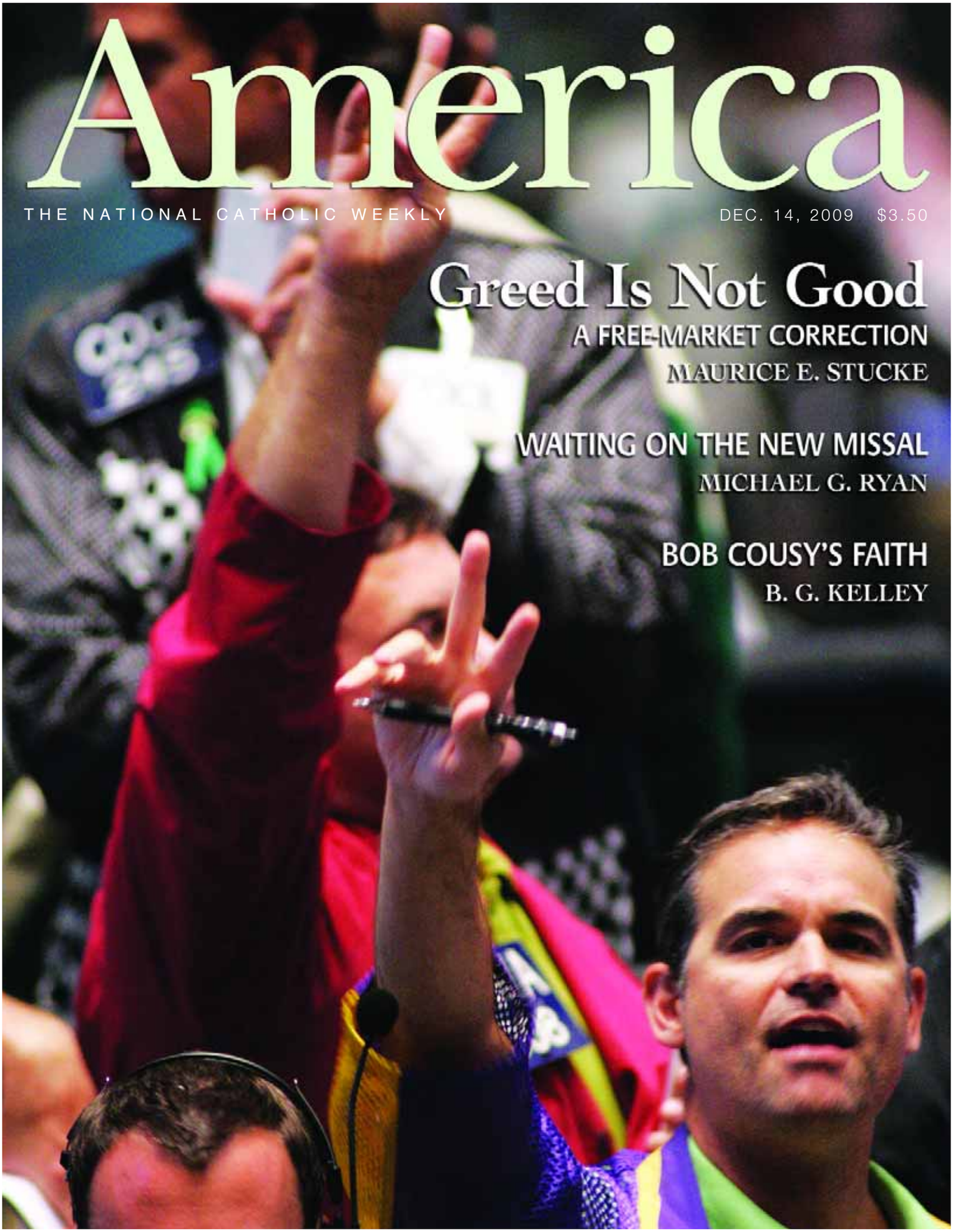


America

THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC WEEKLY

DEC. 14, 2009 $3.50

Greed Is Not Good

A FREE-MARKET CORRECTION

MAURICE E. STUCKE

WAITING ON THE NEW MISSAL

MICHAEL G. RYAN

BOB COUSY'S FAITH

B. G. KELLEY

OF MANY THINGS

Madeleine L'Engle, the Episcopalian fantasy and romance writer, wrote of her family's coping with the aging and death of her mother in a wonderful memoir entitled *The Summer of the Great-Grandmother* (Crosswicks, 1974). For decades, even as Ms. L'Engle's own children grew older, her mother had been at the heart of summer-long gatherings at the family's summer estate. That final summer, however, Great-Grandmother was slipping away from them as she weakened and her mind faded.

Even as the family members negotiated among themselves as to how they might care for their matriarch, in her heart Ms. L'Engle wrestled with a very special loss. As her mother grew more and more confused, Ms. L'Engle feared that she would lose her mother's spirit, her *ousia* (or essence), as she called it. It was not just her mother's death she feared. It was the disappearance of her lively wit and energy from the family circle that troubled Ms. L'Engle. Her mother's spirit and their spirits were so intertwined that she felt the loss of Great Grandmother's spirit as an existential threat to family life. How would the family go on? What would their personalities be, deprived of the force of hers?

At 96, my own mother, Mary, is pulling away from us. She has been diagnosed as suffering from moderate dementia. That may be the case some of the time. When she is weak from lack of sleep or an infection, she is likely to be confused. In the late afternoon, when she is weary, she shows signs of "sundowning," the loss of mental acuity. But she is not always that way. Until 10 days ago or so, if I reached her by phone in the morning, she was sharp and alert. Later in the day, she would have trouble communicating.

Mom's condition is complicated by near-blindness and impaired hearing. Though she has given up reading even large-print books, friends and I have occasionally found that she has been playing Boggle by herself. She can't play for long, but she still applies herself. New hearing aids made a big difference for a week or two, and we could have short, cheery exchanges; but in her weakness and desire for rest she now seems to prefer them out. Both her sight and her hearing seem to be affected by her general level of energy. It helps, I find, with the impaired elderly, with stroke victims and others to be positive and patient. Then connection can be made and what seems confused can often come to make sense. One can see the *ousia* has not vanished. This is especially so when I bring Mom Communion and she springs upright in her wheelchair in a reverent pose.

When Mom is feeling stronger, we can still joke and laugh together. Joking was not something she often did, but in the last years, she began spontaneously to make humorous quips. In these years too, I saw a musical sensibility I had never seen before, with Mom tapping her foot to music and even shaking her bottom in rhythm as she worked around the kitchen. Now, when our visits can be more silence than talk, we can still communicate with food. For Thanksgiving, my always thoughtful sister-in-law, Lois, made one of Mom's favorite dishes, a lemon pudding, and Mom wiped out two whole cups. Another day I prepared red peppers and pieces of provolone cheese, as she used to do for holiday antipastos, and though she had her eyes closed most of the time, she asked for more until every bite was gone.

The little glimpses of spirit I get may help allay any fear that may haunt me about losing Mom's *ousia*. The faith she handed on to me helps too. Naturally, I am reluctant to let her go, but I know that time will come soon. The test of our shared faith will be whether I can release Mom with confidence into the Everlasting Arms.

DREW CHRISTIANSEN, S.J.

America

Published by Jesuits of the United States

Editor in Chief
Drew Christiansen, S.J.

EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT

Managing Editor
Robert C. Collins, S.J.

Editorial Director
Karen Sue Smith

Online Editor
Maurice Timothy Reidy

Culture Editor
James Martin, S.J.

Literary Editor
Patricia A. Kossmann

Poetry Editor
James S. Torrens, S.J.

Associate Editors
George M. Anderson, S.J.
Peter Schineller, S.J.
Kevin Clarke

Visiting Editor
Thomas Massaro, S.J.

Art Director
Stephanie Ratcliffe

Assistant Editors
Francis W. Turnbull, S.J.
Kerry Weber

Assistant Literary Editor
Regina Nigro

BUSINESS DEPARTMENT

Publisher
Jan Attridge

Chief Financial Officer
Lisa Pope

Marketing
Eryk Krysztofiak

Advertising
Julia Sosa

106 West 56th Street
New York, NY 10019-3803

Ph: 212-581-4640; Fax: 212-399-3596

E-mail: america@americamagazine.org;
letters@americamagazine.org
Web site: www.americamagazine.org.
Customer Service: 1-800-627-9533

Cover: Traders in the S&P 500 pit at the Chicago Board of Trade signal orders during afternoon trading. Reuters/Frank Polich

Contents

www.americamagazine.org VOL. 201 NO. 18, WHOLE NO. 4877 DECEMBER 14, 2009

11


20


22

ARTICLES

COLUMNS & DEPARTMENTS

BOOKS & CULTURE

ON THE WEB

Rev. Michael G. Ryan, right, talks about the new **liturgical translations** on our podcast, and John Coleman, S.J., reviews an exhibit of American **narrative paintings**. Plus, an Advent video reflection on the windows of **Chartres**. All at americamagazine.org.

Bloggers Beware

Travel restrictions imposed upon the dissident blogger Yoani Sánchez, who was forbidden to leave her native Cuba last year to receive a prestigious digital journalism award in Madrid, are a relatively mild form of the retaliation repressive governments can take against their critics. In nations with even weaker human rights protections, critical blogging about the established order can be far more perilous. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, the most dangerous country for bloggers is Burma, which places severe restrictions on Internet activity. A popular blogger known as Zargana is serving a decades-long prison term as punishment for disseminating video footage of the response in that country to the disastrous Cyclone Nargis in 2008, when the military rulers' resistance to accepting outside aid cost thousands of lives.

Iran ranks second. The government routinely harasses and even imprisons bloggers who comment negatively on religious and political figures. One blogger who "insulted" religious leaders died behind bars in unexplained circumstances. Powerful leaders in Saudi Arabia have gone so far as to call for flogging and death for online writers who post material considered heretical. China has the largest number of people online, almost 300 million, but authorities there also have the most comprehensive online censorship program. Some two dozen Chinese bloggers are currently serving prison terms.

Clearly freedom of speech cannot be taken for granted, particularly in countries the C.P.J. considers the worst offenders. But in an era of instant global communication, that same freedom is among the most cherished values. The world depends on dissident bloggers to expose human rights abuses that might otherwise remain unknown and unchallenged.

Venerabile Subito!

The Vatican journalist Andrea Torniello recently reported that the Congregation for the Causes of Saints had approved the first step toward the beatification of Pope John Paul II, having given the green light for a declaration of his "heroic virtue." A proclamation will declare the pope venerable and begin the investigation for the miracle (a nun's cure from Parkinson's disease is already being considered) required for beatification. The speed with which the causes of John Paul II and Mother Teresa have moved through the congregation is not only a tribute to their personal sanctity but also a result of organized efforts on behalf of their canonization. But there are other causes predating those two that seem to be languishing.

Oscar Arnulfo Romero, the archbishop of San Salvador who was murdered during Mass by government forces because of his defense of the poor, clearly fulfills the definition of a martyr. Blessed John XXIII also seems to fit every requirement of sanctity—from humility and personal piety to a deep devotion to Christ and the church—yet his cause, too, seems stalled. (Then again, maybe the two need to do a better job interceding for a miracle.) Moreover, the Vatican needs to recognize more lay saints, both single and married. The beatification of Louis and Zélie Martin, the parents of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, and of Pier Giorgio Frassati are good signs. We might suggest Jacques and Raïssa Maritain and Catherine Doherty, too. For there are as many holy mothers and fathers as there are holy Mothers and Fathers.

