up the center aisle, one by one, to offer their thanks for this extraordinary woman.

Not all of us are called to be martyrs, but each one of us is called to give our lives for others. Christine Reyelt was a model of such selfless love, a physician and a devoted servant of God who laid down her life not with pomp and circumstance, but with grace, humility and humor. A

FALL BOOKS I | THOMAS J. SHELLEY

ALONG COMES MARY

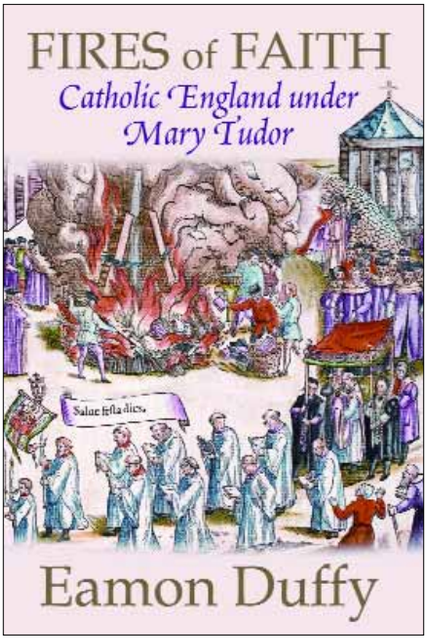
FIRES OF FAITH
Catholic England Under Mary Tudor

By Eamon Duffy
Yale Univ. Press 280p $28.50
ISBN 9780300152166

It has been said, not altogether facetiously, that historians are either plagiarists or revisionists. Some are content to repeat and rehash the standard interpretation of an era, while others dare to challenge the prevailing academic orthodoxy and offer a fresh new approach. Eamon Duffy unequivocally belongs in the latter category.

Professor of the History of Christianity at Cambridge University, Duffy established his scholarly credentials almost two decades ago with *The Stripping of the Altars*, a meticulously documented work in which he blew huge holes in the thesis that the Protestant Reformation in England was a grass-roots movement with widespread popular support. On the contrary, Duffy argued that it was imposed from above on a reluctant population. While Duffy's magisterial work has spawned its own revisionist critics, it remains today the starting point of any serious discussion of the English Reformation.

The religion of England was changed four times in the quarter century between Henry VIII's break with Rome in 1534 and the Elizabethan religious settlement of 1559. Duffy's latest book focuses on the brief reign of Mary Tudor (1553-58), Henry's Catholic daughter, who attempted to restore Catholicism after the equally brief reign of her half-brother Edward VI (1547-53), who opened the flood gates to Protestantism upon the death of Henry. Like *The Stripping of the Altars*, *Fires of Faith* is lavishly illustrated and includes six maps with the locations of the Marian executions.



Mary Tudor is a formidable test case for any revisionist historian. She is remembered as Bloody Mary, who sent over 280 Protestants to the stake. Duffy notes, "It was the most intense religious persecution of its kind anywhere in sixteenth-century Europe." Thanks to John Foxe's widely read *Acts and Monuments* of the Marian martyrs, Bloody Mary became part of English folklore, solidifying popular suspicion of an intrinsic connection between Catholicism and tyranny, cruelty and religious oppression. Not only partisan Protestant historians, but also many Catholic historians have written off the reign of Mary Tudor as an abject failure on the grounds that she was content to resort to force rather than attempt a genuine Catholic religious revival.

Professor Duffy demurs. For him the central figure in the Marian restoration of Catholicism was not the Queen, but her cousin, Cardinal Reginald Pole, the papal legate and the last Catholic archbishop of Canterbury. Although Pole has remained "the invisible man of the Marian restoration" for most historians, Duffy credits him with an impressive list of initiatives—such as the encouragement of preaching, the publication of Catholic devotional and polemical works, plans for the establishment of four seminaries and, of course, the heresy show trials and public executions intended to be the "theatre of justice." Ironically, Foxe largely absolved Pole for the executions in which Duffy shows he was deeply implicated.

Pole's greatest success was his renewal of the episcopate and cathedral clergy, deliberately recruiting candidates with both scholarly and pastoral credentials who were staunch supporters of the Roman primacy. The best measure of his success was the large number who resisted the Elizabethan religious changes, unlike those who participated in the ignominious collapse of the clergy under Henry. In four years Pole achieved results with the upper clergy that took decades to accomplish in France and Spain. "In that perspective," says Duffy, "Marian England was the hare to the rest of Europe's tortoise."

Duffy rejects the assertion that the Marian restoration was the last gasp of medieval Catholicism rather than the

beginning of the counter-reformation in England. Pole himself was an important figure in the formation of the counter-reformation in Italy and came within one vote of being elected pope at the conclave of 1550. His death on Nov. 17, 1558, several hours after the death of the childless Mary, spelled the end of the most promising effort to restore Catholicism in 16th-century England. However, many of Pole's closest collaborators fled abroad to play significant roles in the implementation of the Catholic Reformation in Europe. Posthumously Pole himself had a major impact, through his synodal decrees in England, in shaping the Council of Trent's legislation on the residence of bishops and the establishment of seminaries. Duffy goes so far as to say that "the Marian church 'invented' the counter-reformation."

ON THE WEB
Rev. Robert E. Lauder on the Catholic fiction of Alice McDermott.
americamagazine.org.culture

Both Mary and Elizabeth employed a combination of religious persuasion and political repression to secure the success of their respective religious establishments. Their methods excite revulsion today, but they were brutally effective. Elizabeth had the inestimable advantage that time was on her side. She occupied the English throne for 45 years, compared with Mary's five. History usually favors the winners, not the losers. Thus we have Bloody Mary and Good Queen Bess. Eamon Duffy offers cogent reasons to believe that it might have turned out differently.

MSGR. THOMAS J. SHELLEY, *a priest of the Archdiocese of New York, is professor of church history at Fordham University in New York City.*

DENISE LARDNER CARMODY

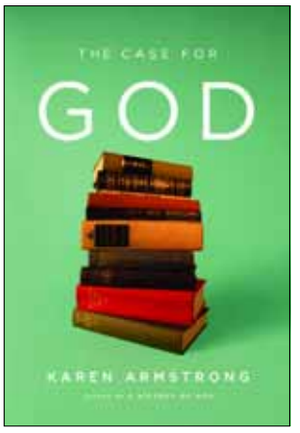
CRAVING THE TRANSCENDENT

THE CASE FOR GOD

By Karen Armstrong
Knopf. 432p $27.95
ISBN 9780307269188

Somehow it seems fitting that Karen Armstrong should make the case for God. Her earlier works establish her gift for displaying the vast historical range of a topic with little distortion. Here she pursues the human quest for God from the evidence of the cave painters of 30,000 B.C.E. to the musings of postmodern thinkers who opine about God-speculation that is beyond both theism and atheism. The book has two parts; each part has six chapters with abundant footnotes. An introduction, epilogue, glossary and selected bibliography provide solid guidance through and beyond the text.

Part I, "The Unknown God (30,000 BCE to 1500 CE)," quickly orients us to the author's major themes. Drawing on the work of anthropologists, Armstrong shows that early human beings, through their myths and rituals (which changed as they evolved), cultivated a sense of the transcendent that permitted them to experience *ekstasis*, stepping outside the ordinary. Rather than bemused dupes cringing before natural phenomena or manipulative priests, the peoples of ancient China and India (for example) developed disciplined rituals that let them recapture—realize—the cosmos as it was before the pain-filled reality that was ordinary life. Such cosmological myths and rituals ideally taught them to live compassionately, emptying themselves (*kenosis*) of all that impeded access to the transcendent. Similarly, Armstrong's analysis of the Hebrew Scriptures reveals stories (myths) of the one God who is powerful, benign, fair, ruthless, impartial, arbitrary and faithful. Clearly, Israelite monotheistic insight did not render the nature of God transparent; rather, God's utter transcendence makes idolatry both horrifying and ever possible. Through the ages, classical Judaism insists that revelation—Torah—must be heard within ritual, which opens the heart to reality beyond reason. From mystery religions to monotheism, myths and rituals are the dual disciplines for transcending ordinary life and finding meaning.



The chapters "Reason" and "Faith" carefully demonstrate how the Greek philosophers and the early adherents of Judaism, Christianity and Islam harbored analogous interpretations of the role of reason (a practical mode of thought that lets us function effectively in the world). But it is their agreement about *faith* that is crucial. Faith in these different contexts was closer to trust, commitment, loyalty and engagement than to abstract assent to theoretical or theological truths. Going beyond what reason alone could reach required disciplined living. Eventually such spiritual exercises led theologians and the laity to "the silence of unknowing." By the Middle Ages, Christianity—East and West—was permeated with the apophatic method: Whatever we say God is, we must affirm, deny and then deny the denial. Unfortunately, the apophatic

center did not hold; by the 15th century, theology lost its grounding in liturgy, community and charity. As theology grew more speculative, it was less able to respond to the craving of the human heart for the transcendent.

In Part II, "The Modern God (1500 CE to the Present)," Armstrong details the saga of how we systematically miss the mark spiritually even as we become scientifically sophisticated. For Socrates dialogue meant gentle persuasion with the possibility of both sides changing; dialogue today is often more like a debate, where neither true listening nor understanding occurs. Logic reigns and myth is equated with fiction. Religion is less about spiritual exercises and disciplined lifestyles than about adherence to a set of beliefs. Faith is the intellectual assent to such beliefs, without our being immersed in the experience they symbolize. Armstrong writes that modern people, unwilling or unable to submit to the self-emptying (*kenosis*) required to penetrate religious symbols, often feel "caught between two sets of extremists: religious fundamentalists, whose belligerent piety they find alienating, on the one hand, and militant atheists calling for the wholesale extermination of religion, on the other." Without romanticizing the past—bigots and atheists are found in all eras—it is difficult to deny that religious leaders, in Armstrong's words, "often spend more time enforcing doctrinal conformity than devising spiritual exercises that will make these official 'beliefs' a living reality in the daily lives of the faithful."

In chapters entitled "Science and Religion," "Scientific Religion," the "Enlightenment," "Atheism," "Unknowing" and the "Death of God?" the author marshals convincing evidence that the seduction of "objective certitude" lured us away from the pursuit of the ineffable. Armstrong moves us through modernity deftly and with a confidence that brooks little resistance. She relates a story in which American Christianity too is enthralled by positivism, eventually spawning both the literalism of the fundamentalists and the stridency of today's atheists, whose rejected "God" would scarcely be recognizable to orthodox theologians. From Columbus to Caputo, Armstrong reviews nearly every significant thinker whose work is germane. The result is a densely (and delightfully) written "case for God." The reader is left with the impression that human beings are perhaps soft-wired for the transcendent. Religiously inclined, we want more than bread: we seek rapture, *ekstasis*. We long to live generously, compassionately, humanely, lovingly. Augustine's intuition about the human heart may yet be correct. Sadly, effective help is in short supply. It would be a start, Armstrong suggests, if religious leaders and believers of all faiths used the word *dogma*—as the Greek fathers did—"to describe a truth that could not be put readily into words, could only be understood after long immersion in ritual, and, as the understanding of the community deepened, changed from one generation to another."

Who should read this book? Undergraduates in appropriate philosophy or theology courses would benefit from its sweeping account of humanity's pursuit of transcendence. Another audience would be reading groups interested in the "Why?" and "Why now?" of the New Atheists' appeal. I especially recommend it to anyone who is intellectually curious and hungry to know and feel the "reasons of the heart."

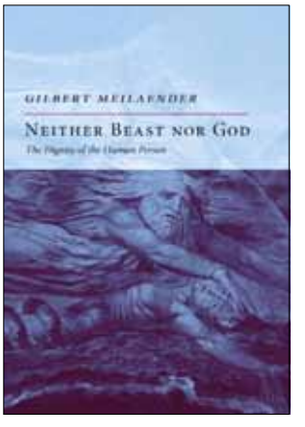
DENISE LARDNER CARMODY *is professor of religious studies at Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, Calif.*

RICHARD M. GULA

AN IN-BETWEEN CREATURE

NEITHER BEAST NOR GOD
The Dignity of the Human Person

By Gilbert Meilaender
Encounter Books. 180p $21.95
ISBN 9781594032578



"Respect human dignity" is a common imperative in ethics, yet this imperative is filled with ambiguity. On the one hand, we say that strong paternalism violates the dignity of the patient. On the other hand, we say that nothing we do can ever deprive another person of their dignity. Can we have it both ways? We can if we follow Gilbert Meilaender's core distinction between human dignity and personal dignity. Loss of control undermines human dignity, but it does not deprive one of personal dignity.

Meilaender, a professor of Christian ethics at Valparaiso University, a member of the President's Council on Bioethics and a fellow at the Hastings Center, addresses the lack of clarity with which the notion of dignity is used in ethics, especially bioethics. This short book expands his programmatic essay, "Human Dignity: Exploring and Explicating the Council's Vision," which appeared in the President's Council's 2008 volume, *Human Dignity and Bioethics*.

While *Neither Beast Nor God* is not a work in bioethics, it was certainly

inspired by bioethical debates, and in it Meilaender draws out a few implications for that field. Nor is this a work of theological ethics, though the anthropology is thoroughly Christian. Meilaender is convinced that we cannot properly understand what it means to be human apart from our relation to God. This book is a good example of religious thinking informing public debates on bioethical issues that deeply depend on some understanding of what it means to be human.