Art That Frees or Enslaves

"An essential function of genuine beauty is that it gives man a healthy 'shock.'" Pope Benedict XVI offered this observation in his address to over 250 international artists in the Sistine Chapel on Nov. 21. The Vatican, through Archbishop Gianfranco Ravisi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, invited several hundred artists to meet with the pope. Precedents for this meeting with artists were the similar meeting in May 1964 of Pope Paul VI with artists and the "Letter to Artists" of Pope John Paul II in 1999. Among those in attendance were writers, artists, singers, sculptors, actors, film directors, composers and architects.

Art's shock, according to the pope, can move a person in a positive or a negative direction. Positively, the beauty of art "draws him out of himself, from being content with the humdrum, 'reawakens' him, opening the eyes of his heart and mind, giving him wings, carrying him aloft." Yet he cautioned that the wrong kind of beauty "thrust upon us [by art] is illusory and deceitful, superficial and blinding, leaving the onlooker dazed; instead of bringing him out of himself, it imprisons him within himself and further enslaves him, depriving him of hope and joy."

In his address, given shortly before the beginning of Advent, Pope Benedict linked art and beauty with the mysteries of Advent and Christmas. He quoted Simone Weil saying that "beauty is the experimental proof that incarnation is possible." Indeed, the pope suggests that a very positive way to begin the annual journey of the church year is to walk the path of beauty, the *via pulchritudinis*. Beauty becomes a "path toward the transcendent, toward the ultimate Mystery, toward God." [See our editors' Advent reflections on art at www.americamagazine.org/video.]

EDITORIAL

The Moment Is Now

Amid gloomy prognostications that the climate conference to be held in Copenhagen from Dec. 7 to 18 will fail to result in a legally binding treaty, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has warned that delays in reducing greenhouse gas emissions could lead to devastating global consequences. In an open letter to the U.N. General Assembly, he emphasized that "the moment is now" to conclude a binding treaty. The urgency stems from the fact that the noxious increase in emissions affects virtually every aspect of life on the planet, from poverty and economic growth to food security and clean water.

The primary purpose of the Denmark gathering is to create a replacement for the Kyoto Protocol of 1997, the U.N. endeavor to reduce global warming that expires in 2012. But the nations of the world do not agree on how to proceed. Neither the Clinton nor the Bush administration submitted the Kyoto Protocol to Congress for ratification, and in 1997 the Senate resolved by a vote of 95 to 0 not to ratify the treaty, if presented, unless China and other major developing countries accept binding limits on carbon production first.

Unfortunately, it is clear that the current Congress will not come forth with legislation on greenhouse gas emissions before the Copenhagen meeting. The United States will thus remain the only developed nation with no established target for carbon reduction. Per capita, we are the major producer of greenhouse gases, far exceeding even China.

Major challenges facing the 192 nations represented in Denmark include: How far are the industrialized countries willing to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions; how much are major developing countries, like China and India, willing to cut their own emissions; and how will developing countries receive the financing needed to reduce theirs and to implement low-carbon green technologies? The National Religious Partnership for the Environment and the Catholic Campaign on Climate Change have been vigorous advocates for integrating the world's poor in a climate covenant with funding for both adapting infrastructure to meet the hardships of changing climate and for transferring green technology.

In some respects, the funding issue is "the key," as Ban Ki-moon put it. The European Union is willing to give $100 billion a year toward green technology transfer to help poor nations mitigate the impact of global climate change, but development groups have estimated that at least $400 billion is needed. At a meeting in October in Barcelona to prepare for the Copenhagen gathering, a bloc of African countries threatened to boycott sessions if rich countries do not pledge more for climate change mitigation and technology transfers. Without adequate funding African nations and countries in Southeast Asia and Latin America will suffer the most from global warming, though they are far less responsible for the emissions.

Archbishop Celestino Migliore, permanent observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, pointed out to the General Assembly in November that delay is all the more worrisome because poor nations are already bearing the brunt of the planet's warming. As ice caps melt and seas rise, vulnerable low-lying nations like Bangladesh will be seriously affected. Indeed, at the Commonwealth summit on Nov. 27 in Port of Spain, in Trinidad and Tobago, speakers noted that many of those least able to withstand adverse climate changes live in the small states of the Commonwealth.

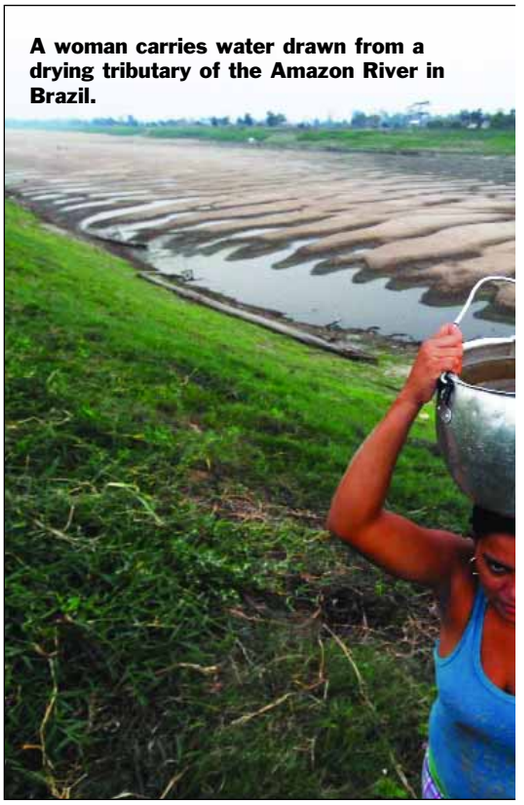
Rampant deforestation is adding greatly to the increase in emissions. Large swaths of forests have been destroyed in Brazil's Amazon region to make room for money-yielding crops, and the same is true in Indonesia and Congo. Living trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Once they are cut down, they release carbon dioxide, so deforestation amounts to a double loss.

But environmentalists emphasize that preserving forests must go hand in hand with protecting both indigenous communities and fragile biodiversity. Thus far each country has been free to set its own limits on deforestation. Some developing countries, like Brazil, have begun to make serious commitments in this direction, as well as in development of alternative energy sources.

By next year's meeting in Mexico City, as evidence mounts of the harm done to regional ecologies, animal habitats and human settlements, especially among the poor, the need for an agreement will grow still more urgent. If the planet is to survive, as Pope Benedict XVI concluded in *Caritas in Veritate*, all nations must accept binding reductions in carbon emissions and construct an equitable structure for energy consumption and for sharing the development of green technology among rich and poor nations—for the sake of this generation and generations to come.

COPENHAGEN

World Leaders Asked to Consider Effects of Climate Change on Poor



A woman carries water drawn from a drying tributary of the Amazon River in Brazil.

World leaders participating in this month's U.N. Climate Change Conference must remember that the world's poorest and most vulnerable people will suffer the most from serious climate shifts, church activists say. "This is a pivotal point for all people of faith and good will," said Cliona Sharkey, policy and advocacy officer for Cidse, an international network of Catholic development agencies. "We simply cannot accept the continuation of a situation that is [most affecting] the people who have contributed least to the problem."

Church groups called for negotiators, scheduled to meet in Copenhagen, Denmark, from Dec. 7 to 18, to sign a legally binding agreement that includes sharp cuts in greenhouse gas emissions by industrialized countries and offers long-term funding to help developing countries adapt to the effects of climate change. Climate activists say that to slow climate change, industrialized countries must reduce emissions of greenhouse gases—carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide—by 40 percent to 45 percent from 1990 levels. There is cause for hope that a meaningful resolution could emerge from Copenhagen. Brazil, a developing country whose economy and energy needs have grown rapidly in recent years, has expressed willingness to cut emissions by 38 percent from 1990 levels. President Barack Obama offered to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 17 percent from 2005 levels, a substantially higher commitment than the 1990 benchmark. That pledge was matched by Chinese officials, who offered a cut of 40 percent to 45 percent from 2005 levels, with the possibility of further reductions if the United States agreed to do more.

Global warming could affect food and water supplies, public health, infrastructure and political security, according to Sharkey. "It's all interrelated," she said. "The implications are felt first by people living in poverty, but those implications will filter up with huge, devastating impacts for everybody if it's not controlled now, when we have the chance."

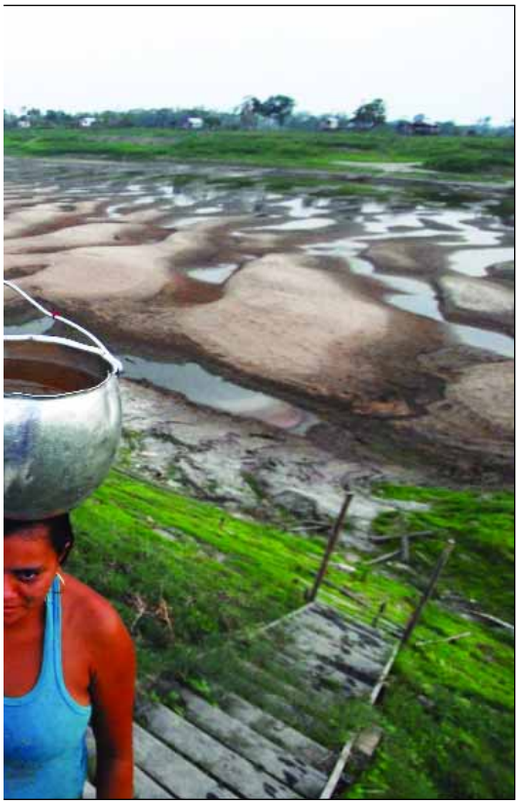
Island nations and countries with coastal cities are threatened by rising sea levels, while mountain farmers who depend on glacial runoff in dry seasons are seeing glaciers disappear. Other regions, including northeastern Brazil and parts of Africa, are suffering increased drought.

"Kenya has experienced three successive rainy season failures, which has affected food security," said Janet Mang'era, national executive secretary of Caritas Kenya, the Kenyan bishops' development and social services agency.

African countries also are suffering from decreasing water supplies, which affect hydroelectricity, drinking water, tourism, irrigation for crops and water for livestock, Mang'era said. There has been a "rise in resource-based conflicts among pastoral communities in northern Kenya and also between wildlife and humans," she said, and people are being forced to migrate from rural areas to cities as deserts encroach on crop land. Climate changes have severely affected food production, she said, exacerbating poverty, particularly among women, who form the majority of the poor and a large proportion of the subsistence farmers in Africa.

In recent years, wealthy countries have pledged funds to help poor countries adapt to climate change. The money also was to be used to help vulnerable countries prepare for disasters such as drought or flooding from storms. But most of the promised funds have not reached the countries with the greatest need.

If radical steps are not taken in Copenhagen, Sharkey fears that the world's developing countries—whose emissions will also increase in the future—could be heading down a path toward unsustainable development. "What is necessary is a fundamental shift in our models of development," she said. "Climate change is exacerbating and increasing poverty and



inequality. The more we delay taking effective action, the greater the impacts of climate change are going to be."

IMMIGRATION

Litterbugs or Lifesavers?

Nearly two years ago, 14-year-old Josseline Janiletta Hernández Quinteros crossed the U.S.-Mexico border illegally. She and her 10-year-old brother, both from El Salvador, joined a group led by a paid guide, known as a coyote, with hopes of meeting up with their mother, who lived in California. Along the way, Josseline fell ill and the group left her behind.

Her brother wanted to stay with her, but Josseline told him he needed to keep going. He needed to make it to see his mother, she told him. Josseline said she'd be all right—she was his big sister, after all.

Josseline died in the desert alone. Her body lay in a river basin for three months until Dan Millis, a volunteer with the humanitarian group No More Deaths, stumbled across it. Millis was hiking through the rough desert with three other volunteers leaving water for illegal immigrants.