Meilaender's governing anthropological metaphor is of the human being as an "in-between" creature: not quite a beast; not quite a god (hence the book's title). We are a union of body (that ties us to beasts) and spirit (that makes us like a god). To flourish as a human species and to manifest human dignity, we need to live within our limits. We should not seek to live in disembodied ways more suited to gods (as some reproductive technologies want to do), nor should we treat our bodies as if they were open to manipulation and not integrally involved with our spirit (as an excessive use of medications to treat every bodily problem wants to do). Overall, Meilaender advocates honoring the embodied character of our life and living within its limitations. As a result, he is critical of procreating without bodily union and of hastening death when life diminishes.

The core contribution of this book, however, is the distinction Meilaender draws between human dignity and personal dignity. He contends that we cannot understand appeals to dignity unless we are willing to consider that respecting dignity might mean more than not harming a person or glibly acknowledging their autonomy.

Human dignity has to do with the capacities and limits characteristic of our species. Thinking in terms of human dignity gives rise to comparing

one another's capacities so that we regard some people as having more dignity than others. Those with less developed capacities (the mentally challenged) or diminished capacities (Alzheimer's patients) lack human dignity and so may be thought to be worth less than others.

Personal dignity, by contrast, protects against the dangers of making comparisons. It declares that each person is of equal worth, whatever his or her powers and limits may be. Personal dignity is fundamental to human dignity. It upholds equal regard for everyone as persons of worth apart from taking into account our human capacities. But personal dignity is not as obvious to us as are the shared capacities of human dignity. Since personal dignity is a theological assertion for Meilaender, we need the religious perspective of the covenantal relation with God in order to see it. Relying on the religious grounding for personal dignity and its priority seems to doom its reception in the public forum.

Nonetheless, Meilaender argues that equal dignity is a conviction so basic that it often goes undefended and that religious believers should not be ill at ease in the public square when declaring its priority. He argues equal dignity is a universal truth that will ultimately assert its claim on us even if we are obscuring it for now by some of our practices and policies.

This compact volume is a challenging read. It should be of interest to anyone who wants to follow ethical debates—those within the discussion of health care reform, for example—with a more refined vision of what it means to be human. Meilaender's significant contribution in clarifying dignity can add to these debates. He keeps the two forms of dignity in a dialectic relation rather than have them stand side by side. To promote health care reform, we will need to work out the relation between two forms of ethics. The ethics of equality values human beings in the light of our common humanity. The ethics of quality values life when it has the capacity for satisfying experiences.

In Meilaender's terms, human dignity allows us to talk both about what we need to flourish as human beings and about the value of each person regardless of our capacities. The dialectical relation of human and personal dignity does not require that we do whatever we can to enhance capacities so that we stay alive as long as we can. While we should not aim at the death of any person, respecting dignity makes our central concern how we live, not how long.

RICHARD M. GULA, S.S., *is professor of moral theology at the Franciscan School of Theology/Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, Calif.*

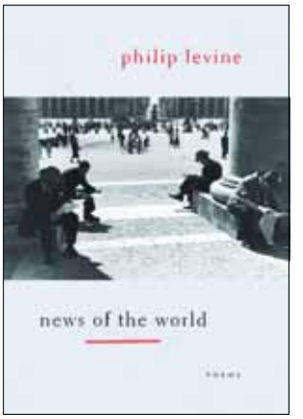
KELLY CHERRY

A MASTER'S WISDOM

NEWS OF THE WORLD
Poems

By Philip Levine
Knopf. 80p $25
ISBN 9780307272232

We often use the word *wise* to mean "insightful" or "graceful" or "shrewd," or even "humble." Philip Levine's newest, just-published poetry collection, his 20th (not even counting chapbooks), is wise in a more fundamental, truer way: it is *knowing*, and what it knows is what only maturity imparts to us. It gives us "news of the world" that can be got only by living in the world for a length of time. Nevertheless, to live long is not by itself enough to acquire this news from the world. One must attend to the world, earn one's place in it and take the measure of both self and other.



Nor does one have to be a poet to acquire it; but only a master will continue making art after unburdening himself of all youthful claims to specialness, for that unburdening is the last and largest step toward maturity. We may begin with a belief that we are as vital to art as art is to us—who would ever begin otherwise?—but maturity shows us we are not. We are small and alone, unsecured against loss and damage. The artist who, like Levine, takes the final step to maturity teaches readers how to be unafraid: of loss, of mortality, of lack of specialness. In other words, he teaches us how to live in the world with open hearts and calm minds. What can be more important than that?

To journey from delusions of grandeur to a relationship of amity and equality with the world as it is—that is the journey of maturity.

Levine, whose many prizes include the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, two National Book Critics Circle awards, the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize, has served as chair of the literature panel of the National Endowment for the Arts and was elected a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets in 2000. After years of teaching at California State University in Fresno, he was appointed the Distinguished Poet in Residence at New York University. Honors in such

abundance can be a hindrance to growth, promoting self-satisfaction, even self-congratulation, but Levine's moral compass is intact and as steady as ever.

He has assembled *News of the World* forthrightly, in four parts. Part I comprises poems about family history. Part II collects poems about Michigan, where the poet was born and educated and where he earned a living as a laborer in industrial plants. Prose poems reflecting on various far-flung places and times make up Part III. The final section confronts mortality.

It is a simple organization, but it is rendered complex by the sense we have, reading, that the volume as a whole is something like an extended meditation on what is to be learned from a life in the world. Perhaps it is the speaker's voice that accomplishes this, for though the poems are as much biographical (or fictionally biographical) as they are autobiographical, the voice is the same throughout—clear, direct, one might say collegial. He has written often, as he does here too, of childhood and youth in Michigan; he worked his way through Wayne State University as a blue-collar employee in automobile factories. In free-verse 14-liners he tells us about "Henry Ford/ the man who created/ the modern world" and the childhood world Ford destroyed:

> *...I loved that world*
> *with its little woods that held*
> *their darkness and the still ponds....*

"Wasn't that the way it worked/ men sold themselves to redeem their lives?" he asks in "Arrival and Departure." Time changes some things—though the current economy seems likely to bring only harder hardships to the men and women who depend on the assembly line for jobs; and though the working-class radicals of the thirties would be deeply perplexed by the dissolution of the Soviet Union—and in "Library Days" we see Levine discovering a different world, the world of books. He approaches the new world with the same determination that had fostered his earlier life. "I had work to do," he writes, taking up his future.