"We were doing a regular supply job," he said. The group, which searches for migrants in need of medical assistance, also leaves behind food, water and socks at designated locations along migrant trails. Two days after Millis found Josseline's body, federal law enforcement officials ticketed him for littering after he left supplies behind on the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge on the U.S.-Mexico border.

"We're obviously not going to be deterred by these bogus littering tickets," he said. "The biggest threat to human life out in the desert is lack of water, so we continue to put it out in the desert."

Millis was tried and convicted, but not sentenced. The group is appealing the case. "We thought it was an anomaly," Millis said.

But it wasn't. On Dec. 4, 2008, another No More Deaths volunteer, Walt Staton, received an identical citation while on the refuge. A 12-member jury convicted Staton in June.

Defying Staton's conviction, 13 humanitarians from No More Deaths, Tucson Samaritans and Humane Borders went out to the wildlife refuge to leave behind water jugs for migrants. All 13, including Jerome Zawada, a Franciscan priest, received tickets for littering.

The Tucson 13, Father Zawada said, told officials of their intention before arriving at the refuge. Federal officials were waiting for them when they arrived. "We put the water down and were walking away," the Franciscan priest said. "They asked us if we were going to pick it up. We told them we weren't. So they wrote us tickets and put the water jugs in the back of their trucks as evidence."

The 13 were scheduled for court Nov. 11, but the trial has been postponed until 2010. In the meantime, the group has been meeting with officials from the wildlife refuge to work out where they can leave water.

The number of deaths this year, 206 according to some estimates, is a drastic increase from 183 in 2008—with Josseline among them. What makes the increase even more tragic, according to No More Deaths volunteers, is that the total number of migrants crossing has actually decreased because of the U.S. recession.

"Without any kind of actual legal path for people to come into the country—without any reform—it pushes people to more and more treacherous terrain," said Jeffrey Boyce of No More Deaths.

Volunteers "litter" the Arizona desert with food and water for migrants.

Bishops Disappointed With Health Bill

The health reform legislation now before the Senate is "an enormous disappointment, creating new and completely unacceptable federal policy that endangers human life and rights of conscience," the chairmen of three committees of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops said on Nov. 20. A letter from the three chairmen outlining the U.S.C.C.B.'s problems with the Senate bill's provisions on abortion and conscience protections, coverage of immigrants and affordability for low-income Americans went out about 24 hours before the Senate voted, 60 to 39, to begin debate on the legislation. The Senate's Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act "does not meet...moral criteria" outlined by the bishops, especially on the use of federal funds to pay for abortions, and should be opposed if it is not amended, according to Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston and Bishops William F. Murphy of Rockville Centre, N.Y., and John C. Wester of Salt Lake City. They head the U.S.C.C.B. committees on Pro-Life Activities, on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and on Migration, respectively.

Resignations Sought After Irish Report

A report describing in detail failures of church leaders in handling sexual abuse cases in the Archdiocese of Dublin has resulted in calls for bishops' resignations and further investigations and prosecution. "The Dublin Archdiocese's preoccupations in dealing with cases of child sexual abuse, at least until the mid-1990s, were the maintenance of secrecy, the avoidance of scandal, the protection of the reputation of the church, and the preservation of its assets," said the report by the independent Commission of Investigation. "All other considerations, including the welfare of children and justice for victims, were subordinated to these priorities. The archdiocese did not implement its own canon law rules and did its best to avoid any application of the law of the state." The report said church officials and police colluded in covering up instances of child sexual abuse by clergy.

Chaldean Church Buildings Bombed

A Chaldean Catholic church, rectory and convent in the northern Iraq city of Mosul were bombed in two separate incidents in late November, but no one was injured. Explosives were detonated inside St. Ephrem's Church on Nov. 26, and the building was reduced to a "blackened shell." The church rectory also was attacked. Hours later a bomb was thrown at St. Theresa's Convent in New Mosul, west of the city. At least five Dominican sisters escaped unharmed. A series of church bombings in Mosul in July left at least four dead and more than 30 injured. A flare-up in violence in October 2008 claimed the lives of 13 Christians and forced thousands of Christians to flee the city. In February 2008 Chaldean Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of Mosul, Iraq, was kidnapped, and his driver and two bodyguards were killed. Two weeks later his body was recovered after kidnappers revealed where it was buried.

From CNS and other sources.

NEWS BRIEFS

U.S. bishops plan to **launch a postcard campaign** in 2010 to urge Congress to make comprehensive immigration reform its next legislative priority. ✦Advent services at St. Cecilia Parish in Detroit, Mich., will include **"Thug Sundays,"** a gun buy-back and outreach program targeting Detroit's gang members. ✦ President Barack Obama has established a new Presidential Commission for the **Study of Bioethical Issues** and named Amy Gutmann, president of the University of Pennsylvania, and James W. Wagner, president of Emory University in Atlanta, to be its top officials. ✦ **Suggestions for daily prayer**, reading, reflection and action throughout the Advent and Christmas seasons can be found at www.usccb.org/advent. ✦ After resisting their release all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, the **Diocese of Bridgeport** on Dec. 1 delivered thousands of pages of court documents related to sexual abuse by clergy to the attorneys for the four newspapers that had sued to obtain the material. ✦ The Israeli Supreme Court is reviewing the case of 21-year-old **Berlanty Azzam**, a Bethlehem University student deported from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip, and a decision is expected in mid-December.

MARGARET SILF

Room at the Inn

The casting has taken place for the pre-school nativity play. My daughter called me a few weeks ago to tell me the news: her first-born, and the apple of all our eyes, had been chosen to be...the donkey! I think the proud parents had been hoping for an angel at least, given that she is—though I may have some bias—a very cute little 18-month-old with the fuzzy beginnings of what might become golden hair. But no. The donkey. I was thrilled and I said so. The donkey is something very special. How often have I found myself particularly drawn, in prayer, to the simple, warm-breathed, burden-bearing donkey.

Thoughts of the donkey turned my attention to a couple who live on our street. Let me call them Mary and Joe, and let me tell you a little of their story, because it is its own Nativity story.

Mary and Joe are as normal and regular a couple as it gets. They have a grown family and are actively bringing up their small granddaughter so their daughter, a single mom, can continue to work. They struggle to keep going in today's economic climate, but they are the kindest neighbors anyone could ever wish for. I bless the day they moved into our neighborhood.

Earlier this year they were accepted as foster parents for children who have been taken into the care of the social services department because of sickness, abandonment or abuse. I could not believe my ears when Joe told me they were willing to take children of any age and any degree of disability or difficulty and that they just thought it would be good to make some small difference to a few young lives and share the little they have.

So what's with the donkey? Well, I have seen the donkey—in the form of the social worker's car—come by three times now over the past few months and park outside Joe and Mary's humble "inn," carrying a needy mother and child on its rough back.

The first placement took us all by storm. Three teenage boys arrived—imagine three troubled teenage boys arriving in your home for an indefinite period. But these were three very special boys. They spoke hardly any English. They needed halal food and opportunities to pray five times a day. They did not know whether their families were alive or dead.

They were willing to take children of any age and any degree of disability.

They were refugees from Afghanistan. Their father had been killed in the conflict, and their mother had courageously smuggled them out of the country to save them from the Taliban and the killing fields. After six months crossing Asia and Europe in a truck, they arrived in England and were granted refugee status. Mary came around a few days after their arrival to invite me to meet them. I looked into the sad and gentle eyes of these war-torn children and saw the face of another middle-eastern Child, fleeing conflict and bringing peace.

Next came two little boys whose father had upped and left and whose mother was doing drugs. They too were gently laid into Joe and Mary's "stable," where their deep woundedness was tended by loving hands until their own family could look after them. There were no shepherds, no wise men, just a little taste of tenderness from caring strangers.

The present incumbents of Joe and Mary's "crib" came a couple of weeks ago: a 6-week-old baby girl, taken into care because she already had been assaulted by her natural family and, along with her, her 15-year-old mother, who had also suffered abuse and domestic violence. This teenage mom is a child herself, still in shock and badly needing Mary's parenting guidance. The baby girl now sleeps safely at night. Perhaps the angels hover over her as once they did in Bethlehem. Perhaps a lone star rises, carrying a prayer that her life might become something better than its brutal beginning. But change like that does not come down with the Christmas sparkle straight from heaven. It comes through the daily struggle of good people like Mary and Joe, who labor to bring a little more love and hope and trust into the world and who welcome whoever the "donkey" brings.

Mary and Joe don't go to church. Should I be "converting" them? Or should I be asking for the grace to let my own heart be converted by their example?

When I see my own little donkey next week on her big day, with her homemade big ears, I shall be torn, I'm sure, between smiles and tears. And I will be praying that she grows up to be a woman with room in her heart for the ones without another human heart to beat for them.

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

How the Great Recession provoked an economic examination of conscience

Auditing Self-Interest

BY MAURICE E. STUCKE

For 30 years, the economic theories of Milton Friedman and others associated with the University of Chicago have shaped American policies. Their theories assume a world of rational people who make optimal choices about spending and saving. In pursuing self-interest, the theory goes, people seek to maximize their wealth and other material goals; they generally do not care about other social goals when those goals conflict with their economic self-interest. When "self-interest and ethical values with wide verbal allegiance are in conflict," said the Chicago School economist George Stigler, "much of the time, most of the time in fact, self-interest theory…will win."

Self-interest, says the Chicago School, drives markets toward more efficient outcomes. The government need not intervene in the economy, since rational individuals pursuing their self-interest prevent or quickly cure most market failures. Until the recent financial crisis, competition was assumed to be a self-initiating, self-correcting process that, when largely left alone, will allocate resources efficiently toward users who value them the most. The economic theories, wrote Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in "Church and Economy" (Communio, fall 1986), assume that the "natural laws of the market are in essence good...and necessarily work for the good, whatever may be true of the morality of individuals."

These Chicago School theories are now under attack. The "orthodox and unvarnished Chicago School of economic theory is on life support, if it is not dead," remarked Commissioner J. Thomas Rosch of the U.S. Federal Trade Commission recently. "In the real world—as opposed to the worlds of political and economic theory—markets are not perfect…imperfect markets do not always correct themselves; and…busi-

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/MONKEY BUSINESS IMAGES

MAURICE E. STUCKE *is associate professor at the University of Tennessee College of Law and senior fellow at the American Antitrust Institute. He was previously an attorney at the U.S. Department of Justice in the Antitrust Division. A longer version of this article will be published in Vol. 50 of the Santa Clara Law Review in 2010.*

ness people do not always behave rationally." Prompted by the financial crisis, the Obama administration is re-examining fundamental issues like the efficiency of markets and the role of legal, social and ethical norms in a market economy.

This re-examination raises three central issues. First, do people actually behave like the Chicago School's self-interested profit-maximizers? Second, if the answer is no, should self-interested behavior be the desired norm? Third, what are the risks if social policies promote self-interested behavior as the norm?

In addressing these three issues, policymakers are looking at "behavioral economics," which the Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman and the cognitive scientist Amos Tversky pioneered. A key assumption of the Chicago School's economic theories is that humans are rational, self-interested and wield perfect willpower. Behavioral economics, in contrast, uses facts and methods from other social sciences—like psychology, neuroscience and sociology—to understand the limits of the assumptions of the Chicago School.

Is greed good? Will self-interested behavior improve overall well-being? The answer is, not always.

Testing these assumptions in experiments, behavioral economists find that in certain scenarios people do not behave as neoclassical economic theory predicts. Human behavior is more nuanced, diverse and complex. Many people, for example, are not predisposed to pursue their self-interest. They sacrifice wealth to punish what is considered to be unjust behavior and generally care about treating others, and being treated, fairly. We see this daily. Many donate blood, take time to help strangers or tip waiters in places they are unlikely to revisit.

The Ultimatum Game

There is a common behavioral experiment called the ultimatum game, in which the subject is given money (say $100) with two conditions: First, the subject must offer another person some portion of the $100. Second, the other person can either accept or reject the offer. If the other person accepts, both parties keep their portions of the $100. If the other person rejects the offered amount, then neither person keeps any money. The question: How much to offer.

A Chicago School economist would predict that the subject would offer one penny. If people pursue their self-interest, then the subject would want selfishly to keep as much money as possible, and the other person would recognize that a penny is better than nothing. But actual experiments using this game in over 20 countries have found that most people offer significantly more than the nominal amount (ordinarily 40 percent to 50 percent of the total amount). Recipients typically (about half the time) reject nominal amounts (less than 20 percent of the total amount available). Similar results occur even when the participants' identities are secret and the game is not repeated.

Sometimes an appeal to social or ethical norms is more effective than an appeal to self-interest. In many behavioral experiments, financial rewards or penalties, when these displace social or ethical norms, actually decrease human motivation. Dan Ariely, a professor of behavioral economics at M.I.T., in his book *Predictably Irrational* describes experiments in which the participants—divided into three groups—all performed the same mundane task. One group (the social-norm group) was not compensated but was asked to undertake the task as a favor. In the first experiment, the social-norm group outperformed the group whose members received $5 as compensation for the task, who in turn outperformed the group whose members received 50 cents. In the second experiment, the two groups did not receive cash but a gift of comparable value (a Snickers bar for the 50-cents group and a box of Godiva chocolate for the $5 group). These two groups performed as diligently as the social-norm group. In the third experiment, after the gifts were assigned a monetary value—a "50-cent Snickers bar" or a "$5-box of Godiva chocolates"—they again devoted less effort than the social-norm group.

Some people, of course, behave selfishly. So the outcome in behavioral experiments can depend on other factors, including whether the participants are reminded about money. Recent behavioral experiments show that even nonconscious reminders of money can cause us to be more independent in our work but also less likely to seek help from others, less willing to spend time helping others and stingier when asked to donate to a worthy cause. Consequently, many people do not predictably pursue their self-interest.

Which Way to Happiness?

Because social perceptions and other factors can influence human behavior, the second issue is whether self-interested behavior, as classical economics teaches, should be the desired norm. Is greed good? Will self-interested behavior improve overall well-being? The answer is, not always. Another branch of economic research confirms the age-old wisdom that once our basic needs are met, money has a weak relationship to happiness. Once a country's gross domestic product per capita exceeds a moderate level of

income, societies do not become happier as they get richer.

One behavioral experiment published in the March 21, 2008, issue of Science magazine reaffirmed the adage that there is more happiness in giving than receiving. The authors of the study found that while spending on oneself was unrelated to happiness, spending more of one's income on others (like gifts for others and donations to charity) was a predictor of greater happiness. How people spent their bonus (on themselves or others) was a more important predictor of their happiness than the amount of the bonus. In another experiment, participants, after rating their happiness in the morning, were given envelopes with money and divided into two groups. Members of the first group were told to spend the money in the envelope on themselves by 5 p.m. The second group was told to give the money to someone else or a charity. After 5 p.m., the participants were asked about their happiness. Although the amount of money received ($5 or $20) did not significantly affect the participants' happiness, those who gave the money away reported greater post-windfall happiness than did the personal-spending group.

So if giving leads to greater happiness, the study's authors ask, why don't we spend less on ourselves and donate a little more? Because people predict poorly. The authors found that 63 percent of the university students predicted personal spending would make them happier than more altruistic spending and that $20 would make them happier than $5.

This also explains why so many of us whose basic needs are met still desire more money. We are on a hedonic treadmill. We adapt to our improved lifestyle (such as a bigger home and second car) and desire more. We perceive absolute wealth (say, possessing a million dollars) as less important than relative wealth (how much we possess compared with our peers, neighbors, friends or, as H. L. Mencken observed, one's wife's sister's husband). As the Roman stoic Seneca commented, "However much you possess, there is someone else who has more, and you will be fancying yourself to be short of things you need to the exact extent by which you lag behind him." Envy keeps the hedonic treadmill humming. Every time someone else acquires more, I have less. So I need to acquire more. Status competition has no ultimate winner and, besides death, no finish line or satisfactory resting spot.

So if self-interested behavior does not promote happiness, what does? The results are unsurprising. On an individual level, as Richard Layard recounts in *Happiness: Lessons From a New Science*, the primary sources of happiness are: family relationships, employment, community and friends, health, self-control or autonomy, personal ethical and moral values, and the quality of the environment. People who look beyond their self-interest and practice religion, belong to community organizations, do volunteer work and have rich social connections are generally healthier and happier than those who do not. Not surpris-

ingly, in a recent survey clergy members, physical therapists and firefighters reported the greatest satisfaction from their jobs.

Promoting Self-Interest

The Chicago School's assumption of self-interest describes neither how we actually act nor how we ought to act. This leads to the third and final issue: What are the risks of a social policy that promotes self-interested behavior? One risk is that an ethical life of charity and community interest becomes anachronistic. Religious norms are among the few counterbalances today against the pursuit of self-interest. A you're-on-your-own society may view the clergy and environmentalists as eccentric but harmless, but its attitude toward the poor hardens. A society's wisdom lies not in its ingenious ways of creating wealth but in its attitudes toward poverty and wealth and its actions regarding both. In the Athens of Pericles, for example, wealth was "more for use than for show," recounted Thucydides, and ancient Athens placed "the real disgrace of poverty not in owning to the fact but in declining the struggle against it."

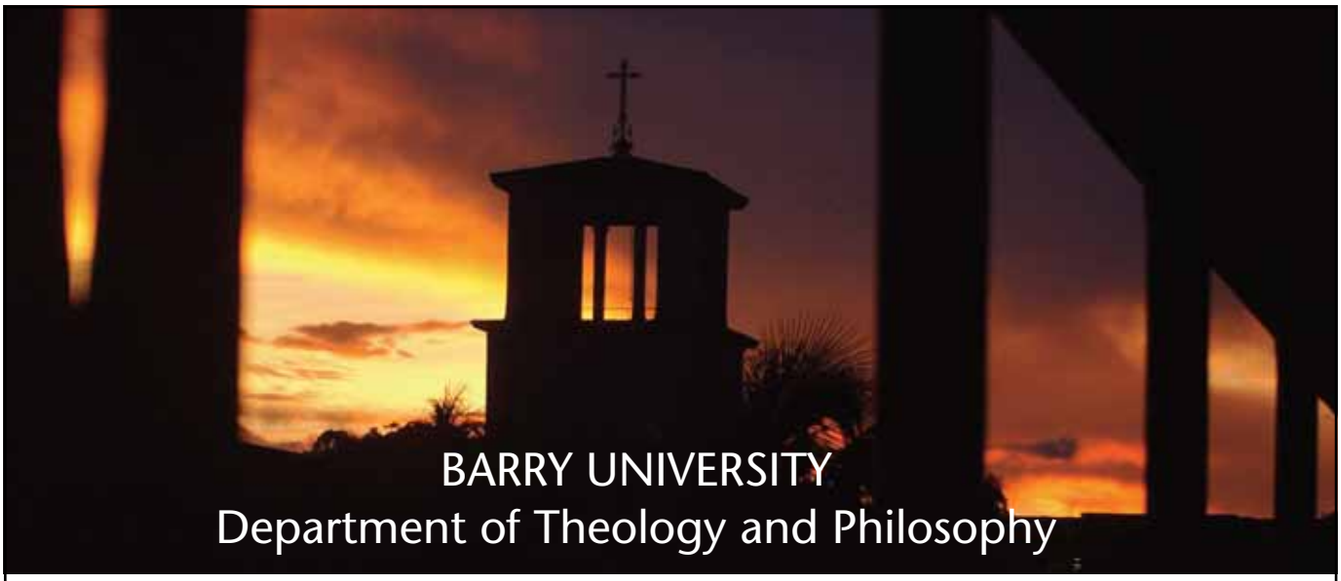
Pope John XXIII struck the same theme in 1961 in the encyclical *Mater et Magistra*: "The economic prosperity of any people is to be assessed not so much from the sum total of goods and wealth possessed as from the distribution of goods according to norms of justice, so that everyone in the community can develop and perfect himself. For this, after all, is the end toward which all economic activity of a community is by nature ordered" (No. 74).

Self-interested behavior can sometimes undermine rather than support a market economy. An economy, as Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate, recently wrote, "needs other values and commitments such as mutual trust and confidence to work efficiently." Suppose, for example, a prospective employer offers you a contract that meticulously details every requirement and penalty for every conceivable transgression or deficient work performance. Would you want to work there? Behavioral experiments show that communicating such penalties to employees may backfire; the penalties signal distrust and engender a lower level of productivity from the employee.

A social policy that promotes the perception of widespread self-interested behavior may be self-defeating. Individuals are not inherently selfish. But if we believe that many others are behaving selfishly (cheating on their taxes), then we may be more inclined to behave selfishly as well. One study of over 5,000 business and nonbusiness graduate students at U.S. and Canadian universities found that graduate business students cheat more than their nonbusiness-student peers. The largest influence in the business students' behavior, the study's authors found, was the students' perception that their peers were also cheating.

Ultimately, our survival depends upon our ability to look beyond self-interest. As the Internet and global commerce over the past 20 years have broadened social relationships and increased the interdependence of citizens throughout the world, this has become even more important. To evolve, economies must rely on complex, large-scale cooperation. As the financial crisis shows, economic risks are not isolated to particular regions. But the crisis has provided the needed impetus for policymakers to re-examine many assumptions underlying our current economic policies. Such re-examination, the economist John Maynard Keynes wrote, may enable us to:

> return to some of the most sure and certain principles of religion and traditional virtue—that avarice is a vice, that the exaction of usury is a misdemeanor, and the love of money is detestable, that those walk most truly in the paths of virtue and sane wisdom who take least thought for the morrow. We shall once more value ends above means and prefer the good to the useful. We shall honor those who can teach us how to pluck the hour and the day virtuously and well, the delightful people who are capable of taking direct enjoyments in things, the lilies of the field who toil not, neither do they spin. A



confers

The Yves Congar Award for Theological Excellence

upon

Donald J. Goergen, OP, PhD, STM

Internationally renowned Dominican Theologian and Professor at Aquinas Institute of Theology

Dr. Goergen will present the lecture "A Wider Vision: Biblical, Catholic, and Cosmic"

January 17, 2010

7:00 pm

Barry University
Andreas Hall, Room 111
11300 NE Second Avenue
Miami Shores, FL 33161-6695

BARRY UNIVERSITY

RSVP TO:
Silvia de la Peña
305-899-4887
mdelapena@mail.barry.edu

AME 10032 11/08

What If We Said, 'Wait'?

The case for a grass-roots review of the new Roman Missal

BY MICHAEL G. RYAN

It is now 45 years since the Second Vatican Council promulgated the groundbreaking and liberating document on the sacred liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*. As an eager and enthusiastic North American College seminarian at the time, I was in St. Peter's Square on the December day in 1963 when Pope Paul VI, with the world's bishops, presented that great Magna Carta to the church. The conciliar document transcended ecclesiastical politics. It was not just the pet project of a party but the overwhelming consensus of the bishops of the world. Its adoption passed overwhelmingly: 2,147 to 4.

REV. MICHAEL G. RYAN *has been pastor of St. James Cathedral in Seattle since 1988 and serves on the board of the national Cathedral Ministry Conference.*

Not in my wildest dreams would it have occurred to me then that I would live to witness what seems more and more like the systematic dismantling of the great vision of the council's decree. But I have. We Catholics have.