The work includes narrative poems that segue swiftly into anecdotal memory or surprising comic stops, as in

Mary's Cat

for Lucien

he came
like clockwork
every day at four,
those leonine paws
in imperious trot,
as if some inner alarm
roused him from his world
of couch and window
and hunting in the attic,
hurrying him to my lap
to greet the first Hail Mary
and settle in, the heft of him
warming my knees,
and in the mix of prayer and purr,
we meandered through the mysteries,
the beads disappearing into his fur
like ripe plums dropping into grass

when he died,
I carried him to the rocker
for one last go-round,
one last rosary
before the angel came—
the Glorious, of course,
resurrection being apt—
I anointed him with my tears,
blessed the small wrinkled ears,
the velvet paws growing cold,
the once triumphant plume of tail
now a ratty flag,
limp in surrender

now,
every day at four
when I journey the beads
alone,
in mind's eye, I see him
leap into the lap
of answered prayer,
Mary caressing
the tawny length of him,
as, in full throttle purr,
he kneads her robe
to his ecstatic
satisfaction

ETHEL POCHOCKI

ETHEL POCHOCKI *is the author of several children's books, including* The Blessing of Beasts *(Paraclete Press) and* Saints and Heroes for Kids *(St. Anthony Messenger Press), as well as* The Women of Lockerbie, *a collection of her poetry.*

"The Language Problem," "The Death of Mayakovsky" and the title poem. It includes poems about his father, his brother, his uncle Yakov, who before he moved to Detroit lived in Siberia, where "Even the wolves...moved/ through the trees without breathing" ("Yakov").

Now the poet is in his ninth decade. We wish him many more years and many more books, even if he does rather look forward to the condition of no longer owning anything, not even his name. He will be "no longer inflated/ or bruised" by people's opinions, "free at last" (from "Burial Rites"). But right now, he is alive and writing and has something to say, wisdom to impart:

...It took me years to learn
a way of walking under an umbrella
of indifferent stars, and to call them "heavenly
bodies," to regard myself as no part
of a great scheme that included everything.
I had to put one foot in front of another,
hold both arms out for balance, stare ahead,
breathe like a beginner, and hope to arrive.

These magnificently unadorned lines conclude the book's final poem, "Magic," wherein we observe how the human can triumph over the self. A kind of transcendence, I think.

KELLY CHERRY *is the author of 17 books of fiction, nonfiction and poetry, most recently* Hazard and Prospect *(Louisiana State Univ. Press).*

DOLORES R. LECKEY

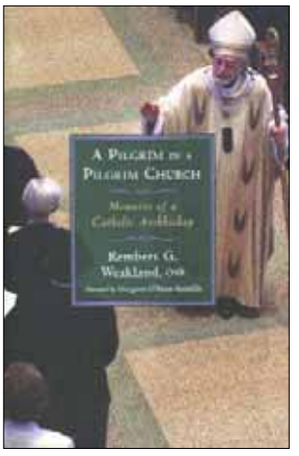
THE BISHOP'S TALE

A PILGRIM IN A PILGRIM CHURCH
Memoirs of a Catholic Archbishop

By Rembert G. Weakland, O.S.B.
Foreword by Margaret O'Brien Steinfels
Eerdmans. 384p $35
ISBN 9780802863829

The English mystery writer P. D. James once said she would not review a book written by a friend. I thought that was good advice when I read it, but now I am about to ignore it.

I have known Archbishop Rembert Weakland for over 30 years. He wrote the preface to my first book, which was about the Rule of St. Benedict in family life. I have his picture in my office nestled in among photos of family and other friends. (He is seated at a piano engrossed in a Chopin waltz.) When I worked at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops we collaborated on a number of issues and projects. I respected his erudition and intellectual prowess, and we shared a love for Benedictine traditions.



So when I heard the radio report on May 23, 2002, that he had had an affair with a man decades earlier, and that in 1998 there had been a cash settlement of $450,000, two thoughts converged: one, that he fell in love, probably for the first time, and that falling in love has a way of humanizing us; two, that nobody in church leadership—bishop, cardinal, whoever—should have free access to large sums of money. I knew that canon law allows bishops to avail themselves of church funds if the amount is not $500,000 or more, and to do so without the involvement of the diocesan finance committee. But less ($450,000 in the Weakland case) does not require oversight. This distinction, while legal in the strict sense of church law, seemed to me to fail a basic ethical test, as normal people understand ethics. I thought at the time that canon law needs some fixing; I still think so.

So with these "disclosures" and concerns as background, I entered into the memoir of an American archbishop.

The author begins with his personal crisis: the revelation of his long ago sexual affair and the payment of settlement money. In sorrow and humility, he makes a public confession of his transgressions in the context of a penitential service displaying not only an innate sense of drama but also an appreciation of history. One is reminded of penance in the early centuries of the church, when certain sins, confessed in public, earned the penitent a pilgrimage, often to dangerous places.

Weakland, indeed, goes on pilgrimage in the pages of this memoir, and the reader goes with him. After his public confession, he returns, using Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as a map of sorts, to the places of origin that shaped him at various stages of his life's journey. The family home in Paton, Pa., where his widowed mother raised six children, one of whom, George (later Rembert), displayed a gift for music; and St. Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, Pa., where as a young teenager he began his

lifelong explorations into the life of the mind.

The Benedictines gave the young Weakland the best education possible, not only in their own school, but later at the Julliard School of Music in New York and Columbia University, where he studied medieval literature, art and architecture. Columbia granted him a scholarship that allowed him to study in Milan, where he first met the archbishop of Milan, Giovanni Montini, later Pope Paul VI. That was the beginning of one of the most important relationships in Weakland's life.

With every experience, his world—including the church world—grew larger and culturally richer. But the Benedictines gave him something more, something that remains to this day. They gave him the Rule of Benedict as a way to center his life and to guide him as he moved from one leadership role to another, nationally and internationally. He learned from the monks who were involved in his formation that St. Benedict saw the monk as one on a search for God. Benedict did not say the important point was finding God, but the continuous search for God. In all of the roles and responsibilities that were his over the years—abbot of St. Vincent's, abbot primate of all the Benedictine houses in the world, archbishop of Milwaukee, a national leader regarding issues of social justice, liturgy, ecumenical and interreligious matters—always the Rule, the Benedictine way of life, anchored him.

As I read *A Pilgrim in a Pilgrim Church*, I was reminded of three of my favorite memoirists. Like the Polish writer Czeslaw Milosz, Weakland places the self against a historical background. He demonstrates that the personal and the historical can illuminate each other, and bring history from the realm of the abstract to that of the concrete through the medium of the personal story. We meet the ecclesiastical structure of the Catholic Church through his encounters with real people, and history comes alive.

Patricia Hampl does something similar. She is skilled in relating the personal story to a larger horizon. For her, the memoir is an effort to learn things one could not otherwise know; it is a movement toward talking about big issues, including meaning and values. Weakland's story does this too. With its triumphs and failures, its sorrow and shame, this monk's tale not only moves him to a deeper level of self-understanding but raises big issues the church needs to grapple with honestly: the role of the laity in the contemporary church, and especially of women; the failure to prepare celibate leaders to deal with human/sexual development; the theological contradictions in the claim that homosexual orientation is intrinsically disordered; the meaning of authority in the light of the Gospel; the structural reasons behind the bishops'

incompetence in the sexual abuse crises; and the uses and misuses of money. And that's the short list.

Finally, I thought of Euginia Ginzburg, who wrote about her life as a political prisoner in Stalin's Siberian camps. She assured her readers that she had written down the truth, not the whole truth, she said, because she had neither the range of information nor the skill and because no one knows the whole truth. But she insisted there were no lies in her account. I believe there are no lies in Weakland's pilgrimage account. He speaks the truth, a deeply personal truth. Are there suppressions? Probably. We all carry unconscious suppressions. Might his judgments be skewed? Perhaps. Who of us is free of bias? But I can find no deliberate deception in these pages.

ON THE WEB
From the archives, Rembert Weakland, O.S.B., on his American upbringing.
americamagazine.org/pages

A Pilgrim in a Pilgrim Church becomes a lens for viewing—and understanding a little better—a period of church history where tensions, confusion and hope intertwined.

DOLORES R. LECKEY *is senior fellow at Woodstock Theological Center, Washington, D.C.*

TOM DEIGNAN

STREETS OF PHILADELPHIA

CLOSING TIME
A Memoir

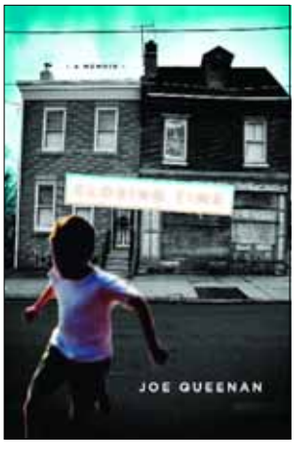
By Joe Queenan
Viking. 352p $26.95
ISBN 9780670020638

On a recent episode of the hit cable drama "Rescue Me," the Irish-American firefighter Tommy Gavin (Denis Leary) attends his father's funeral. In a subsequent fantasy sequence, Leary takes an ax to the old man's coffin. Clearly, father and son had some unresolved issues—and the Gavins are not alone.

Irish fathers—in movies, books, memoirs and more—are often a disturbingly flawed group.

There is Frank McCourt's dad, Malachy, from *Angela's Ashes*. Movies like "Good Will Hunting" and "The Brothers McMullen" are set in motion by abusive fathers. And in literature by such titans as Eugene O'Neill and James Joyce, fathers range from scheming to tyrannical.

Add Joe Queenan's father to this notorious roster. In *Closing Time*, the humorist and author of nearly 10 books (including *Balsamic Dreams*), takes a dark look back at his abusive, alcoholic father and his youth in the projects of Philadelphia.



That Queenan survived a childhood spent under the fist of his father is astounding. How he emerged with a sense of humor and decency, not to mention a bellyful of (more or less controlled) rage, is the subject of this book.

Queenan's dad was abusive because his own "father had been beastly to him, abusive in the generally horrific way that Irish males often are to their sons." Also, "he had grown up in the Great Depression."

Not surprisingly, Queenan spends much time talking about being poor and being Irish, though he has no interest whatsoever in any therapeutic "answers" that might help him understand what he had to endure.

Closing Time's most provocative moments may be when Queenan moves from the sad particularities of his own impoverished youth to the subject of poverty in general.

"Poverty is a lifestyle, a philosophy, a modus vivendi, an agglomeration of bad habits, which is why nobody who has ever been poor physically ever stops being poor emotionally," Queenan writes. "The once-poor simply become masters of disguise…trying to keep a straight face while someone talks about low self-esteem."

Queenan is an unapologetic ranter, and there are passages in *Closing Time* that will make some readers squirm. ("Poor people behave stupidly because poverty is a finishing school where children learn to be stupid.") But his refusal to romanticize poverty, his clear-eyed description of all of poverty's consequences, is refreshing. By the time Joe Queenan was born, the family was already on a downward spiral. They eventually lose their home and move into public housing.

"Three things kept us going through these wilderness years: the Catholic Church, the generosity of [a] few relatives…and the public library."

It is tempting to see young Joe's fledgling interest in books and ideas as just another way to aggravate his blue-collar Dad. But as Queenan makes clear, his father, for all his flaws, valued the written word. Queenan even took dictation when his father decided to write one of his famously eloquent letters to a newspaper.

Perhaps that is why Queenan, along with his sisters, became excellent students. Joe even decides to become a priest. He enrolls in Maryknoll Junior

Seminary, which does not lead him, ultimately, to fulfill his vocation, but it does get him out of Philly for the first time.

Queenan then sets his sights on getting accepted into St. Joseph's College (in part because of the "abiding allure of the Society of Jesus"). While Queenan is intellectually growing, however, his father is still drinking and seething.

There are two shocking scenes near the end of *Closing Time* that permanently change the nature of the author's relationship with his father. Perhaps they could have been explored in greater depth, though it must be added that one thing you take away from the book is that exploration in no way leads to explanation or understanding; nor should it.

By the time he is in college, Queenan develops a passion for music and French culture. He spends a glorious year in Paris, falls in and out of love with girls who share his artistic interests and, later, comes to his father's side when the old man—"who has been drinking since he was thirteen and smoking since he was ten"—finally succumbs to cancer.

Queenan, though, is not interested in forgiving. He is exhausted and simply wants to move on. "My father was a nightmare from which his family needed to awake," he writes.

What is strongest overall about *Closing Time* is Queenan's voice, his astounding lack of sentimentality, his ability to find humor in nearly any bleak situation. The book loses some steam, though, when Queenan's focus shifts from his father to other, more positive male figures in his life. Looming over all of this is Queenan's elusive mother, a hard-working, persistent woman, whom the reader cannot help but want to learn more about. Then again, given what she had to endure, Queenan's mother probably deserves a book of her own.

Finally, given Queenan's intellectual evolution, it might have been interesting to hear him reflect on the many published stories that resemble his. From "Studs Lonigan" to "Saturday Night Fever," the urban Catholic male and his suffocating environment is an enduring narrative that transcends eras and ethnicities.

Still, *Closing Time* is easily one of the most refreshingly honest, even brave, memoirs to appear in recent years.

TOM DEIGNAN, *books columnist for Irish America magazine, is the author of* Coming to America: Irish Americans. *He is writing a novel about a New York City high school.*

BILL WILLIAMS

DARING DEO

STRENGTH IN WHAT REMAINS

A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness

By Tracy Kidder
Random House. 304p $26
ISBN 9781400066216

Genocide has claimed hundreds of thousands of African lives in recent decades. In his ambitious new book, Tracy Kidder, the Pulitzer Prize-winning writer, takes readers into the heart of that awful chapter in human history through the eyes of a Burundian medical student named Deogratias—known as Deo—who narrowly escaped the slaughter and fled to New York.

"A young man arrives in the big city with two hundred dollars in his pocket, no English at all, and memories of horror so fresh that he sometimes confuses past and present," Kidder writes. "And then, two years later, he enrolls in an Ivy League university. How did this happen? Where did he find the strength?"

The arc of Deo's life, painstakingly reconstructed by Kidder during long interviews and a trip to Africa, is breathtaking. Deo was a medical intern in 1993 when a wave of ethnic killing began in Burundi. After hiding in tall grass and living in refugee camps for months, Deo secured a visa allowing him to fly to New York, where he delivered groceries to survive, slept in Central Park, learned English and eventually studied at Columbia University and later at the Harvard School of Public Health and Dartmouth Medical School, all the while wracked by nightmares of the carnage he had left behind.