For evidence, one need look no further than recent instructions from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments that have raised rubricism to an art form, or the endorsement, even encouragement, of the so-called Tridentine Mass. It has become painfully clear that the liturgy, the prayer of the people, is being used as a tool—some would even say as a weapon—to advance specific agendas. And now on the horizon are the new translations of the Roman Missal that will soon reach the final stages of approval by the Holy See. Before long the priests of this country will be told to take the new transla-

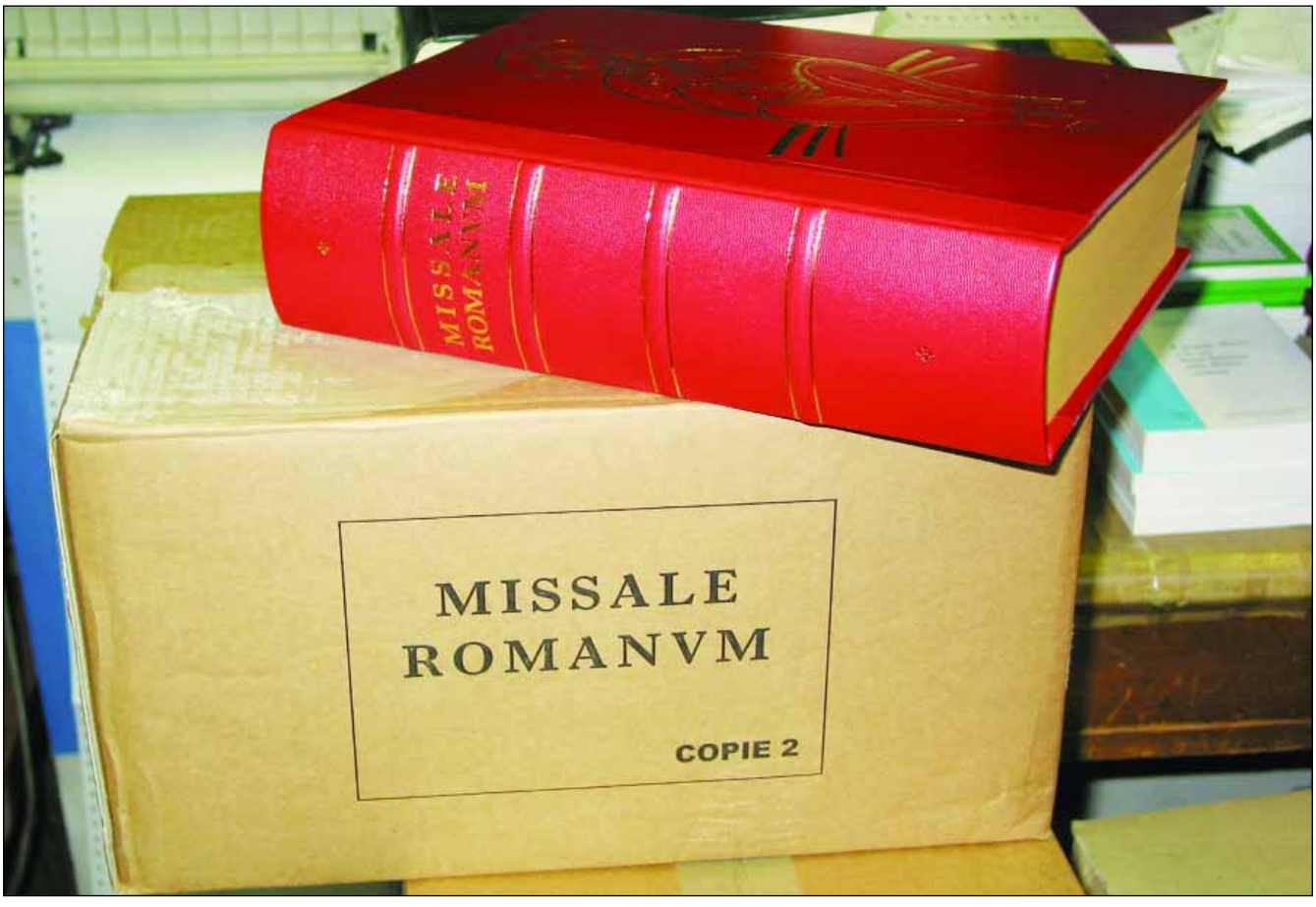


PHOTO: CNS

tions to their people by means of a carefully orchestrated education program that will attempt to put a good face on something that clearly does not deserve it.

The veterans who enthusiastically devoted their best creative energies as young priests to selling the reforms of the council to parishioners back in the 1960s will be asked to do the same with regard to the new translations. Yet we will be hard put to do so. Some colleagues in ministry may actually relish the opportunity, but not those of us who were captivated by the great vision of Vatican II, who knew firsthand the Tridentine Mass and loved it for what it was, but welcomed its passing because of what full, conscious and active participation would mean for our people. We can see the present moment only as one more assault on the council and, sadly, one more blow to episcopal collegiality. It was, after all, the council that gave to conferences of bishops the authority to produce their own translations (*S.C.*, Nos. 36, 40), to be approved, it is true, by the Holy See but not, presumably, to be initiated, nitpicked and controlled by it. Further, the council also wisely made provision for times of experimentation and evaluation (*S.C.*, No. 40)—something that has been noticeably missing in the present case.

This leads me to pose a question to my brother priests: What if we were to awaken to the fact that these texts are neither pastoral nor ready for our parishes? *What if we just said, "Wait"?*

Prayer and Good Sense

I know it might smack of insubordination to talk this way, but it could also be a show of loyalty and plain good sense—loyalty not to any ideological agenda but to our people, whose prayer the new translations purport to improve, and good sense to anyone who stops to think about what is at stake here.

What is at stake, it seems to me, is nothing less than the church's credibility. It is true that the church could gain some credibility by giving us more beautiful translations, but clumsy is not beautiful, and precious is not prayerful. During a recent dinner conversation with friends, the issue of the new translations came up. Two at the table were keenly—and quite angrily—aware of the impending changes; two were not. When the uninformed heard a few examples ("and with your spirit"; "consubstantial with the Father"; "incarnate of the Virgin Mary"; "oblation of our service"; "send down your Spirit like the dewfall"; "He took the precious chalice"; "serene and kindly countenance," for starters), the reaction was somewhere between disbelief and indignation.

One person ventured the opinion that with all that the church has on its plate today—global challenges with regard to justice, peace and the environment; nagging scandals; a severe priest shortage; the growing disenchantment of many women; seriously lagging church attendance—it seems almost ludicrous to push ahead with an agenda that will seem at best trivial and at worst hopelessly out-of-touch.

The reaction of my friends should surprise no one who has had a chance to review the new translations. Some of them have merit, but far too many do not. Recently the Archdiocese of Seattle sponsored a seminar on the new translations for lay leaders and clergy. Both the priest who led the seminar (an accomplished liturgical theologian) and the participants gathered there in good faith. When passages from the proposed new translation were soberly read aloud by the presenter (I remember especially the phrase from the first eucharistic prayer that currently reads "Joseph, her husband," but which in the new translation becomes "Joseph, spouse of the same virgin"), there was audible laughter in the room. I found myself thinking that the idea of this happening during the sacred liturgy is no laughing matter but something that should make us all tremble.

There's more: the chilling reception the people of the dioceses of South Africa have given the new translations. In a rare oversight, the bishops of that country misread the instructions from Rome and, after a careful program of catechesis in the parishes, introduced the new translations to their people some months ago. The translations were met almost uniformly with opposition bordering on outrage.

It is not my purpose here to discuss in detail the flawed principles of translation behind this effort or the weak, inconsistent translations that have resulted. Others have already ably done that. Nor do I want to belabor the fact that those who prepared the translations seem to be far better versed in Latin than in English. No, my concern is for the step we now face: the prospect of implementing the new translations. This brings me back to my question: What if we just said, "Wait"?

What if we, the parish priests of this country who will be charged with the implementation, were to find our voice and tell our bishops that we want to help them avert an almost certain fiasco? What if we told them that we think it unwise to implement these changes until our people have been consulted in an adult manner that truly honors their intelligence and their baptismal birthright? What if we just said, "Wait, not until our people are ready for the new translations, but until the translations are ready for our people"?

Heeding Our Pastoral Instincts

The bishops have done their best, but up to now they have not succeeded. Some of them, led by the courageous and outspoken former chairman of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, Bishop Donald Trautman of Erie, Pa., tried mightily to stop the new translation train but to no avail. The bishops' conference, marginalized and battle-weary, allowed itself slowly but steadily to be worn down. After awhile the will to fight was simply not there. Acquiescence

took over to the point that tiny gains (a word here, a comma there) were regarded as major victories. Without ever wanting to, the bishops abandoned their best pastoral instincts and in so doing gave up on the best interests of their people.

So the question arises: Are we priests going to give up, too? Are we, too, going to acquiesce? We do, of course, owe our bishops the obedience and respect that we pledged to them on the day of our ordination, but does obedience mean complicity with something we perceive to be wrong—or, at best, wrongheaded? Does obedience mean going against our best pastoral instincts in order to promote something that we believe will, in the end, actually bring discredit to the church and further disillusionment to the people? I do not think so. And does respect involve paying lip service to something to which our more instinctive reaction is to call it foolhardy? Again, I don't think so.

ON THE WEB
An interview with Rev. Michael G. Ryan.
americamagazine.org/podcast

I offer the following modest proposals.

What if pastors, pastoral councils, liturgical commissions and presbyteral councils were to appeal to their bishops for a time of reflection and consultation on the translations and on the process whereby they will be given to the people? It is ironic, to say the least, that we spend hours of consultation when planning to renovate a church building or parish hall, but little or none when "renovating" the very language of the liturgy.

What if, before implementing the new translations, we do some "market testing?" What if each region of bishops were to designate certain places where the new translations would receive a trial run: urban parishes and rural parishes, affluent parishes and poor parishes, large, multicultural parishes and small parishes, religious communities and college campuses? What if for the space of one full liturgical year the new translations were used in these designated communities, with carefully planned catechesis and thorough, honest evaluation? Wouldn't such an experiment yield valuable information for both the translators and the bishops? And wouldn't such an experiment make it much easier to implement the translations when they are ready?

In short, what if we were to trust our best instincts and defend our people from this ill-conceived disruption of their prayer life? What if collegiality, dialogue and a realistic awareness of the pastoral needs of our people were to be introduced at this late stage of the game? Is it not possible that we might help the church we love avert a debacle or even disaster? And is it not possible that the voices in the church that have decided that Latinity is more important than lucidity might end up listening to the people and re-evaluating their position, and that lengthy, ungainly, awkward sentences could be trimmed, giving way to noble, even poetic translations of beautiful old texts that would be truly worthy of our greatest prayer, worthy of our language and worthy of the holy people of God whose prayer this is? (If you think the above sentence is unwieldy, wait till you see some of the new Missal translations. They might be readable, but border on the unspeakable!)

"What If We Just Said No?" was my working title for this article. "What If We Just Said, 'Wait'?" seems preferable. Dialogue is better than diatribe, as the Second Vatican Council amply demonstrated. So let the dialogue begin. Why not let the priests who are on the front lines and the laypeople who pay the bills (including the salaries of priests and bishops) have some say in how they are to pray? If you think the idea has merit, I invite you to log on to the Web site www.whatifwejustsaidwait.org and make your voice heard. If our bishops know the depth of our concern, perhaps they will not feel so alone. A

Rebounding Faith

BY B. G. KELLEY

I stare at my mortality, reading in a magazine that Bob Cousy, the great Boston Celtics basketball player of the 1950s and 60s, is 80 years old. *Bob Cousy—80!* Once he was the wizard of the hardcourt and I was a kid who wanted to be Bob Cousy—not James Dean or Elvis, mind you. I practiced five, six hours a day shooting, dribbling, passing to be like the Cooz. At 68 now, I am on the homeward-bound side of life's slope, not playing many more basketball games, moving closer to my step into that long, terrifying night, that waiting world. Bob Cousy pushes my thoughts on death because we once discussed mortality.

It is a brilliant summer day on Cape Cod Bay. Cousy and I are playing a round of golf at the New Seabury Country Club. He looks alive and healthy, tanned as a shiny penny, trim as a trout. Somewhere around the fifth hole, he says, "You know, athletes are indestructible. That's the way we think, but these days I'm more aware of my mortality."

There is a slight hint of uneasiness in his voice. Immediately I think of Rousseau's line: "He who pretends to look on death without fear lies." I ask him, "Does the thought of death frighten you?" He becomes intensely introspective before replying, "No, the thought of nothingness after death does, but my faith pushes me to view death with promise." As we talk I get the impression that Cousy, who has kept the faith, sees himself ascending to heaven in the company of popes and kings, roofers and teachers, truck drivers and C.E.O.'s. He adds, "I hope religion is not just a cop-out."

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/FOTIQUE

Death is the other side of silence. One can curse it or bless it. Raging at God, who is untouchable, gets you nowhere. Better to embrace the ideal at Catholicism's heart: that the afterlife is a comfort, a bulwark to life. To die is to gain—to live again.

This awareness, raised by Bob Cousy's being 80 years old, brings me spiritual clarity. It demands that I become more a receiver of God than a filter. I also sense that mortality need not destroy me nor infect the time I have left with a give-up, give-in attitude. Instead it provides strength for the time remaining to savor my most fundamental yearnings: to keep expressing and believing in the power of language; to love others (for what is life without love?); to play, for playing speaks to the heart of being human; to pray, knowing that here I must earn the next and final stop; and to buttress my belief that death is not separation but transformation, not termination but transcendence.

ON THE WEB
From the archives,
"The Metaphysics of Baseball."
americamagazine.org/pages

The Cooz and I come from the 1950s, a time of optimism, prosperity and affluence, when it seemed as if anything was possible. The Catholic Church prospered and the seminaries turned out plenty of priests. Big city parishes were filled with families who willingly sent their children to Catholic schools. Corpus Christi, my parish grade school in the Paradise section of Philly, was so loaded with kids—50 in each of the eight classes—that the sister principal had

B. G. KELLEY, *of Philadelphia, has published in The New York Times, Sports Illustrated and elsewhere. He was a two-year starting point guard for the Temple University basketball team.*

to segregate the boys from the girls. All seven Sunday Masses were filled.

Catholics grew up as part of the scenery, part of the times, comfortable with their roots, stability and parish training. Catholics learned a code of discipline, a focused work ethic, humility and a praise of God.

As a hard worker, team player and man of faith, Bob Cousy was perfect for the 50s. His creative passing and fast-breaking game boosted the promise of professional basketball. Cousy's play attracted more fans in the seats and lifted the N.B.A. out of its second-rate professional sports status. And his electric style was showcased on television, where Bishop Fulton J. Sheen also appeared as a powerful figure in the lives of Catholics.

The zeitgeist of the 50s connected Catholics to their faith, to their history and to larger alliances like family, friends, neighborhood and tradition. It gave meaning to their lives and made sense of life. What bound us to Catholicism were these: the honest zeal of the parish priest, the birth and baptism of a child, our fathers taking us to Holy Name Society breakfasts, the sacredness of transubstantiation and the doubts about justice in civil society.

"My college was instrumental in my faith," Cousy tells me on Cape Cod Bay. He attended the College of the Holy Cross, where he was imbued with the Jesuit tradition of giving back and paying forward. He did just that.

In 1956 Cousy befriended the first black Celtics player, Chuck Cooper. Once when the team was in Raleigh, N.C., for a game, Cooper was told he could not stay in the team's hotel that night because of his color. So Cooper decided to take a train to New York after the game, where the Celtics were to play the next day. Cousy, concerned about his teammate, went with him. They both waited five hours on the station platform for the 3 a.m. train.

On the sixth tee Cousy tells me that the Chuck Cooper experience had a profound effect on him. It forced him to embrace further the spirit of the Jesuit teachings: he became a Big Brother to Kevin, a 6'2" African-American 14-year-old. Cousy recalled a time at Blessed Sacrament, his parish church, in Worcester, Mass., where he has lived for 63 years: "It was a completely white parish. One Sunday when the church was filled, I marched down the middle aisle for Mass with my black little brother Kevin." At Holy Cross, Cousy's senior thesis was titled "The Persecution of Minority Groups."

Personally, I am hoping and praying for a piece of paradise. It isn't Key West, Aspen or Palm Beach, but that place with no referent postcard. What good is heaven if anyone who wants to can walk right in? I know it's there, simply because I have seen a full moon, a single star, a sunset, the mountains, an ocean deep, the wilderness where the night air is as magnificently quiet as it is cold and clean, a rainbow that blows your sneakers off—all signs that point to paradise.

Just as surely as there are signs that ripen our spiritual perspectives, there are moments in our temporal life when clarity grows. Bob Cousy's turning 80 is one such moment for me. Knowing that life is a terminal condition, I also know this: God draws life out of death. That's good enough for me. A

Moonflowers

moonflowers,

like little saints
who scrub and plow,
and bake and kiss,
take tickets, make change,
work two jobs,
and do it again
tomorrow,

like secret poets,
who expose their vulnerable,
quivery souls
scribbling truths
they hide in drawers,

exude their fragrance
without spotlight,
audience,
applause,
even,
especially,
in the
dark

ETHEL POCHOCKI

ETHEL POCHOCKI *is a writer of children's books.* The Women of Lockerbee *(2006) is a collection of her poetry.*

TELEVISION | DOMINIC J. GRASSI

HERE'S ALL THE PEOPLE

PBS's 'Scenes From a Parish'

I have been a pastor for more than half of my 36 years of priesthood. In that time I have learned, to paraphrase the late Congressman Tip O'Neill, that "all church is local." **Scenes From a Parish** (airing on PBS stations on Dec. 29), James Rutenbeck's documentary of life in St. Patrick Parish in Lawrence, Mass., offers one portrait of the Catholic Church in this country during a time of transition.

What kind of parish is St. Patrick? Early in the film, we are shown a stained-glass window emblazoned with the name of an Irish-American donor. In the background, we hear a choir singing a hymn in Spanish. An older immigrant congregation is making room, as often is the case in American parishes, with some difficulty, for a new group of faithful. An elderly parishioner informs the pastor of her displeasure with bilingual liturgies and says she will stop attending Mass if he continues them. She does not, however, give up her attendance at bingo. At the same time, we witness the St. Vincent de Paul Society and staff members doing their best to help people in need. Some of the staff and parishioners clearly struggle to accept those they are helping instead of judging them, and some apparently succeed.

The parish comes together in two main ways. The Eucharist is celebrated with an inclusiveness that most parishioners understand as a way of defining the community and revealing its reason for existing. Quite organically, this leads to the creation of a community center and outreach program known as Cor Unum that serves dinner to 300 people from the parish and city every night, with a staggering 100,000 meals in its first year, in a welcoming, flowers-on-each-table environment. As a pastor, I found the connection between the two meals, the ritual and the practical, to be the heart and soul of the documentary. Both are necessary. St. Patrick Parish feeds God's people in every way they need to be fed.

Scenes from PBS's documentary on St. Patrick Parish in Lawrence, Mass.

Clearly the parishioners and staff who were filmed grew accustomed to the crew and their equipment. Seldom did it appear that they were censoring themselves or playing to the cameras. This made for some painful scenes, as well as some moments of true grace. In one vignette, Bobby, a mentally challenged adult, celebrates his birthday with his mother and sister. The sadness permeating that event prefigures a scene later in the film when Bobby's mother walks into church and remains alone while others embrace one another. Her son's handicaps have apparently become irritants for some parishioners, and for that she is isolated. She will be left even more alone after her daughter finds a way to afford college even while wondering if her brother Bobby will remember her. This bittersweet mo-

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PBS. TOP: JAMES RUTENBECK/ITVS. MIDDLE AND BOTTOM: LOLITA PARKER, JR./ITVS

ment is difficult to watch.

Throughout the film are shots of the massive church edifice, often looming in the background, a presence of seeming stability in a community torn apart by prejudices and financial decline. The building serves as a backdrop during the Good Friday Passion play that unfolds on the streets. It is visible as the two priests walk the streets. And it stands in the middle of closed stores and urban flight as a reminder that God has not abandoned Lawrence.

I watched Rutenbeck's documentary with a group of parishioners and friends one evening after dinner. The film's pacing is slow, moving as "God's time moves," in the words of one deacon. Others remarked on the number of volunteers and the amount of organization needed to feed so many people nightly. Yet those doing these works of charity chose to remain in the background. The women who watched the film celebrated the gentle openness of the music director toward Rosario, an alienated cantor who needed to know that she was loved and accepted. The group also acknowledged that parishioners who were helping others seemed themselves to grow. In short, we saw how the concentric circles in the parish bound the people's lives to one another with their gifts and their limitations as they responded to God's call.

ON THE WEB
John Coleman, S.J., on the Met's "Paintings of Everyday Life."
americamagazine.org/culture

The Rev. Paul O'Brien, the pastor, who wears a T-shirt and shorts while helping to decorate the church for Christmas, jokes that he is everywhere. But the priests do not take up most of the camera time. That is as it should be. A good pastor listens and then affirms the dreams that grow out of the shared faith of the parishioners, even when they are not able to articulate them fully. Then the pastor empowers the people to turn those tentative visions into the reality we call church. A pastor's task is to ensure that since everyone is gifted, everyone is called.

As at every parish, there are those at St. Patrick who fully accept the call as they gather to be nourished and strengthened around the table of the Lord. We see a young adult leave gang life behind because of the belief in him shown by Father Paul and the community. But God's call, like any gift, can be accepted or rejected. A woman who loves her children does violence to the very

CULTURE IN BRIEF | MICHAEL V. TUETH

FAMILY THERAPY

American theater has thrived on stories about "my crazy family." Everyone from Tennessee Williams to Neil Simon to last year's Tony Award winner, Tracy Letts, in his epic "August: Osage County," has presented domestic dysfunction with tragic or comic overtones, and sometimes both. But aside from alcoholics and drug addicts, none has featured a certifiably "sick" family member and then dared to write a musical about him or her. Two years ago an off-Broadway production of **Next to Normal**, by Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey, broke through that barrier with the story of a woman afflicted with bipolar disorder and the effect her illness has on herself, her husband and her daughter. The current Broadway production has received enthusiastic reviews, numerous awards and nightly standing ovations. It will undoubtedly appear in the repertoire of regional theaters throughout the country in the next few years.

The play's setting suggests several rooms of a family residence, reminiscent of the multi-room sets of "Death of a Salesman" and other domestic dramas of the 1950s, in which the home comes across as a prison of the human spirit. Here the home's walls are metallic grids resembling cages, and even though the play's action rapidly moves to other locations—the therapist's office, the operating room and the musical practice room where Bach serves as an oasis of order for Diana's daughter, Natalie—everyone, including the doctors, seems trapped.

The emotional core of the play is the suffering of Diana, the psychologically wounded wife and mother. Traumatized by a family tragedy, Diana has been leading a medicated life for almost 20 years. She decides to discontinue her medications and the emotional numbness they have created for her. This leads to bizarre behavior, hallucinatory experiences, electroshock therapy, memory loss and other crises for Diana and her family. It also forces them to re-evaluate their coping mechanisms and patterns of denial and avoidance. (Alice Ripley's musical and dramatic performance as Diana was honored with the 2009 Tony Award for Best Actress in a Musical.)