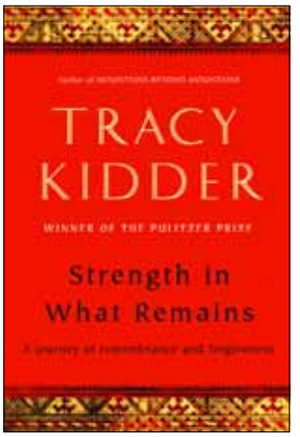
Deo phoned home, fearful of what might have happened to his family. He learned that several family members had died in the violence, including a cousin who was beheaded.

Though Kidder attempts to understand the hatred between Tutsi and Hutu, it remains a mystery. Historians cannot agree on what makes one person a Tutsi and another a Hutu, because there are no clear ethnic, religious or historical differences. And yet both sides have engaged in periodic genocide.

Although Tutsi make up only 14 percent of Burundi's population, they usually have constituted the ruling class. Because Deo was a Tutsi, he enjoyed advantages, like being admitted to the best schools.

While an intern in a rural hospital in 1993, Deo sensed that trouble was brewing. One day, as he prepared to visit patients, he noticed the absence of any nurses or doctors. It happened that Burundi's Hutu president had been assassinated, and Hutus were coming to exact revenge. He hid under a bed as militiamen stormed through

the hospital, shouting "warm them up," code for pouring gasoline on Tutsis and setting them on fire. He smelled gasoline, then smoke. He hid until nightfall, and then fled past scenes of slaughter, including rivers filled with bodies. At one point, he spotted a fly on a leaf and thought, "How lucky you are not to be a human being."



While Deo was hiding, a Hutu woman approached and offered to protect him. He was suspicious, but she reassured him by saying, "I'm a woman and I'm a mother." When militiamen tried to take Deo, she saved his life by telling them that he was her son.

The story unfolds in layers as Kidder moves back and forth between America and Burundi, a tiny nation the size of Maryland and among the poorest, with an average life expectancy of 39 years.

At Columbia, Deo studied philosophy because he wanted answers to questions about good and evil, humanity and God. He spent hours sitting alone in St. John the Divine Cathedral in Manhattan, trying to reconcile his experience of genocide with his belief in God.

Kidder felt uncomfortable probing into Deo's past, and several times offered to stop "my search for his story and let his memories die, if they would." Gradually, Kidder managed to pierce the shell of this shy, intelligent, introspective, wounded young man.

In one of the most moving episodes, Deo and Kidder meet a priest who had been principal of a Catholic high school in 1997 and had tried to create an "example of unity" by having Hutu and Tutsi students live and pray together. One day Hutu soldiers burst into the school dormitory and ordered "Hutu brothers" to step to one side and "Tutsi cockroaches" to the other. When the students refused to separate, the soldiers decided to kill them all. Some escaped, but 40 were murdered.

"It was said that some of the dying boys quoted Jesus on the cross, crying out to God to forgive their killers because they didn't know what they were doing," Kidder writes. Portraits of the slain boys were later painted on a wall above an altar.

In America, Deo had heard about the work of Paul Farmer, the Harvard physician who has founded medical clinics around the world and was the subject of another acclaimed Kidder book, *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. After Deo and Farmer met in Boston, Deo went to work for Farmer, who mentored him.

Deo's dream since high school had been to build his own medical clinic in Burundi. In 2006 he withdrew from Dartmouth Medical School to devote his full energy to the project. With support from Farmer and other benefactors, the clinic opened in 2007. Deo sees the area around the clinic becoming a neutral ground where Tutsis and Hutus can mingle without fear, "a place of reconciliation for everyone, including him."

Kidder has written a stunning and poignant story, weaving together several threads and leaving the reader with indelible images of senseless killing, admirable heroism and unmatched resilience of the human spirit.

BILL WILLIAMS, *a freelance writer in West Hartford, Conn., is a former editorial writer for The Hartford Courant. He is a member of the National Book Critics Circle.*

TELEVISION | TERRANCE W. KLEIN

MANHATTAN GOTHIC

'Mad Men' and the shock of recognition

Flannery O'Connor explained the grotesquery of her characters and plot twists by saying that the subject of her fiction was "the action of grace in territory held largely by the devil." She felt her characters and plots needed to be distorted to the point of the surreal to produce in the reader a "shock" of recognition. O'Connor's stories each contain "an action that is totally unexpected, yet totally believable," often an act of violence, like the murder of the cantankerous and haughty grandmother in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" or the self-blinding of Hazel Motes in *Wise Blood*. Violence, she said, is "the extreme situation that best reveals what we are essentially." We are meant to see in her stories our need for grace.

Amy Hungerford, an English professor at Yale, sometimes asks her students whether they would want to have dinner with O'Connor's characters—unlikeable folk. The same can also be said about the characters of "Mad Men," the critically lauded AMC series, although it would more likely be a cocktail that one would decline to enjoy in their company. Don Draper and the executives with whom he works at the Sterling Cooper Ad Agency are hollow, rapacious Philistines. Draper would not want to have a drink with anyone without the promise that it would lead to his success in business or philandering.

"Mad Men" employs the same creative device Flannery O'Connor used.

Jon Hamm, left, as Don Draper and Vincent Kartheiser, right, as Pete Campbell meet with a client.

PHOTO: AMC/CARIN BAER

It radically resets a character or situation so that readers or viewers see themselves from a previously unknown vantage point. O'Connor did this geographically by exploiting her native, rural South—strange territory to many of us. Matthew Weiner, the creator of "Mad Men" and a writer for the last three seasons of "The Sopranos," accomplishes the same through temporal dislocation. He takes us back to the early 1960s and, with the aid of a half-century of hindsight, we see ourselves with new eyes.

In the series' first season, a child is shown in the Draper family home playing with a plastic dry-cleaning bag. A parent scolds, warning not of danger to the child but of wrinkling the garment. When the Draper family picnics in a bucolic setting, Betty Draper, Don's wife, concludes the festivities with a brisk shake of the blanket, sending all their trash onto the field. So many people smoke in the offices of Sterling Cooper that one wonders whether they've had a premonition that one day the practice will be prohibited. When Don, driving while drunk, causes a car accident, the local Long Island cop decides to get tough. The errant New Yorker must pay the full $150 fine before he can drive away. There's no arrest, just a small contribution to the local economy.

ON THE WEB
A conversation about "Mad Men."
americamagazine.org/podcast

The series' chief moral pedagogy lies in its depiction of 1960s sexism. A woman at Sterling Cooper is called a "girl," "babe," "sweetheart," almost any form of address except one that suggests equality. Peggy Olsen, a secretary raised to the position of copywriter, is sidelined and belittled by the men with whom she works and shunned and resented by the women. In season two, she is told—by a woman—that the only way to succeed in a man's world is to become an object of men's desire. A lesson in sexism is combined with one in racism when Paul Kinsey, a copywriter and aspiring novelist, dates an African-American woman from New Jersey. At a party with his co-workers, he instructs her not to speak in his absence, lest her socioeconomic background become apparent to the others.