The musical's conclusion is bittersweet and brave, but honestly earned. As one of Diana's therapists says of a new treatment, "I know it's not perfect, but it's all we've got." "Next to Normal" applies that comment to the entire human predicament and the challenges all must face, with or without the support of family or pharmaceuticals.

MICHAEL V. TUETH, S.J., *is associate chairperson of the Department of Communications and Media Studies at Fordham University in New York.*

parishioners who are trying to help her family. Not every parish story has a happy ending.

Still, "Scenes From a Parish" remains hopeful. The film chooses not to dwell on what is sapping the energy from so many parishes today. There is no reference to anyone's theological positions on hot-button issues, nor mention of the recent church scandals. These are important concerns, but they are not the focus of this documentary. Even a reporter's attempt to make the appearance of the talk-show host Conan O'Brien at a fundraiser for the community center into a "celebrity event" fails. Most parishes do not make headlines doing what they are called to do.

What has been distilled from the thousands of hours of filming? Evidence that God finds ways of working in and through the ordinary people, the old and the young, the lifelong parishioners and the new arrivals, the ordained and the lay, indeed, all the people of St. Patrick Parish who choose to answer God's call. And there is always more work to be done.

My friends who watched with me concluded that PBS's "Scenes From a Parish" presents an honest look at one parish in one place over one time period. It is worth taking the time to view and discuss the program in light of one's own experience of church and parish life.

REV. DOMINIC J. GRASSI *is the pastor of St. Gertrude Catholic Church in Chicago and the author of* Still Called by Name *and* Bumping Into God in the Kitchen.

BOOKINGS | JAMES S. TORRENS

PURE POETRY

W. S. Merwin, born in 1927, is one of the most lasting and continually productive of American poets. In addition to his own multiple volumes, beginning in 1952 with *A Mask for Janus*, he has been a distinguished translator of poetry in French, Spanish, Latin and Portuguese. Obviously he appreciates quality when he finds it. His long elegiac poem, "Lament for the Makers," guides us through those he has admired and held as friends for half a century. It is a roll call of the greats, from Dylan Thomas to James Merrill, even as it is also a sequence of losses. He has found in these past masters "the true sound of brevity/ that will go on after me." Reading them convinced him that the "presence I had known/ sometimes in words would not be gone." The voice of good poetry is enduring.

TO PURITY

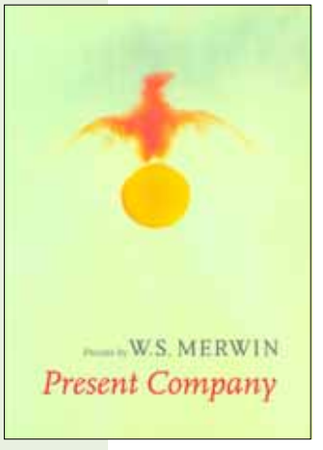
I have heard so much about you

if you claim to be you
I will know it is not true

if you say nothing I will listen
as I do
with my own
old mixed feelings
of hope and reservation

hearing through them
whatever might be you

the way I see
the white light from
the beginning
through the colors of the garden
through a face an eye



In 2005, when Merwin issued his *New and Selected Poems* (Copper Canyon Press), not surprisingly he gave it the title *Migration*. The cover art is a beautiful aerial photograph of Lowell, Ga., called "Snow Geese in Migration." This sense of being in movement, and part of a directed passage through the world, this attention to "the high wavering trails of migrant birds" ("Another River"), enters his poetry at many places. In a poem called "Teachers," he admits that "I dream of the first words/ of books of voyages/ sure tellings." These have been his real teachers.

In Merwin's poetry there is an even more persistent theme, not unrelated to the migration of the living. He is preoccupied with the darkness that surrounds and engulfs us in the universe, and also with our fugitive but astonishing experiences of light—"the blaze in widened eyes," he calls it in "The Chinese Mountain Fox." You cannot compel the light, he believes. This is what interests him in what are known as "the Marfa Lights," elusive flashes often reported in the Glass Mountains of West Texas. All sorts of people claim to see them, but you can never be sure.

In "The Hours of Darkness," a blind old man says to the poet: "How often you return/ to the subject of not seeing/ to the state of blindness." Yet the poem ends declaring "we see the youth of the light/ in all its ages/ we see it as bright/ points of animals/ made long ago out of night." Stars, that take so long to reach us with their

radiance, are for Merwin "the youth of heaven the ages of light" ("At Night before Spring"). Yet he named his latest collection (2009) *The Shadow of Sirius*, suggesting that the Dog Star, brightest in the sky, does not truly dispel night.

W. S. Merwin was brought up in an aura of belief; his father "was a country preacher/ in a one-store town" ("Inheritance"). But he has also been affected by the skepticism of the modern mind. These two powers contend in his poems. We see this vacillation at work in a poem entitled "To Purity," from *Present Company* (Copper Canyon Press, 2005).

Merwin begins "To Purity" with the line "I have heard so much about you." What can he mean? In recent decades pure food and drugs, that is to say, pure products undiluted and undoctored, have become a big public concern, as has purity of water. We want what we ingest to be free of impurities. But also, anyone with a sense of ritual and religion has learned much about lustrations and ceremonies of purification. Under the term *katharos* in Kittel's *New Testament Dictionary*, we read this: "By associating what is holy and what is clean religion fashions a starting-point for the ultimate moral spiritualizing of the concept of purity." Merwin, writing in his 70s, also would remember an era when chaperones and courtship were in order, and modesty and purity were ideals for the relation between the sexes. So, however taken, we need to let this term "purity" connote a strong longing for an ideal, reachable or not.

Next comes a baffling statement: "if you claim to be you/ I will know it is not true." Isn't this self-contradictory? No, it is not in the character of purity to advertise or tout itself, to trumpet its own identity. Ego is not consonant with purity.

The poet, incidentally, is addressing purity as a "you." Is this merely as expected in a personification, a literary

license in other words, or does it imply something more personal? English literature, we know, has a string of wonderful "To" poems, as in "To a Mouse" by Robert Burns. This approach enlivens an ordinary musing and surely attracted Merwin, for the title of every poem in *Present Company* begins with "to"—"To Impatience," "To Smoke," "To the Dog Stars." But does not the "to" in "To Purity" also express a genuine tribute?

ON THE WEB
This month's Catholic Book Club selection.
americamagazine.org/cbc

The speaker says that if, by contrast with any self-announcing, purity keeps quiet, he will listen. He will have his antennae out, with the "old mixed feelings." This avatar of purity could be the real thing, although appearance once more could be deceiving. Doubt is at work in his mind along with persistent belief and yearning.

Merwin, who has always been entranced by light, especially "the white light from/ the beginning"—from the Big Bang or the pronouncement "Let there be light"—sees it reverberate in the bright spectrum of garden colors. But "garden colors" can also suggest the original garden, Eden, the earthly paradise, where we first watch the spectrum of emotions and passions complicating the white ideal. As to "a face, an eye," lighting up, they certainly suggest and make us hope for an interior pure source.

Reading "To Purity," we notice its seamlessness, the omission of capital letters and of all punctuation marks. The syntax, the grammatical construction, is exact, but the reader has to spot where periods and commas would normally be for pauses, and where, by contrast, one must read on past the end of a line without pausing (so as to complete the phrasing). Merwin makes do with a basic, simple

vocabulary—generic terms that would not send anyone to the dictionary. His aim always is thoughtful probing rather than vividness, philosophic musing (although he scorns philosophy!) and geographic or biographic reference. His poems often refer to valley, river and ridge, but with no detail that indicates Hawaii, where he has lived for 30 years.

The Shadow of Sirius—winner of the 2009 Pulitzer Prize—is a book of retrospection. He revisits his early life, touching on so much that he cherishes—his parents, to begin with (see the touching elegy "Secrets"); incidents of youth; his dogs; his wife, Paula. But how fugitive is this memorable world!

Laboring to sew on a button, the poet says of his mother, "I open an old picture of you/ who always did such things by magic." The poem has to conclude, however: "but the picture has/ faded suddenly/ spots have marred it/ maybe it is past repair/ I have only what I remember" ("A Likeness"). Alas, we are not mindful of the marvelous when it happens, for we are too busy somehow; and then it gets away.

In a poem recreating the house and fields where he once lived, Merwin writes: "here surfacing through the long/ backlight of my recollection/ is this other world veiled/ in its illusion of being known/ at the moment of daybreak/ when the dreams are all at once gone" ("The First Days"). Merwin ends the poem "in a dream of clear depths," with what seems a wistful smile: "I glimpse/ far out of reach the lucent days/ from which I am now made."

The aging master, all too aware of the shadow obscuring our sight of things and aware of the encroaching darkness as well, can still ponder what is on the other side of night and still be lucent, thank goodness, about the great benefit of living.

JAMES S. TORRENS, S.J., *is the poetry editor of* ***America****.*

LETTERS

Expert at Work

Re "A Visitor's Guide," by Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M. (11/23): It is no surprise that such a balanced, thoughtful and challenging article would be the work of Sister Doris Gottemoeller. Her insights reflect the manner in which she has exercised leadership roles in many venues, influencing institutions and individuals (including me) over the years. In her work and writing she personifies what it is to be a contemporary religious sister. Thanks to her for being a real sister for so many of us.

(MSGR.) CHARLES FAHEY
Bronx, N.Y.

Questions First

I appreciated the hope that Sister Doris Gottemoeller offered and the challenge to the Vatican to be transparent, but I was sorry that she had not read the questionnaire before writing the article in order to get a sense of what is being asked of us.

KATHLEEN BRYANT, R.S.C.
Culver City, Calif.

More Visitations

As a lay person, I hold in high esteem the voices of Mary Clare Millea, A.S.C.J., and Doris Gottemoeller, R.S.M. Their personal involvement, the faithfulness to their calling and the professionalism of these two highly qualified women are to be commended. One point needs extra attention. One can no longer expect secrecy in such an undertaking. We live in an era in which transparency is expected from all institutions large and small. We as a church cannot deviate from an ethical behavior expected from worldly institutions.

This visitation is history in the making. It is a positive way for the world to see and appreciate the sacrifices, the faith, hope and love of the consecrated sisters, who for centuries have generously shared their lives with all of us. Because of the importance given to the project, I and others can expect that the next step will be the visitation of male religious orders, parishes and lay volunteers. The visitations give us an opportunity to pause and consider how we as children of God in a Trinitarian church are working in communion, mission and ministry. The visitations allow us to consider if we have truly grown in grace and wisdom.

ILSE WEFERS
Portland, Ore.

An Imperative

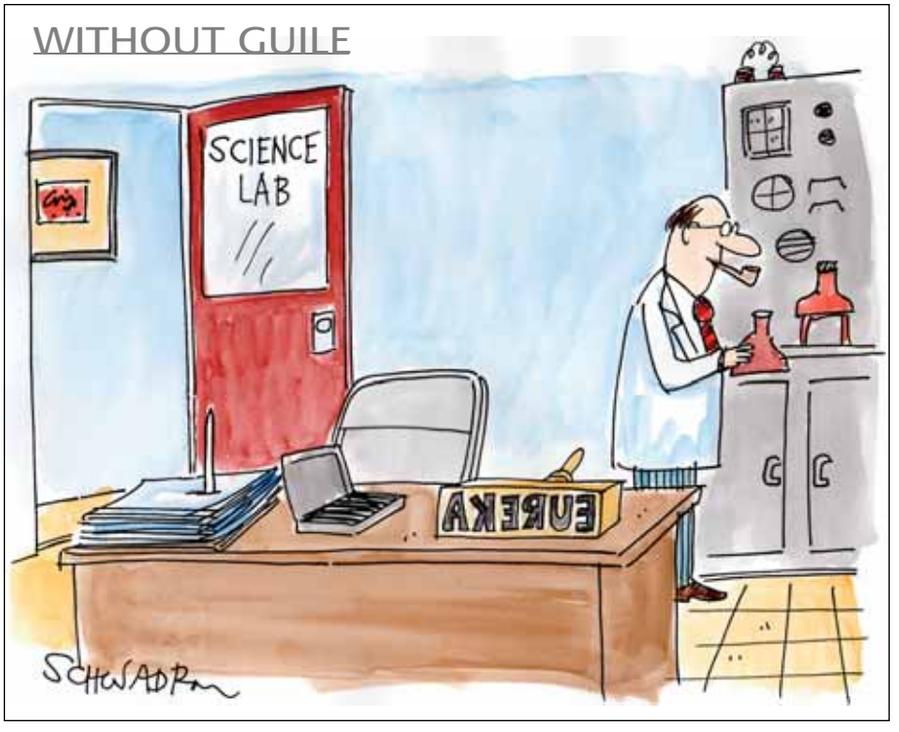
Re "A Lasting Victory" (Editorial, 11/30): In the grand tradition of Catholic social teaching, access to health care for all citizens is not just a goal. It must be an imperative. But we are nowhere near consensus on just how that is to be achieved. Developing the legislation that will make access to affordable quality health care a reality in our country is one person's expression of love for one's neighbor but another's recipe for rampant socialism and fiscal irresponsibility in the midst of a major recession. So what are we to do?

While we are pondering an answer to that question, let's not destroy one another by throwing grenades made up of insults and put-downs over the wall at anyone who does not see things the way we do. This situation is very complicated. Catholic social teaching has never had to look further than the Gospels and Christ's message that we love our neighbor as ourselves for its inspiration and its justification. So let those values also guide our dialogue now, because reforming health care will not come easily.

DENIS E. QUINLAN
Asheville, N.C.

Many Issues at Stake

The opposition of the U.S. bishops and other anti-choice groups to universal health care (on the grounds that the language about abortion is not



CARTOON BY HARLEY SCHWADRON

America (ISSN 0002-7049) is published weekly (except for 14 combined issues: Jan. 5-12, 19-26, March 30-April 6, April 20-27, May 25-June 1, June 8-15, 22-29, July 6-13, 20-27, Aug. 3-10, 17-24, Aug. 31-Sept. 7, Sept. 14-21, Dec. 21-28) by America Press, Inc., 106 West 56th Street, New York, NY 10019. Periodicals postage is paid at New York, N.Y., and additional mailing offices. Business Manager: Lisa Pope; Circulation: Judith Palmer, (212) 581-4640. Subscriptions: United States, $56 per year; add U.S. $30 postage and GST (#131870719) for Canada; or add U.S. $54 per year for international priority airmail. Postmaster: Send address changes to: America, 106 West 56th St. New York, NY 10019. Printed in the U.S.A.

strong enough) could, ironically, lead to the death of thousands of underinsured children. Could we please understand that millions of Americans experience severe, even catastrophic economic consequences as a result of illness?

Can we please put aside the fear-mongering news commentators and start to behave like citizens who care about one another? As a Catholic (Jesuit-educated) I was taught that my faith should be put into action and that I should be a person for others. Does this philosophy extend to advocating for those who are sick or now bankrupt because of illness? I believe the pro-life stance extends beyond the abortion question.

BRIGID DUNN
Fayetteville, N.Y.

Capital Punishment

Re "The Geography of Justice" (Current Comment, 12/7): As has been noted, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed could be legitimately held as an unlawful combatant until the end of hostilities without any trial; he could be tried in a military court as a captured combatant; or he could be tried in the U.S. court system, as Attorney General Eric Holder has decided. It is worth noting that Holder publicly stated he was quite confident that the evidence would result in a conviction. He also went on to imply that the death penalty is far more common in U.S. civilian courts than in the military court system, which has not executed a person found guilty of a capital offense or any reason for two generations.

Since Holder has determined to try other Gitmo terrorists in the military system, it is reasonable to conclude that he does not have as strong a case against them as he has for Mohammed and hence he has a better chance for a conviction in the military courts for these prisoners. It could simply be that Holder wants Mohammed not only found guilty, but executed. That likely would not happen in the military system.

WALTER MATTINGLY
Jacksonville, Fla.

Glaring Omission

The word *greed* does not appear once in the encyclical "Charity in Truth" ("Papal Correspondence," 11/30). This seems to me to be a glaring problem with regard to the world economy. If the avoidance of the word was intentional, so as to not paint capitalism in a negative light, then the encyclical was a huge success.

CHRISTINE VILLECCO
Boston, Mass.

Some, Not All

Re "Hidden Prayer in Yemen," by David Pinault (12/7): Religious persecution is a phenomenon of fundamentalist views and practices. The author has seen this at first hand in Yemen and mentions a few examples of religious intolerance in other countries. May I remind you that there are Muslim populations in over 50 countries. Citing just a few examples from a limited number of countries may reinforce popular Christian stereotypes about all Muslims. My information is that non-tolerant fundamentalist practices represent a small percentage of Muslims. Unfortunately, some Christians, Jews and Muslims have been guilty at times of not following the teachings in their foundational documents.

J. PATRICK MAHON
Young Harris, Ga.

Sad, But Grateful

The announcement of the closing of the National Pastoral Life Center ("A Good Death," Current Comment, 12/7), following so closely upon the suspension of the widely appreciated periodical Church, is a cause of great sadness for many of us in pastoral ministry. For over 25 years, we have been blessed through the leadership of N.P.L.C. We are indebted to the vision and zeal of the late Msgr. Philip J. Murnion, who organized institutes for new pastors and promoted the development of ecclesial lay ministry in our country.

Another significant project conceived by Monsignor Murnion and the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin was the Common Ground Initiative, which has attempted to heal some of the polarization and distrust in our Catholic Church. The invitation for honest and constructive dialogue continues to be a challenge in pastoral ministry, but we can all be thankful for the pioneering and creative contributions of N.P.L.C. since 1983.

(MSGR.) THOMAS P. IVORY
Upper Saddle River, N.J.

Reinstate the Draft?

Is it heroically daring or recklessly foolish to call for a reinstatement of the draft ("Up or Out," Editorial, 12/7)? I hope your editorial suggesting such a possible approach, if we are to continue our morally questionable warring, may provoke further debate. I was forever aware that my draft number of five meant certain sending to Vietnam when I was in the seminary. Like so many of that generation, I had brothers from my childhood die there; and I cared for many suffering veterans throughout my years as a hospice chaplain.

I look at my 13-year-old son and 15-year-old daughter, who have grown up in the very protected, anti-war atmosphere of our home, and cannot imagine a draft touching their lives. Yet I know that the burden of service is unfairly sustained by so many, often of lesser means or of a different cultural milieu. The question puzzles me profoundly, but I will talk about it more since reading your editorial.

DAVID E. PASINSKI
Fayetteville, N.Y.

Leaping for Joy; In God's Bosom

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (C), DEC. 20, 2009

Readings: Mi 5:1–4a; Ps 80:2–3, 15–19; Heb 10:5-10; Lk 1:39–45

"The moment your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy" (Lk 1:44)

There are certain persons in our lives who, when we see them or hear their voice, make our heart skip a beat with delight. They are the ones who can make us laugh when everything seems gray. They are the ones who have strong arms and a soft heart, who wrap us in a smothering bear hug that makes everything seem all right. They are the wise ones who have weathered many a storm and whose assurances that all will be well can be trusted absolutely. Such is the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth in today's Gospel. The moment Elizabeth heard Mary's voice, both her own heart and the babe in her womb leaped for joy. Mary undoubtedly felt the same.

Oftentimes we imagine Mary, the younger of the two, hastening from Galilee to Judea out of concern and generosity to help her older relative, who is coping with pregnancy at an advanced age. Without discounting this aspect of their encounter, we may also envision Elizabeth as the wise figure of an elder mentor, who wraps the bewildered teenage mother-to-be in her strong embrace, offering her wisdom and strength in a difficult time. God's timing is difficult for both women. How much easier it would have been for Elizabeth had her child come when her body was more limber and supple. How much easier it would have been for Mary had her child arrived after her marriage to Joseph.

In a culture in which a woman was esteemed for the male children she bore, Elizabeth likely endured accusatory glances and unkind comments throughout her life as people wondered why God was punishing her with barrenness. Likewise, in Mary's little village of Nazareth, the gossip about her probably started flying once her condition was known. Elizabeth, who has been utterly faithful to God all her life (Lk 1:6) despite the suffering she has endured, is the perfect companion for Mary. She helps Mary learn to trust even more deeply the mysterious ways of God, as she endures the many difficulties that come with saying "yes" to God.

In like manner, we too carry the mysterious power of God's life within us, which enables us to be a source of delight and blessing for others. When we abandon ourselves to the mysterious ways of God, it is not only for ourselves that the new life within is given. We are meant to be companions to one another, a source of mutual joy, wisdom and strength.

ART: TAD DUNNE

PRAYING WITH SCRIPTURE

- Give thanks to God for those who make your heart leap for joy this Advent.
- Ask for the grace to let the sound of your voice be a source of delight for others.

• • •

- Whose face most clearly revealed God to you today?
- What does it feel like to be in the bosom of God?

CHRISTMAS DAY (C), DEC. 25, 2009

Readings: Is 52:7–10; Ps 98:1–6; Heb 1:1-6; Jn 1:1–18

It is God, the only son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known (Jn 1:18)

No one has ever seen God—or so the ancients said. They believed you could not see God because God was invisible. Or, if one did see God, that person would not live to tell of it. Thus, Moses asks to see God's glory, not God's face. He is protected in a cleft of a rock and covered by God's hand when God passes by. He is allowed to see God's back as God tells him, "You cannot see my face; for no one shall see

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.*

me and live" (Ex 33:20).

In the same way, today's Gospel affirms, "We have seen his glory"—but even more, divinity has become entirely visible in the Word made flesh. In the face of Jesus and in the face of all his followers, we see God's face—and live to tell of it! The exquisite poetry of John's prologue takes us back to the origins of the cosmos, to the explosion of light and heat when life came into existence, brought into being by the power of God and the Word, one in being, one in generative love.

This divine desire to share love and life culminates with the "pitching of a tent" by the Word among humankind. In the desert sojourn with Israel, God would speak with Moses in the tent of meeting that Moses set up outside the camp. A pillar of cloud would descend upon it when Moses entered it to speak with God; then Moses would return to the camp (Ex 33:7-11). With the birth of Jesus, God inhabits the "tent" of human flesh, not in a place apart, but right in our midst.

Whereas Moses entered the tent for a solitary encounter with God, now God enters the tent of humanity so as to make "grace upon grace" directly available to every single one. This divine love and intimacy are revealed to us by the "only Son" who is "in the bosom of the Father."

The intimacy of this relationship is not always as vividly expressed, as some translations render this phrase in Jn 1:18 as "at the Father's side." A more literal translation is "in the bosom" (*kolpos*) or "breast of the Father." This image is reprised in Jn 13:23, when at the Last Supper the Beloved Disciple is reclining "in the bosom [*kolpos*] of Jesus." The same intimacy between the Father and Jesus is shared with all disciples, who make visible in every generation the face of God in human flesh.

BARBARA E. REID

Now...more than ever

Please donate to support Catholic Charities in our work to provide help and create hope for all.

1-800-919-9338
or
www.CatholicCharitiesUSA.org

Catholic Charities USA®

Working to Reduce Poverty in America.