But do we get it? Do we see ourselves in the characters of "Mad Men," or do we superciliously take pride in having left behind their sexism, their racism, their ecological callousness? When the Democratic Party chose to nominate Barack Obama in preference to Hillary Clinton, was it a sign that racism is dead or that sexism is still alive? And if racism is dead, why did it take a

White House summit to conclude the contentious national debate over the arrest of the Harvard professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr.? Racism, like any other prejudice, can be the mote we have simply learned to look past, making it all the more difficult to diagnose. Today many Americans must leave their offices to smoke, but some toss their cigarette butts onto the street, despite the ecological damage (the butts are not biodegradable, take 10 to 15 years to decompose and leach toxic chemicals into the water and soil).

Students first encountering Flannery O'Connor's fiction often protest that her stories are too "Gothic" to be realistic. She insisted that her stories were credible, though not easy to believe. The difficulty in accepting their verisimilitude is meant to trigger our recognition of grace; the stories are heightened in feature so that clouded-over contemporary eyes can see God at work. Hazel Motes really sees only *after* he has blinded himself. We are supposed to ask ourselves what it would take for us to see.

The danger of the temporal dislocation of "Mad Men" is that so many years have passed since the 1960s that viewers no longer recognize themselves in the insecure men and women who bed each other in hotel rooms and commit rape in corporate boardrooms. Do career women today feel themselves more secure at work than Peggy Olsen does? Is the emotionally suffocating marriage of Don and Betty Draper a relic of the past? "Mad Men" is a morality play, and Don Draper is an everyman. Even his identity is borrowed from a dead comrade of the Korean War. As brilliantly played by Jon Hamm, Draper is reminiscent of Walker Percy's oft-repeated protagonist, a walking wound that no philandering can cure, here transplanted from New Orleans to Ossining, N.Y., the Draper suburban home. The self-alienation that expresses itself in perfervid promiscuity is not a thing of the past.

Both O'Connor's fiction and "Mad Men" can be received without any shock of grace. (Students are often surprised to learn that O'Connor intended her stories to be all about the action of grace.) Some read them simply as macabre stories without a moral. Not everyone sees the morality tale implicit in the saga of Sterling Cooper. Surely there are viewers who wish they could be Don Draper, who don't recognize the soul-sadness stirred into his martinis. Hollow men have hollow dreams. It takes a lot to see grace at work in territory held largely by the devil. The same might be said of time, as O'Connor might put it, when Satan winds the springs.

REV. TERRANCE W. KLEIN *is an associate professor of theology at Fordham University and the author of* Vanity Faith: Searching for Spirituality Among the Stars *(Liturgical Press, 2009).*

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LETTERS

Exercise and Spirituality

I much appreciated Maurice Timothy Reidy's latest Of Many Things column (9/14). I developed the cycling addiction this past summer. A doctor I heard speak recently described exercise, including cycling, as "meditation in action." Cycling is an enjoyable way to see new places, meet new friends and develop new insights. I look forward to reading future articles on exercise (broadly defined) and spirituality.

BEN CRITTENDEN
Anchorage, Alaska

Reform in Kenya

Thank you for keeping the suffering people of Kenya and East Africa in the spotlight (Signs of the Times, 9/28). I was still living and working there when the post-election violence broke out in December 2007. A way must be found to bring the instigators to justice. They are devious and determined to cling to power on the backs of the poor.

There is still a long path to genuine democracy in Kenya, with open and free and fair elections, literacy and transparency being important components. The ordinary people of Kenya desperately need and deserve civil peace based on an open and fair sharing of natural resources and land reform. The resistance to such reform is both subtle and blatant, longstanding and fierce. The Kenyan people need international help to achieve these goals, or poverty, violence and corruption will continue to be a way of life.

MAE KIERANS, C.S.J.
St. John's, Newfoundland

Parents as First Teachers

Brad Rothrock ("God and the Teenage Mind," 9/14) says most Catholic teenagers have developed ideas about belief based on "some of the worst God-talk popular culture has to offer." He then suggests a remedial curriculum that high school religion teachers might use to counteract those ideas.

I suggest an added remedy: Help Catholic parents teach their preschool children about faith. When toddlers ask such questions as, "Do goldfish go to heaven?" or "Are you crying because grandma died?" a parent has an opportunity to explain how everyone struggles with belief in a loving God. Are parishes across the country systematically assisting parents to seize such opportunities? I don't think so. Little children who are not taught about faith at home are left to spend their first six or seven years absorbing from television and elsewhere "some of the worst God-talk popular culture has to offer."

PAUL J. McCARREN, S.J.
Washington, D.C.

Tempted to Return

God bless William J. O'Malley, S.J., for speaking truth to authority in his trenchant analysis of the shortcomings of the U.S. bishops' curriculum framework ("Faulty Guidance," 9/14). His students, all adolescents for that matter, would be well served by having to tackle his essay as their first reading assignment in the new school year. Indeed, thinking about such a prospect almost tempts me to end my decade-long hiatus and return to the classroom I haunted for over 30 years. On second thought, I lack the courage and stamina Father O'Malley has displayed for over four decades and leave the job to brave souls like him.

PAUL LOATMAN JR.
Mechanicville, N.Y.

Too Late Have I Read Thee

Every article of Father O'Malley's that I have read over the years made me sorry that I was reading them only after my children had left high school. I always believed that his pieces on raising teenagers were full of wisdom and that if they had been written 10

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CARTOON BY HARLEY SCHWADRON

years earlier, I would have done many things differently. I hope his students at Fordham Prep (and their parents) appreciate him.

A. F. JOHNSON
Falls Church, Va.

The Gift of Tears

Re: "Escape from Alcatraz" (9/28): I first read about Father Damien in eighth grade in public school. I was totally taken with him and the lepers. It is very strange that after all these years—I am now in my 60s—I am basically the same sappy person, in tears reading the story of Father Damien here in San Francisco, where I live. During breaks at work I often look at **America** on the screen. I use it as a prayer. Thanks for telling me of Father Damien's approaching canonization.

RICHARD BENITEZ
San Francisco, Calif.

Blessings of a Saint

The U.S. Army's hospital ship Republic was the last ship refitted and commissioned toward the end of World War II. I too was newly commissioned, as a second lieutenant nurse assigned to the Republic's complement. I wondered over the years if the story of Father Damien's body being transported to the United States aboard the Republic were true. Father Damien was one of the heroes of my childhood. The months spent on the Republic were life-changing for me. I would like to think that Father Damien's one-time presence was one of the blessings brought by that experience. I met my husband aboard the Republic. Our life together was short but much blessed. Knowing I connected with Father Damien, even in such a tiny way, was a joyful gift for my recent birthday.

IRENE KING MENNITT
Lyndhurst, N.J.

Pleasant Surprise

Re: "Camelot's End" (Editorial, 9/14):

Soon after Ted Kennedy's death, I called my brother in Baltimore to see how his children were doing in the first days of school. He said, "James and I were down watching a special on Kennedy." I wondered what might come next. Just six weeks earlier, my brother and I were having a conversation and he commented that it was amazing that he and I were of the same parents, same home and upbringing, and we were so radically different. He said, "You are such a liberal Democrat, and I am on the books a Democrat, but a conservative Republican at heart."

With this backdrop I was now holding my breath. Joe went on to say that "a great man had been lost.... In the past 40 years, with everything that had to do with the poor and marginalized, Kennedy went to bat for me." My brother made sure his son was at least exposed to Ted as they watched that special. This exchange for me has been the greatest testimony to Ted Kennedy. And I pray that he now knows the blessing of his labors.

MICHAEL DUFFY, O.F.M.CONV.
Above Rocks, Jamaica, W.I.

No Profile in Courage

St. Thomas More did not compromise his faith for political correctness. He knew his faith and followed it. From his expulsion from Harvard through his first marriage to his reversal on the abortion issue, Teddy Kennedy always missed the chance to be a "profile in courage." That was his greatest tragedy. St. Thomas saw what was really important.

GEORGE MUNYAN
Thorofare, N.J.

Look at the Record

Looking at President Obama's record throughout his lifetime, it is absurd to think that he is committed to reducing the number of abortions in the United States. This is the man who voted

against allowing palliative care for infants who survived botched abortions.

This is the man who repealed the Mexico City Policy despite public opinion in its favor. This is the man who said that the Freedom of Choice Act was his legislative priority. He has taken many actions already during his presidency that will increase the number of abortions performed around the world. He has done nothing so far to reduce them.

To those who claim that the bishops are using abortion as a political tool: Shame on you.

MIKE MAIALE
Baltimore, Md.

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Just One Thing

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), OCT. 11, 2009

Readings: Wis 7:7-11; Ps 90:12–17; Heb 4:12-13; Mk 10:17-30

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mk 10:17)

Many classic tales are told in which a hero or heroine searches for the key to happiness. In "City Slickers," a film popular in the early 1990s, Mitch, a city boy, is asked by Curly, a crusty old cowboy, "Do you know what the secret of life is?" Curly holds up one finger and continues, "One thing. Just one thing." When Mitch presses him for the secret, Curly says, "That's what you have to find out." The answer unfolds subtly in the film but is never stated explicitly.

In today's Gospel, a rich young man asks Jesus a similar question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" He seems to be looking for a formula. Though he has kept all the commandments since his youth, the young man lacks something. He looks to Jesus as the "good teacher" to tell him what it is. Jesus does not say readily what he must do to inherit eternal life but focuses instead on the man's use of the word "good." In this way Jesus points the young man toward God's unique goodness, which is the "one thing" at the center of all.

Jesus invites the rich man to step across a threshold, to leave behind the spirituality of his youth and to take on another spirituality that abandons all for the sake of love. In youth, clear guidelines with specific boundaries and actions for moral living are needed. But as we move into maturity, it is the gaze of love that Jesus casts on each of us that enables us to abandon everything else. This love cannot be earned with actions, but is the sheer gift of the good God, who embodies the one thing that surpasses all else. The only condition for attaining the one thing is this: A person must be willing to let go of everything else.

ART: TAD DUNNE

Abandoning all for the pursuit of the one love is not an easy thing to do. In the Gospel, the young man's many possessions seem an insurmountable obstacle. For a rich person to enter the realm of God is like a heavily laden camel struggling to wriggle through a tiny opening with all its cargo intact. To hold on to the power, control and security that abundant possessions bring is antithetical to the vulnerability, receptivity and risk that abandoning oneself to the one love requires. It is not impossible for people with riches to do so, but it is exceedingly difficult.

As other Gospel passages illustrate, it is not the having of riches that poses an obstacle; rather it is what one does with one's possessions that is determinative. Jesus' assurance that "for human beings it is impossible, but not for God," has an echo of Gabriel's words to Mary at the annunciation (Lk 1:37). Total self-surrender to the divine is the one thing that brings abundant life to all.

There is a similar theme in the first reading, where wisdom is the one thing sought. The king prays for and is granted the grace to choose wisdom alone, over scepter and throne, riches and gems. Ironically, just as the disciples gained back a hundredfold all the family relations and land they relinquished, so the king's choice of Wisdom over all else brought him all good things and countless riches. The idea is not to guess the one thing that will bring wealth. Rather, the choice of the one love, Wisdom incarnate in Christ, prompts one to let go of all else, only to receive in return all that the beloved lavishes on us without reserve.

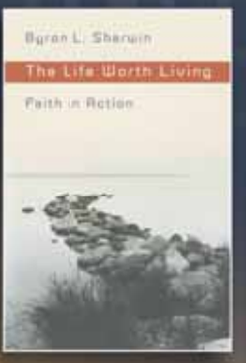
BARBARA E. REID

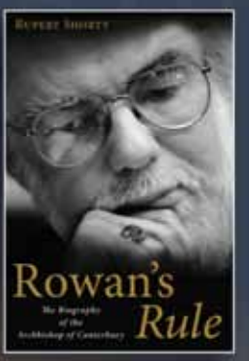
PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

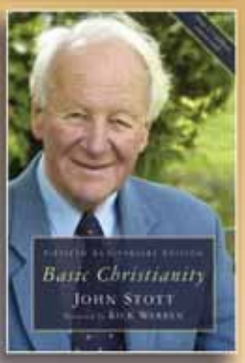
- Ask Jesus to lead you to the "one thing necessary."
- What have you let go in the pursuit of the "one thing"?
- What have you received in return?

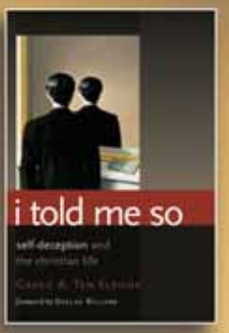
BARBARA E. REID, O.P., *a member of the Dominican Sisters of Grand Rapids, Mich., is a professor of New Testament studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Ill., where she is vice president and academic dean.*

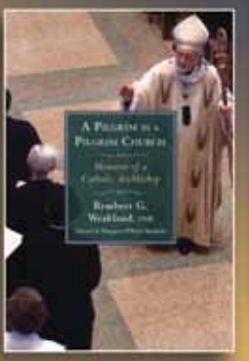
EERDMANS

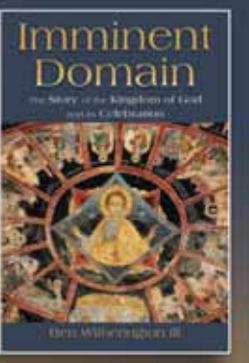












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